2023/2024 SESSION
of the

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

MARCH 2024

Sittings 11 - 16 of the 2023/2024 Session
(pages 647-1160 and INDEX)

Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr, JP MP
Speaker

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

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
1 MARCH 2024
10:01 AM

Sitting Number 11 of the 2023/2024 Session

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

The Acting Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Acting Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 26 and 28 February 2024]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of the 26th of February and the minutes from the 28th of February have both been circulated.

Are there any amendments required?

No amendments. The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

[Minutes of 26 and 28 February 2024 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: The following Members have indicated to us they will be absent today: Minister Jason Hayward; Minister Vance Campbell; the Honourable MP Zane De Silva; MP Susan Jackson; and MP Simmons-Wade.

SHAREPOINT DOWN

The Speaker: Also, just for your clarification, the SharePoint is down this morning and the business of the day has been emailed out to you just so that you would have it rather than being able to get up on the SharePoint. When the SharePoint is back up, we will inform you that it is up. But Members, you should have all the normal documentation for today in your email.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: There are none.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: There are two Statements this morning. The first is in the name of the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Minister Furbert.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

NATIONAL MINI YOUTH CONFERENCES

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise this morning to share with you and my honourable colleagues an exciting new event for the annual calendar of Bermuda's young people, through the Office of Youth Affairs. On January 25 and 26, 2024 students across Bermuda from primary, middle and senior school levels participated in the first National Mini Youth Conference entitled "Big Up Ya'Self" held at the Botanical Gardens.

Mr. Speaker, the National Mini Youth Conference was a recommendation of the National Youth Policy Working Group, who functions to operationalise the National Youth Policy, the Government's five-year plan to develop and empower young people in Bermuda. The National Policy Working Group consists of young people from the ages of 14 to 30 years who work alongside government departments to make recommendations based on the eight National Youth policy goals which are [as follows]:

1. keep young people safe from harm;
2. achieve full potential in learning, development, and education;
3. minimise antisocial behaviour;
4. increase employment and entrepreneurship opportunities;
5. engage youth in sports, culture, and recreation;
6. support young people to be active and healthy;
7. enable participation in civic engagement;
8. encourage diversity and inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, while the conference satisfied Goal 7, *enabling participation in civic engagement*, the title of the conference was "Big Up Ya'Self," which aligned with Goal 8, *diversity and inclusion,* thus providing opportunities for additional goals to be addressed. This was achieved by having students engage in sessions where they were able to explore who they are as individuals and find value in themselves so they can advocate for themselves, while also respecting the individuality of others as they make their way through a world where careers and the future are constantly changing.

Mr. Speaker, with diversity and inclusion being the overarching theme of the day, staff in the Office of Youth Affairs took this to heart by inviting students from public and private schools to attend the conference. On the first day of the mini-conference, senior school students received a keynote speech presentation by the dynamic team of Spice and Fury. Mr. Speaker, Spice, Ms. Alexandria Williams, and Fury, Mr. Jonari Smith, are two young Bermudians who studied theatre and brought their unique skills back to Bermuda to energise the creative sector through music and positive messaging. They shared their personal stories on transitions in their lives and send a message of respect for others while discovering the person you are becoming and laying the foundation for your career.

Mr. Speaker, there were breakout room topics on unconscious biases and the way social media impacts how we see ourselves. This was presented by local actress, producer, and writer, Ms. Quinceé Dill. Another breakout room topic "How to advocate for yourself in a world of 'others,'" was presented by Mr. Matthew Johnston, college lecturer and poet. Also, local artist Mr. Carlos Santana shared on the topic "Transforming your passion into a career."

Mr. Speaker, these conversations are not light topics, but they are important ones reflecting the world that our young people currently live in. To ensure that all youth attending had support with any emotional or mental health needs, the team at Mayvera Wellness, led by Dr. Jana Outerbridge was on hand to debrief with participants after sessions, as well as provide a comfortable space for release through crafts and open, supportive conversation.

Mr. Speaker, the second day of the conference was the largest of the event. Not only because there were more students than on the first day of the conference but because the day went longer. I will explain further after I give a brief description of the day's events.

Mr. Speaker, primary and middle school students began the day with an energising and exciting key presentation from Teacher Telle, Ms. Chantelle Weller, who crafted a bespoke story for the conference entitled "Gombey's in Space." This was a story of a young girl who wanted to be a Gombey and in her journey to achieve her goal, she was able to learn about who she was and fall deeper in love with herself which fell right in line with the messaging of believing in who you are and going after your dreams, irrespective of where you come from.

Mr. Speaker, following this rousing presentation breakout sessions were held by Bermuda's second favourite cousin, Mr. Fotogenik, (MP Derrick Burgess being the first), who participated in both days of the conference speaking to students on how to cultivate their unique voice and use it in positive ways on social media. Ms. Shanna Hollis, creative director, designer, and multidisciplinary artist created a step-by-step guide for the students to explore graphic design elements while creating their own personal brand.

Mr. Speaker, this is just a taste of what our students experienced at the conference. There were also many fun activities and games for them to partake in between sessions, and while the conference ended with a mini-concert by Bermuda's own Fire Wayne, who had everyone on their feet, the day did not end there. To many a parent's surprise and appreciation, following the end of the formal conference students were bused to one of our community centres for more fun activities and a pizza dinner until 9:00 pm.

Mr. Speaker, during the two-day mini youth conference, more than 160 young persons from public, private and even home schools were poured [into]. They were given information that provided new perspectives on the world they live in, viewpoints they can draw on to assist their future, and insights to ensure a healthy relationship with themselves. These are experiences that we want for all of our youth.

Mr. Speaker, I stopped in during this two-day youth conference and, although we are speaking about it as a mini-conference, it was definitely a large undertaking. Our students were greatly involved, and I believe gained a wealth of information and insight by attending. At this time, I want to thank all persons who worked diligently to provide an amazing event for Bermuda's youth. In particular, I want to recognise the team in the Office of Youth Affairs for organising the mini-conference, the Department of Parks for preparing the perfect venue at the Botanical Gardens, all the inspiring young speakers, and our community partners who provided awesome prizes and giveaways. I am looking forward to the conference, Mr. Speaker, that will be hosted in July 2024 for our youth 18 years and older who need to be inspired, encouraged, and poured into.

Mr. Speaker, this Government, through the activities held by the Office of Youth Affairs, is committed to providing meaningful pathways for our youth to become productive citizens who positively contribute to the quality of life for all in Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I believe the second Statement is also in your name. You can present that now if you wish.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

UPDATE ON THE UNITED NATIONS JOINT PROGRAMME "BUILDING BACK EQUAL THROUGH INNOVATIVE FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT"

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to provide this Honourable House with an update on the United Nations Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund Programme: "Building Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" also referred to as the "Building Back Equal Project" led by UN Women in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]. This joint programme was officially launched in Bermuda on June 27, 2022, and recently extended until October 2024.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to remind my honourable colleagues that the joint programme, the Building Back Equal Project, aims to diversify Bermuda's economy by supporting the growth of new opportunities for empowering women, our youth and persons with disabilities to engage in key economic sectors, such as agriculture, cultural and creative industries, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises [MSMEs], and sustainable tourism. The joint programme also aligns with the Government's national priorities and its commitment to ensuring the advancement of gender affairs. The joint programme encourages productive engagement for the growth of new opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and cultural industries.

Mr. Speaker, in February 2024, representatives from UN Women Caribbean and UNDP Multi Country Office in Jamaica made their second mission trip this year to Bermuda to advance the Building Back Equal Project. The first mission trip was in October 2023. Mr. Speaker, as part of the terms of reference for the joint programme, feasibility studies were to be undertaken on the business landscape of women, youth and persons with disabilities entrepreneurs. This is what the second mission trip in February this year focused on, in addition to introducing a potential accelerator programme to the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that in 2022, I informed this Honourable House that UN Women was seeking to hire consultants as researchers for the Building Back Equal Project. Also in March 2023, I shared that another consultancy position was advertised by UN Women for a consultant to be hired and based in Bermuda to support the activities of the joint programme. At that time, the Ministry issued a press release to encourage Bermudians to apply for this job opportunity to work for UN Women within the framework of the joint programme.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that Bermudian Mrs. Clesia Pachai was hired by UN Women as the Bermuda-based consultant. Mrs. Pachai is an accredited climate change professional who has 12 years of experience working at HSBC Bermuda, leading the bank's corporate, social responsibility and sustainability function. Mrs. Pachai attended the Berkeley Institute and holds a BA in Event Management, a Master of Science in Social Responsibility and Sustainability, and a Green Finance Certification.

Mrs. Pachai is also a consultant within Bermuda's international business sector, with a focus on environment, social and governance strategic development and climate risk. Mrs. Pachai has been contracted by UN Women to provide support for the Building Back Equal Project by liaising with the various partners of the joint programme such as UN Women, UNDP, other consultants; the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors; Bermuda Economic Development Cooperation and key community stakeholders, to build a framework that fosters economic development focusing on growing and scaling women-owned and led businesses within Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to Mrs. Clesia Pachai, UN Women has contracted three more consultants to advance the Bermuda Building Back Equal [Project] to the next phase. These consultants each have specialised training, skills and expertise required to conduct the specific feasibility studies and were all on Island in February during the UN Women and UNDP mission trip.

Mr. Speaker, let me share a bit about the consultants' expertise and the work they have commenced to progress the Building Back Equal [Project]. Mr. Speaker,

1. Ms. Kizzann Sammy, is a senior development professional. She holds more than 20 years of experience in programme implementation across government, the private sector, and non-profit organisations, located in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. These organisations include Caribbean governments, Global Affairs Canada, the Inter-American Development Bank, CARICOM, the Red Cross Society, the UN Environment Programme and UN Women.

Ms. Sammy is highly qualified with a master's degree in international development and an MBA in economic crime and fraud management. She divides

her time between consultancies in primary health care programmes in Canada and gender lens investing programmes across international projects.

Ms. Sammy was contracted by UN Women to develop and conduct a feasibility study on financing [instruments] for women-owned MSMEs in six Caribbean islands and Bermuda, and to present a report with recommendations under the SDG [Sustainable Development Goals] Fund programme.

2. Mr. César Yammal, the second consultant is an experienced international consultant in designing, coordinating, implementing, supervising and evaluating national and regional gender-focused projects, programmes, and public policies centred on development and investment in science, technology, innovation, research, higher education, environment, SMEs, business incubation and entrepreneurship, covering both technical and logistical as well as fiduciary aspects.

Mr. Yammal holds a doctorate in chemical sciences, a master's in business administration, specialising in management consulting and is a Fulbright scholar. He has field experience working in various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia and Oceania.

Mr. Yammal has 10 years of experience working at the World Bank and as a consultant for Inter-American Development Bank (DB). Mr. Yammal has been contracted by UN Women to conduct a needs assessment on financial instruments for women-owned MSMEs in Bermuda, under the SDG Fund programme.

3. Ms. Heather Pinnock, the third consultant is a development professional with formal training in architecture urban design and project management, who holds professional certifications as an agile project management Scrum Master, an EarthCheck Design Accredited Professional and a licensed real estate salesperson. Her experience includes master planning, energy-efficient and net zero buildings, sustainable housing and public spaces.

Since 2022, Ms. Pinnock has served as a planning advisor to UN Women Caribbean and co-chair of the Commonwealth Women in Planning network. Ms. Pinnock leads her own boutique development company, LUCEA Caribbean, which offers advisory services with a focus on sustainable development, climate resilience and conscious living for tropical regions.

Ms. Pinnock has been contracted by UN Women to undertake training needs assessment on climate and shock resilient needs of women-owned MSMEs, unemployed women and other marginalised groups in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, a total of nine delegates associated with the joint programme, who represent both the UN Women and the UNDP Multi Country Office, were on Island the week of February 5, 2024. The mission provided an opportunity for delegates to meet with Government Ministers, members of the Public Service Executive, Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, technical officers, banks and business entrepreneurs.

The UN Women consultants had a full schedule of activities that included, but were not limited to

- meeting with myself and technical officers in the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, including the Office of Ageing and Disability Services;
- participating in focus group sessions with:
  - youth-owned businesses;
  - women-owned businesses located in the East End of the Island;
  - women-owned businesses in the West End of the Island;
  - women-owned businesses located in the centre of the Island;
  - successful established women-owned businesses and those in the earlier stage of business; and
  - men-owned businesses.
- engaging financial institutions Bermuda Commercial Bank and Clarien Bank;
- meeting with key stakeholders including BEDC, the Human Rights Commission, the Bermuda Business Development Agency, and the Bermuda Tourism Authority;
- consultation with civil society organisations that empower women, youth, and persons with disabilities, inclusive of the Women's Resource Centre, Future Leaders Bermuda, and Tomorrow's Voices; and,
- site visits across the Island to meet women-owned businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I personally participated in the consultation meeting held with the non-profit organisation WeSpeak, which was created for women by women. This meeting allowed me to hear how passionate and dedicated the members of this organisation are to helping women find and project their voices; and build confidence and leadership capabilities by developing their presentation and public-speaking skills. WeSpeak empowers women by providing a safe space for women to improve their public speaking skills.

I also sat in on the focus group session with our successful established women-owned businesses. This provided me with an opportunity to hear the success stories along with the barriers these women face, and the recommendations they made to potentially close existing gaps to improve the business environment for women-owned MSME's.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the various forums was for the UN Women consultants to gather information, by listening to entrepreneurs of MSMEs experiences, their concerns and potential solutions to improve the local landscape for MSMEs and how this could be facilitated in practice.

Mr. Speaker, the question is always asked—*What's next?* Let me say that the site visits held by the UN Women consultants, the focus group sessions, the

individual discussions, meetings with the financial institutions, government ministries and departments and non-profit organisations, all provided feedback that will feed into the assessments being conducted by the UN Women consultants and form part of a national report to provide Bermuda's current position as a country.

This would allow themes and trends to be identified to create an overall country profile that would support the direction of piloting innovative financing tools for gender equality to enable entrepreneurs who are women, youth, and persons with disabilities to access additional capital, reduce risks and accelerate SDG achievement. These assessments are a first for Bermuda and the Ministry certainly welcomes the national report. The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors remains committed to sharing this report upon completion. I also look forward to sharing subsequent updates with this Honourable House on the progress of the Building Back Equal joint programme.

Mr. Speaker, the contribution the delegates from UN Women and UNDP have made thus far for Bermuda and its citizens in advancing new opportunities through the joint programme is trail-blazing. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Ms. Erica Smith, Executive Director of BEDC; Ms. Jamillah Lodge, Communication and Development Director of BEDC; and their team for their invaluable contributions, their commitment to the programme and their expertise. Lastly, thank you to the government departments, owners of MSMEs, members of the civil society organisations, and financial organisations that participated in the consultations and site visits. Your time and feedback are valued.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to the end of the Statements for this morning.

We will move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: Three are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are no questions this morning.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: MP Caines, you rose very quickly. You have your three minutes.

Mr. Wayne Caines: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mr. Wayne Caines: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to give congratulations to the Bermuda Institute, class of 2024. Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday gone, as you know, it is a tradition at the Bermuda Institute, the school of the prophets, where the senior graduating class is presented acknowledgement of their academic year, and they were presented in front of their families and church officials saying that they are indeed on course at this moment to graduate in June. It was a privilege to see all the families in our Southampton community come together to celebrate the class that will be presented in June.

Mr. Speaker, on a sad note, I rise to offer condolences to the family of Mrs. Phyllis Simons. Phyllis Simons is my godmother and the godmother of our Honourable Premier. She was in Bermuda for over 50 years. She worked at the Hamilton Princess, Kentucky Fried Chicken and she worked at the G&M Beauty [and Barber] salon for a number of years. A stalwart in our community. My mother's best friend. The Premier's mother's best friend. These were ladies who came into Bermuda in the 1960s and gave every fibre of their being to make our community a better place. Recently she was funeralised. Members from all walks of life were at the funeral to celebrate her life. And on behalf of this House I would love for condolences to be sent to the Simons family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other—MP . . . Deputy Premier, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a brief mention of something positive I would like to bring to the House. This past week there was an article in the media about a young woman who lives in my district who I just think is representative of the type of aspiration that we need to encourage in all of our young people who seek careers, who seek to find direction in life and help them to believe that they can not only choose a career that will earn them money, but also something that is a passion of which they love. And the young lady is named Meagan Boyles. I have known her for the whole time that I have been a Member of Parliament. Her family lives in the North Village. She has been on a journey having studied the culinary arts to doing a number of things. And it has not always been easy. But I was overjoyed to see an article profiling her in her chosen calling of being a chef. She has finally found a way to realise that career for herself in her community. And the fact that it was appreciated enough to profile her in the local media, I thought was wonderful. I do hope that other young people in Bermuda can have a similar experience with not only finding their passion but being successful at it as a calling and as a way to sort of, obviously, be a productive and successful member of society. So I just want to mention Meagan but it

is a message for all of our young people and how we encourage them in their lives for the future.

Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

MP Lister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to the listening audience and to my fellow colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off on a sad note to send condolences to the family of Ms. Sharon Wilson of 15 Palm Valley, one of my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to send condolences to the family, I say my family, of Mr. Ephraim James Simmons. He was 97 years old, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to associate the Minister of Health. That is her father-in-law. And also you, Mr. Speaker, as we are family. Mr. Speaker, 97 years, not many people make it to 97 years. Good innings. And I only hope that his family can be consoled with the fact that he had a good life, a long life and that they too one day will look to see him later.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to send congratulations. Last week in the newspaper there was highlighted two young men who are in the Leadership Development Programme at Hamilton Princess and Beach Club. Mr. Marcus Simmons and Khaijeh Worrell, two young Bermudian men who are in this programme looking to develop their leadership skills to one day take leadership roles up at Hamilton Princess. So I would like to encourage them as they continue in that programme and congratulate them in taking that step.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Terry Spencer was recently promoted to be—and I will associate MP Tyrrell and other . . . I associate the whole House, Mr. Speaker. He was recently promoted to the Director of TCD [Transport Control Department]. In my time as the Chairman of the Road Safety Council, even before I was Chairman and just a member, I have had to work alongside of him and I have always found that he is a very knowledgeable person when it comes to transport and the matters that fall under him. So, congratulations to Mr. Spencer on his promotion.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I stand before you (I am two weeks late) but I would like to send congratulations to yourself. On February 9, 1989, you were elected to this Honourable House—35 years ago—Mr. Speaker. While I was only four years old at the time, I have lived almost my whole life with you in this Honourable House. And you have transitioned from being an MP Backbencher, to a Minister, to now the Speaker of the House. So, I would like to send congratulations for 35 long years, Mr. Speaker—

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —my dad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Foggo.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to join the chorus in congratulating . . . I know him as Chris. Mr. Chris Spencer. A long-time civil servant, a former police officer of many years and an officer at the Transport Control Department. I would like to associate the Deputy Premier of the country. And I would like to associate Minister Weeks. Chris, was a real jokester. He is a Berkeleyite and he was a real jokester when in school. I have to be honest and say, *I hated him when we were in high school!*

[Laughter]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: He used to call me *Yellow Bird.* I will put it like this. Whatever clothing I had on under my white shirt, he would look at the colour, he would call me Yellow Bird, Pink Panther.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: I said whatever clothing.

That was the kind of person he was. There were no breaks from Chris Spencer. He has acquitted himself in his duties extremely well.

An Hon. Member: I would say he has matured.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes, he has.

[Laughter]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Extremely well over the years in the Department of Transport. And when I was the Chair of the Public Service Vehicles Licensing Board I would come in contact with him more frequently. But whenever I have needed help from Chris he would be there to help. So congratulations to him. And Bermuda will be well served with him as the director.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Anthony Richardson.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Good morning, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: fellow colleagues and listening audience.

Lawrence Roderick Clifton Burchall. Who is that?

The Speaker: Go ahead and tell us.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Roddy Burchall. Mr. Roddy Burchall was honoured on Sunday at St. Philip's Church down on Harrington Sound Road where the pastor is Pastor Wendell Christopher. And he was honoured as part of the . . . every year the church, the young people, have a Black History Recognition service. And during that time they actually honoured the late Ottiwell Simmons, during like a two-minute presentation. And at the end of it they started a video presentation and that is, Mr. Speaker, when I learned for the first time that his name is Lawrence Roderick Clifton Burchall. He was actually moved to tears and he said, Mr. Speaker, when he gave a few words, he wants his work to speak for him and not to be recognised. And I want to make sure today that we recognise Lawrence Roderick Clifton Burchall. He is a . . . and I associate Minster Rabain, who was there also. I want to say that he is the . . . he is one who knows every single person in the constituency. When it comes to canvassing, he is the guy. And he does not have to go and check names or whatever, he knows every single person. He knows if you moved in, who moved out and all those kind of things. And so I will say one more time, on behalf of constituency 7, Hamilton South, congratulations to Lawrence Roderick Clifton "Roddy" Burchall. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member . . . MP Swan. Would you like your three minutes?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I would like to be associated with those congratulatory remarks to Roddy Burchall, a former coach for St. George's Colts. One of his legendary . . . and national coach, but one of his legendary things was when he was assistant coach, a coach in St. George's of the national team. He had a game of St. George's Colts against the national team which was won by St. George's. It is a legendary story. To prepare them . . . and that was one of Bermuda's championship teams that went on a long time ago. I associate Brother Tyrrell with that, MP Tyrrell.

I would like for a letter of congratulations sent to young Jasper Nebard and his parents, Rebecah Nebard and his father. Why? Because this young man on a school project from Saltus celebrating Black History Month reached out to me. Nine years old and wanting to interview me in that regard. And because they wanted to do it in the relationship of a radio talk show, I invited this nine-year-old on the show. And I want to say that the questions that he asked brought tears to my eyes. But the fact that the school is encouraging their young people to get more knowledgeable about Black history, and this young man did us very proud in his interest, in his poise on the radio, and it was certainly an honour for me to be associated with that project.

And I want to send congratulations to the school and the teachers responsible for charging these young people for learning more about the history. And I am thankful to him for selecting me. I will just say this. The other nine-year-old that I had interviewed on that show, some five years ago, went on to be the second-youngest player to participate on the PGA TOUR. But the poise of this young nine-year-old interviewing me and listening and internalising . . . really, I could not let this go by without singling him out. I can see and envision great things for this young man with the poise and the care. And his father from Wakefield in Yorkshire where I have many friends who will be coming to Bermuda soon, his love for golf, I hope to share that as context with them. Thank you. And thank you, once again, to Jasper Nebard, A young Saltus student.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Swan.

Does any other Member . . . Minister Furbert, You have three minutes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time to send congratulatory remarks to the Francis Patton Primary School, and one of our signature schools and parish schools. They recently put on a play production, last week, and the play was written by our very own Bermudian teachers, one of my constituents, Ms. Antoinette Hollis. I was very impressed with the performance of the students. The students themselves, actually the two main characters, [wrote] some of their own lines. And so it was very inspiring to see the school community come together to produce such a wonderful play and so I just want to send a big congratulations to the entire team who helped put that production on. I would also like to associate Minister Rabain with those comments.

Again, I would like to send congratulatory remarks to the Bermuda Occupational Therapy Association. They were very instrumental in securing the World Federation of Occupational Therapists to have their executive team and council meeting here in Bermuda. Bermuda has been an organisation with membership with the World Federation of Occupational Therapists since 1992. That is some 32 years. And so we are quite excited to be able to have the opportunity to host the delegates in Bermuda because they could have chosen anywhere else in the world, but they chose to be here with Bermuda. And so we have approximately 35 countries here represented as well as close to 50 delegates who are here to have their meetings. So I want to extend a special thank you for the effort and time that the

host of Bermuda Occupational Therapy Association put in to be able to secure the visit of the delegates with the World Federation of Occupational [Therapists] in Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Famous, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I would like to be associated with the remarks for Mr. Roddy Burchall, as they call him. Because he is the consummate canvasser. He has taught many of us the proper way to canvass.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to speak about another lady that, while she was not a canvasser, she was one of the foundations of Devonshire North. For those who remember, the old constituencies, Devonshire North was the stronghold of Dame Lois Browne-Evans and Freddie Wade. That lady was Mrs. Melvina Robinson, sister of the [late] Honourable Stanley Morton. I would like to associate the Deputy Speaker. She was the mother of Eugenia, Barclay and Laquita, grandmother of about nine, and great-grandmother of about five or six. But nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, she was one of the cornerstones of the families in Hermittage Road, originally comes from Parson's Road, Central School then moved to Hermitage Road. She worked assiduously to build and maintain Devonshire as a PLP stronghold. And when the boundaries changed in 2003, we lost that stronghold for approximately 17 years. So it was with great pride that we were able to deliver Devonshire back to the hands of the PLP in 2020, and we shall do our part to ensure that it stays in the hands of the PLP.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make one other congratulatory statement. And it may not be politically popular but it is the facts. I would like to thank the Caribbean community for making a stand against the unjust war in Gaza.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Members, does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution?

None other. Before we move on I would just like to add my remarks to a couple of the condolence comments that were made this morning. First, I would like to add my words to the condolences that were expressed, yes, to my family from my son on the passing of my Uncle Effie, father-in-law to the Honourable Minister of Health. You know the Listers are a small family. And Uncle Effie and my father were first cousins. We grew up in an era when every senior was your uncle or your aunt and you offered them that respect as that. And we grew up in a small neighbourhood where we were a close-knit family. And Uncle Effie was definitely a family man who shared himself well with all of us as children growing up and I have fond memories of him, and I will always have fond memories of him. And I want his family, my cousin Kent his son, and his daughter Beth, and their spouses to know that he is very cherished by us. And we will miss him.

On another family note, but on a lighter note, you all know my cousin Lisa Lister-Reed. Well, Lisa had the opportunity of celebrating her 13th birthday yesterday.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: She is one of those folks born on the 29th of February. And we have a joy of watching every four years of being able to tell her she has a real birthday this year. So yesterday was one of those occasions, so I just want to acknowledge her here. I know she has enjoyed her birthday and looks forward to enjoying her birthday week.

And also I would like to be associated with the remarks that were expressed to Chris Spencer on his appointment as a TCD director. I have known Chris way back, yes, I heard Berkeley days mentioned back there earlier. Yes, that was when I first met Chris was at Berkeley. He was a few years behind me though. But I have known him since then. I have a lot of respect for Chris and what he has accomplished and I think he will do extremely well in the position of director at TCD. So I just wanted to add my thoughts to those comments that have already been expressed.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOVERNMENT BILLS

OPPOSITION BILLS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: That leads us now to the business of the day. And again, particularly for the listening audience, we are here today for the resumption of the annual Budget Debate. Today, and again for the audience, every day as you know there are eight hours that are set aside for particular department heads that are selected to be debated each day. And those times are normally split between different ministries during the course of the day but today we have the whole eight hours that are dedicated to the Ministry of National Security. So today we will be focusing on the responsibilities of that Ministry. And we will start with the Minister of National Security and then followed by the Shadow Spokesman for National Security.

Again, for the listening audience, once we go into Committee the Speaker is out of the House for that entire time. And this morning's session will be chaired by MP Chris Famous, who will lead the start of the debates this morning.

The Premier will lead us into Committee and we will put the responsibility of the House in the hands of the Chairperson after that.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

MP Famous.

House in Committee at 10:46 am

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25 [which] are now to be debated.

I call upon the Minister in charge to proceed.

Minister, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads, Head 83—Ministry of National Security, Headquarters; Head 6—Defence; [Head] 7—Police; [Head] 12—Customs; [Head] 25—Department of Corrections; and [Head] 45—Fire Services be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Are there any objections?

None.

Minister, carry on.

HEAD 83—MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman and Honourable Members, I am pleased to present the current accounts estimate for the Ministry of National Security Headquarters, Head 83, which can be found on pages B-262 through B-265 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure Book.

Mr. Chairman, I will briefly discuss the Ministry as a whole followed by information for Head 83— Ministry Headquarters, and then in detail for each of the heads under the Ministry. Those heads are as follows: Head 6—Defence, Head 7—Bermuda Police Service, Head 12—Department of Customs, Head 25—Department of Corrections and Head 45—Bermuda Fire and Rescue Services.

Mr. Chairman, eight hours have been allocated for this Ministry, and I intend to give sufficient time for the Opposition to ask any questions they may have or for them to seek clarification on the financial year 2024/25 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Our mission, Mr. Chairman, of the Ministry of National Security Headquarters is *Working together to keep you safe.* Mr. Chairman, the mission statement, programmes and budgets within the Ministry are aligned with this overriding mission. I will briefly set out some of the priorities of the Ministry for the next financial year which includes several policy initiatives on which we shall be delivering as part of the focus on crime prevention and the concentrated efforts to reduce the number of road traffic offences.

- The final stages of the new Island-wide CCTV system will be completed by the end of July 2024.
- We aim to fill posts within our cybersecurity unit which will greatly enhance our protection in the cyber realm.
- We will fill vital posts within the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team.
- We intend to fill posts across our Uniform Services to provide greater operational effectiveness and ultimately enhancing safety and security across Bermuda.
- We look to upgrade two security systems in our Corrections facilities.

- Funding for the Royal Bermuda Regiment to establish a hurricane preparedness shelter project.

Mr. Chairman, I would now draw your attention to page B-262 of the Estimates Book where you will note that the Ministry of National Security budget for the financial year 2024/25 is $137,759,000, an increase of $6,425,000, or 5 per cent, which will be discussed in more detail in the individual heads. This increase is mainly owing to the 2.25 per cent salary uplift for all full-time employees including the members of union bodies still in negotiations or in the final stages of review and signoff which will be addressed in each department's budget briefs.

Mr. Chairman, page B-262 shows a revenue estimate for the Ministry of $1,776,000, a $308,000 increase, or 21 per cent over financial year 2023/24, which will also be discussed in more detail in the individual heads.

Mr. Chairman, page B-262 also details the current account expenditure of the departments that make up the overall budget for the Ministry by head, as follows:

HEAD	Department	FY 2024/25 Estimate
83	Ministry HQ	$ 3,170,000
6	Defence	8,827,000
7	Police	[64,838,000]
12	Customs	18,372,000
25	Corrections	25,727,000
45	Fire Services	16,825,000
	Ministry Total	$137,759,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, we now go on to Head 83.

HEAD 83—MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to the current account estimates for Head 83—Ministry Headquarters, which can be found on page B-263.

Mr. Chairman, the objectives of the Ministry Headquarters are to ensure the Minister's policy objectives are met; to ensure that the Ministry and departments deliver services effectively and comply with relevant legislation, policies and procedures; to plan, mitigate and respond to threats to security; to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour; and to promote public safety.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of National Security Headquarters' budget allocation of $3,170,000 for the financial year 2024/25 represents an increase of $487,000, or an 18 per cent increase, over the 2023/24 budget allocation.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-263 of the current account estimates you will note that there are six business units within the Ministry Headquarters. The estimate for business unit 93000, Administration, is $2,002,000, an increase of $435,000, or 28 per cent. This comprises $36,858 toward the salary uplift. [There is] $217,000 to cover two information system security and incident response officers for the cybersecurity team, and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team coordinator post of $125,000. The remaining amount was allocated toward the Uniform Services Training Programme in the amount of $56,142.

Mr. Chairman, the estimates for business unit 93002, Parole Board is $125,000, an increase of $3,000, or 2 per cent in anticipation of additional meetings stemming from hearings for parole breaches and appeals.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for business unit 93003, Treatment of Offenders Board, is $30,000, an increase of $3,000, or 11 per cent in anticipation of additional meetings.

The estimate for business unit 93004, Police Complaints Authority, is $31,000, an increase of $10,000, or 48 per cent in anticipation of additional meetings.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for business unit 93007, Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team is $190,000 compared to $12,000 for the 2023/24 financial year. The increase is to fund

- one disaster coordinator post—$125,000;
- conference tabletop exercises—$40,000;
- posters, maps and advertising—$13,500; and
- emergency broadcasting systems maintenance—$11,000.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 93008 relates to the Gang Violence Reduction programme with an estimate for financial year 2024/25 of $792,000. This represents a $154,000 decrease, or 16 per cent decrease over the financial year 2023/24. The funds were reallocated toward the Uniform Services Training Programme. The reduction in the estimate will only impact the inability to hire additional outreach and youth workers and special projects such as sending youth on the Habitat for Humanity programme. The current programmes such as Gang Violence Reduction Case Management and Outreach Services, Work Placement, G.R.E.A.T. and the I AM programmes will continue to provide training, skills and support to our youth.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to address page B-264 of the Current Account Estimates. This page includes the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates and the employee numbers of full-time equivalents.

Mr. Chairman, three of the object codes see no change in estimates for financial year 2024/25 over the original budget of 2023/24, and I will therefore limit my comments to the other 10 that have been changed. Salaries increased by $279,000, or 34 per cent, to reflect a 2.25 per cent salary uplift and the filling of two cybersecurity posts, as well as the Disaster Coordinator post in our Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team.

Wages increased, Mr. Chairman, by $279,000 to cover the wages for 10 Uniform Services Training Programme candidates. Training has been increased by $80,000, or 400 per cent, to reflect the increased need for cybersecurity and disaster training. Further increases are also reflected in repair and maintenance by $11,000, or 367 per cent, to cover copier and radio equipment maintenance fees.

Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry has increased by $7,000, for the Uniform Services Training Programme. Decreases are reflected in transport by $1,000, or 100 per cent. Communications by $11,000, or 28 per cent. Professional Services by $108,000, or 8 per cent. Material and supplies by $29,000, or 24 per cent. Other Expenses by $20,000, or 10 per cent. The reduction in the budget for those costs was applied to the wages, uniforms and part-time teachers for the Uniform Services Training Programme.

Mr. Chairman, it is anticipated that the fees will increase to $913,000 as the country experiences post COVID-19 celebrations and events such as special events hosted by individuals, sporting buddies and charitable and entertainment organisations.

The employee numbers, or full-time equivalents, have increased to 10 with the addition of two posts for the Cybersecurity Unit and one for the Disaster Risk and Reduction Management Team.

I shall now move on to page C-15 for Capital Acquisitions.

Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry has $4,000 allocated to office equipment for new computers.

Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to some of the accomplishments that the Ministry had in 2023/24 before moving to the other heads under the Ministry.

Cybersecurity

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: To ensure that Bermuda's critical services such as our energy supply, telecommunications, emergency services, water infrastructure and government are adequately protected against increasing cyberattacks, a Cybersecurity Act has been drafted and will be tabled this year. This Act will establish minimum standards for the protection of critical national information infrastructure, formally establish the cybersecurity governance board to oversee the protection of these entities and a national cybersecurity incident response team to assist government and private sector entities with preparing for and responding to cyberattacks.

Cybersecurity legislation is also being drafted and will be tabled to help ensure Bermuda legislation meets the international requirements established by the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. This legislation will provide modern definitions of cybercrimes and will provide law enforcement and the Judiciary with an effective foundation for investigating and prosecuting cybercrimes.

Mr. Chairman, we are increasingly dependent on information technology to store sensitive information and provide critical services. As was demonstrated in September 2023, cyberattacks represent a significant threat to Bermuda and our economy. We must continue to improve our ability to protect against, detect, respond to and recover from cyberattacks. Our cybersecurity strategy provides the appropriate framework for the Government of Bermuda to ensure that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) systems across all critical segments of our society and economy are designed, implemented, operated and maintained with adequate security.

In the coming year, with more human resources in our Cybersecurity Unit and with a legislative framework for the protection of critical national information infrastructure systems, our ability to defend against cyberattacks will be greatly enhanced. Whilst no system is completely immune from cyberattacks, as was shown last year by successful cyberattacks in Las Vegas and Singapore, and if I may, Mr. Chairman, just on this morning's news there is a real big cyberattack in the US health system. Across the country the health insurances have been comprised, across the whole of the United States. So cyberattacks are real. So our efforts in this space over the next year will provide increased security for our systems.

Mr. Chairman, the cybersecurity key accomplishments during financial year 2023/24 included [the following:

- The Ministry of National Security has conducted extensive consultation with Bermuda stakeholders and is working with parliamentary drafters to finalise new cybersecurity legislation in accordance with drafting instructions from Cabinet. The legislation will establish structures and standards for the protection of Government and other critical national entities.
- National Security continues to lead the development of a comprehensive information system risk-management programme, working as part of the Cross-Ministry Cyber Risk Management Team that includes the IDT Chief Information Officer, the head of the Government privacy programme and other key stakeholders. The team identifies cyber risks impacting government information and systems and develops strategies, policies and standards to ensure the risks are adequately addressed.
- During the 2023/24 budget year, the Ministry worked with the Chief Information Officer, the head of the PATI/PIPA unit and other members of the IT Government Steering Group to support development of IT governance policies, procedures and terms of reference in support of the Cybersecurity Programme. The Ministry

also continued to advise heads of departments and ministries on cybersecurity threats, vulnerabilities, policies and good practices.

- During the 2023/24 budget year, detailed job descriptions and functions were developed for all posts in the Cybersecurity Unit within National Security, in alignment with the structure approved by Cabinet in 2022. Recruitment for these new positions within the Cybersecurity Unit will begin early in the coming fiscal year. The Cybersecurity Unit will lead the National Cyber Incident Response Team and maintain a cybersecurity operation centre that will provide resources and capabilities to help ensure that Government and private sector critical information infrastructures are adequately prepared for cyberattacks.
- National Security also provided support to Government departments for securing their IT systems and information, providing guidance for appropriate planning, design and documentation to comply with approved policies and standards, and meet security requirements and define security objectives. Other services provided included: identifying threats to information, IT systems, components and processes; identifying vulnerabilities impacting IT system designs, architecture, components and data flows; identifying attack vectors and assessing the likelihood and impact of attacks. This work included providing recommendations for secure design and appropriate administrative, operational and technical safeguards to meet security requirements for protecting information and IT systems and preventing, detecting, responding to and recovering from cybersecurity incidents.
- The Chief Information and Security Officer and representatives from the Bermuda Police Service Cyber[security] Unit attended the UK Overseas Territories Cybersecurity Conference this past February. Attendees had the opportunity to collaborate with their peers in other jurisdictions to better understand the evolving cyber threat landscape and defences in order to defend against increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks. A thorough review of the results of the National Cyber Risk Assessment completed in March of 2022, was performed. Action items based on the results and recommendations from a National Cyber Risk Assessment report have been developed and will be used to update the Bermuda Cybersecurity Strategy and prioritise high-risk areas for protection against cyber threats.

Gang Violence Reduction Team

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Gang Violence Reduction Team (or GVRT) has been hard at work on the frontline confronting the multi-faceted challenges posed by gang-related issues in our community.

In the face of persistent economic disparities, familial disintegration and limited educational and employment opportunities the Gang Violence Reduction Team has remained steadfast and has resolved to disrupt the cycle of youth involvement in gangs and violence.

Mr. Chairman, the Gang Violence Reduction [Team] as led by Bishop Leroy Bean has worked tirelessly throughout the year to provide several programmes including . . . the mission of the Gang Violence Reduction Team is to

- aid in the transition of at-risk individuals away from delinquent peer groups and toxic environments to reduce violent crime in Bermuda;
- change the pattern of behaviour of individuals involved in group and gang violence and reintegrate them into mainstream society;
- prevent preteens and adolescents from joining gangs and engaging in antisocial behaviour by re-establishing positive social and familial bonds;
- create opportunities of employment for young people and individuals who have previously not been employable due to antisocial backgrounds;
- connect youth, men and women with the necessary helping agencies that will aid in addressing mental and social health issues; and
- place more focus on fostering and sustaining positive interpersonal relationships.

Mr. Chairman, the Gang Violence Reduction Team's commitment to School Outreach initiatives stands as a beacon of proactive engagement and support. Acknowledging schools as primary recruiting grounds for gangs, our team has implemented targeted interventions to mitigate risks and cultivate a culture of positivity among students. The Team Outreach support includes various vital components. Mr. Chairman, I will list a few:

- Incident management support services. Following incidents, our team provides comprehensive support to schools, including security meetings, strategy sessions and the creation of mitigation plans.
- Facilitating multi-agency meetings. Our team actively collaborates with various government departments to strategise the development of violence mitigation plans in response to high tensions or incidents between students.
- Delivering ongoing restorative sessions through consistent mediation sessions. We strive to force the understanding and resolution, promoting peaceful conflict resolution among students.

- Daily school lunch visits in high schools. By maintaining a daily presence during school lunch hours, the Gang Violence Reduction Teams seek to create opportunities for informal interactions and support, reinforcing positive relationships with students.
- Delivering individual youth sessions. On a case-by-case basis, the Gang Violence Reduction Team delivers sessions tailored to the unique needs of each student. These sessions provide personalised guidance and support, empowering individuals to make positive choices and avoid gang involvement and eventually become productive citizens in our community.
- Individual student case management. Students who are identified as needing it, receive a personalised case management ensuring that their unique challenges and needs are addressed effectively.
- Specialised small group meetings. Targeted group sessions provide opportunities for peer support. Skills building and positive reinforcement, strengthening students' resilience against negative influences.
- Specialised programmes. On a needs basis in our high schools or middle schools the team designs and implements specialised programmes to address specific issues such as conflict resolution, anger management, and positive decision-making skills.

Early Intervention Programmes Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Gang Violence Reduction Team recognises the critical importance of early intervention in addressing youth involvement in gang-related activities. To this end, the team has implemented two cornerstone programmes. The I AM programme and the G.R.E.A.T., or the Gang Resistance Education and Training programme, or G.R.E.A.T. for short. These initiatives are specifically designed to cater to boys enrolled in primary and middle schools.

I AM Programme

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: In partnership with the Minister of Education the Gang Violence Reduction Team meticulously identified and selected six schools to implement targeted intervention programmes. These schools were Pervis Primary, Paget Primary, Prospect Primary, Harrington Sound Primary, Sandys Middle School and Clearwater Middle Schools. The primary objective of the I AM programme is to mitigate risk factors, reinforce protective factors and cultivate academic motivation and personal development among the participating youth.

Mr. Chairman, I am proud to share that the I AM programme held the first I AM programme youth summit, "Say It Loud." This landmark event held on June 24, 2023 brought together 70 young boys from our weekly programmes, accompanied by 12 dedicated staff members at the Fun Zone in St. David's. The summit comprised three enriching workshops facilitated by esteemed community members focusing on empowerment, leadership and goalsetting. Following the workshops, participants engaged in a plethora of engaging team games and activities throughout the afternoon fostering comradery and teamwork among the youth.

Gang Resistance Education and Training Programme

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Similarly, the G.R.E.A.T. programme targets boys enrolled in primary and middle schools with guidance from the Minister of Education, the Gang Violence Reduction Team implements specialised interventions aimed at reducing gang involvement and promoting positive life choices among participants.

The Work Placement and Mentoring Programme

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Work Placement and Mentoring Programme is a job placement initiative targeting youth who have participated in high school intervention programmes. In 2023/24, the Gang Violence Reduction Team successfully executed another round of this programme with 15 students completing the eight weeks of training. We anticipate another cohort of 15 students in the programme for 2024/25.

Some key achievements of the programme are as follows:

Work Readiness Workshop completion. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of student completed the Work Readiness Workshop with 12 out of 15 students finishing the full eight-week programme.

Attendance and engagement. Mr. Chairman, 10 out of the 15 students never missed a scheduled work date, demonstrating their commitment and dedication. Business partners showed significant engagement with 86 per cent completing weekly evaluations and coaching meetings with students.

Job coaching sessions. The programme manager conducted 123 job coaching sessions providing personalised support and guidance to students.

Business partner satisfaction. Mr. Chairman, 85 per cent of business partners expressed interest in participating in the programme again highlighting their satisfaction with the initiative.

Participant satisfaction and growth. All students would recommend the programme to others and 100 per cent of parents noted personal growth in their children over the eight-week period.

Additional work opportunities. [There were] 10 students who were offered an additional two weeks of

paid work based on their performance reports and supervisor satisfaction. Five students secured part-time or full-time positions within the companies after completion demonstrating the programme's effectiveness in facilitating employment opportunities.

Support services and crises intervention. The Gang Violence Reduction Team provided three referrals to additional emotional and social support services and assisted students through eight crisis incidents, ensuring their well-being and stability throughout the programme.

Behaviour and criminal activity avoidance. Throughout the programme 100 per cent of students avoided engaging in antisocial behaviour or criminal activity reflecting the positive impact of the programme on participants' behaviour and choices.

These outcomes reflect the programme's effectiveness in providing valuable opportunities for youth to gain work experience, develop essential skills and achieve positive personal and professional growth.

Community Outreach

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Our Gang Violence Reduction Team [GVRT] has been at the forefront of our community outreach efforts, actively engaging with various groups and events to address pressing issues such as violence and gang influence. The GVRT has utilised multiple platforms to spread our message including radio shows where we have reached audiences far and wide. Additionally, the GVRT organised and hosted the impactful I AM programme "Say It Loud" youth summit bringing together the 70 enthusiastic young minds from our primary schools to inspire and empower them.

Partnering with local organisations. We have sponsored vision-makers scenes, anti-violence outreach and supported events like the "Bikes Up, Guns Down" community day demonstrating our commitment to positive change. The Gang Violence Reduction Team presence at church groups and PTA meetings has been instrumental in educating individuals about the nuances of community violence and equipping parents with essential tools to protect their children from gang involvement.

Collaborating with summer camps. The Gang Violence Reduction Team has instilled self-worth and awareness among youth, empowering them to resist negative influences. Moreover, our sponsorship and partnership with community violence walks, fairs and youth-focused fun days have allowed us to share our message effectively. Led by the Gang Violence Reduction Team, our participation in community panels and events has sparked crucial conversations and forged connections amplifying our impact and strengthening community bonds.

Through these collective efforts we have not only disseminated vital information, but also inspired collective action toward building safer more empowered communities.

Coordinated Crisis Response

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Coordinated Crisis Response Team has coordinated the following crisis response protocols aimed at restoring peace in the community and assisting family members, relatives or witnesses of violent incidents following violent incidents such as a shooting or stabbing:

- The Hospital Team was activated 12 times during this last financial year.
- The Community Team was activated two times.
- The Gang Violence Reduction Team provided eight post-incident support sessions to immediate family members and close friends after violent incidents.
- Street Level Outreach Work and Case Management. The Gang Violence Reduction Team continues its crucial role in lowering community tensions with a focused approach on interventions in our neighbourhoods through street level outreach for 18- to 35-year-old men and women in our community. Our comprehensive Gang Violence Reduction case management and outreach services have been instrumental in supporting hundreds of young men in our community.

Case Management and Outreach Support

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Some key services provided:

Our client-led strength-based programmes are tailored to meet with individual needs providing a sense of belonging, consistency and impartial guidance. Clients are paired with dedicated case managers who assist them in securing housing, food, employment, court support and making healthy life choices.

- Providing non-traditional counselling sessions and family group sessions to address underlying issues and promote healing within families.
- Client-centred meetings with outside agencies including the Bermuda Police Service, Court Services, Workforce Development, Financial Assistance, Department of Child and Family Services, legal support and more.
- Facilitate collaboration and coordination of services. There were 85 clients between the ages of 18 and 35 who have directly benefited from our case management and outreach services.
- Specialised support services, safe houses. Providing a safe house and support for individuals in need of immediate assistance.
- Relocation support. Assisting clients in transitioning to safer environments when necessary.
- Prison visits. Maintaining connections through monthly visits and providing support to incarcerated individuals.

- Court advocacy and support. Monitoring court sessions and providing advocacy support during court proceedings.
- Offering community service opportunities to clients in fulfilling court-mandated community service hours, promoting accountability and positive contribution to society.
- Employment support. Assisting clients in developing résumés and applying for jobs to facilitate their integration into the workforce connecting clients to jobs and work placement opportunities.
- Mediations and negotiations. Holding quarterly mediations and negotiations to resolve conflicts and foster positive community relationships.

The Chairman: Pause for minute, please, Minister.

For the benefit of the Members in the House and the listening public, I would like to remind us that we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Minister Michael A. Weeks is giving his presentation on the Ministry of National Security.

Please resume, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, as I continue:

Redemption Programme Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Redemption Programme is a specialised therapeutic initiative designed for young people. Over the past five years the programme has successfully supported over 75 trainees in their journey toward personal transformation. In the past year alone 18 trainees completed the intensive 25-week programme benefiting from weekly stipends, comprehensive case management educational services and post training support. This programme focuses on fostering personal growth and instilling positive behavioural patterns and providing participants with essential tools for a better future. The Gang Violence Reduction Team effectively delivered the programme in 2023/24.

Individual Case Management and Job Coaching Sessions

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Throughout the year the team conducted 105 individual case management job coaching sessions with Redemption programme trainees offering crucial support and guidance.

Crisis Intervention

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The team assisted trainees through 15 crisis situations ensuring their well-being and stability during challenging times.

Education and Skill Development Sessions

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The programme hosted 17 sessions covering essential areas such as job readiness skills, life skills, career exposure, goal setting, and general personal development. These sessions aided trainees in acquiring vital skills for success in both their personal and professional lives.

Ongoing Support for Current Trainees

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Currently three trainees are still in the process of completing the Redemption programme with ongoing support from the team to ensure their successful completion.

Job Placement and Transition Support

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Eight trainees were offered full-time or part-time job opportunities during their training placement and have successfully transitioned into their new roles. Additionally, three current trainees are actively seeking full-time or part-time employment and the team is assisting by helping them prepare résumés and apply to various businesses for job opportunities.

Overall, the Redemption programme has proven to be instrumental in empowering individuals to make positive changes in their lives equipping them with the skills and support needed to succeed. Through continued dedication and tailored support, the Gang Violence Reduction Team [GVRT] remains committed to facilitating the transformation and reintegration of programme participants into society.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to understand that our clients carry life histories marked by poverty, family violence, marginalisation and intergenerational abuse and neglect. Many have incarceration experiences or have pending charges in cases. The young men we support face additional challenges presented by institutionalisation, discrimination, community judgment, major educational gaps, negligible work history, criminal records [and] criminal proceedings which preclude hopes of employment. For many of our clients, illicit substances are a way of coping with the perils of gang involvement, homelessness and mental health issues.

Mr. Chairman, the Gang Violence Reduction Team will continue to work in our community to reduce gang tensions and provide a way out of gang violence as well as provide children with alternative life choices to gang life. We as a community must give this generation and the next generation a viable alternative to gang violence.

Disaster Reduction Risk Management

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Disaster Reduction Risk Management, DRRM for short. Mr. Chairman, in 2018 the Ministry of National Security formed the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team which I shall refer to as the "DRRM" Team. It was manned by employees seconded from various government departments. During this fiscal year, Cabinet formerly approved the creation of a substantive DRRM unit and during the coming year we shall start the recruiting process to fill those posts. I am pleased to report that we are now in the process of recruitment for the post of Disaster Coordinator.

The mission statement of the team is *to build national disaster risk reduction and mitigation capacities with our community, partners and stakeholders by identifying and reducing the underlying drivers of risk in order to save lives and protect property.*

Disasters are the result of natural occurrences, human intent, error or as a result of failed systems. They can be divided into categories such as terrorism, technological hazards, environmental incidents, epidemics and transportation hazards. The DRRM team functions as the coordinating body between first responder agencies, governmental agencies, non-governmental agencies and other organisations.

The goal of the team is to prevent new disaster risks and to reduce those that already exist. The team does this through the implementation of integrated and inclusive measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery and thus strengthen Bermuda's resilience in preparation for natural and man-made disasters.

The DRRM team is responsible for harmonising the national disaster plans and ensuring that all agencies and government departments are aware of these plans. The team is engaged and fully committed to continuously updating their plans, training their staff in the execution of those plans and ensuring that when the need arises the plans are effective. Many departments do not have business continuity plans, and the DRRM team is an integral part of the Bermuda Government's commitment to ensuring that there are adequate mitigation measures in place to address identified risk, whether they be man-made or natural.

The key accomplishments of the Disaster Risk Reduction Mitigation team for this current budget year include [the following]:

Hurricane season 2023 saw another active season with storms, including Hurricane Lee and Tropical Storms Idalia and Philippe. The DRRM team prepared public messaging in addition to checking with hardware stores to check on the status of supplies. In light of the instability of the 2023 storms, a debrief was completed at the end of the season to review our standard approach to ensure future decisions are consistent.

The team continues to be responsible for the operation of the EMO [Emergency Measures Organisation] Operations Centre, which is currently located at the Hamilton Fire Station. This serves as the multi-agency coordinating centre during any major incident.

The team continues to work with Skyport Corporation on training required for the airport emergency plan. Small exercise modules are planned each year with a large live exercise every three years, the last being in November 2021.

The team continues to facilitate tabletop exercises in several Government and non-governmental stakeholders in preparation of securing our ports, both air and sea. This past year saw the DRRM team conduct the following tabletop exercises: Several seaport exercises in collaboration with the cruise liners that visit our ports.

The team facilitated a tabletop exercise with several Government and partner agencies in December 2023 to discuss a joint response to illegally registered aircraft and aircraft from sanctioned nations should they land in Bermuda. This will develop into further exercises both tabletop and partly live multi-agency exercises in 2024. These exercises allow for pertinent discussions toward the updates of several agencies' plans. All these supporting agencies must add additional sections within their plans to facilitate the comprehensive emergency response required. Some of the requirements include addressing potential immigration challenges. These are requirements, et cetera; accommodation; transportation and psychological assistance.

A memorandum of understanding [MOU] has been signed between the Bermuda Government and the Bermuda Airport Authority represented by the Bermuda Weather Service to deliver official reports and updates as it relates to weather disturbances that will affect the community. These reports are generally delivered during, but not limited to, the defined hurricane season. With the upcoming tsunami exercise, the Bermuda Weather Service will highlight one of their major responsibilities in alerting the Government, et cetera.

The team continues to chair the monthly supply chain meetings with stakeholders including government departments and the private sector since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meetings have proven to be very informative and important. The collected data provided an understanding of the global supply chain challenges to local businesses that have impacted prices on imported goods such as

- regional conflicts both in Ukraine and the Middle East;
- shipping rate hikes due to actual long journeys around continents and ports of call delays;
- drought in Panama bringing the canal operations almost to a standstill;
- maritime policy changes, shipping requirements of electric vehicle batteries;
- US suppliers prioritising the domestic market over export;

- shrinking post COVID-19 pandemic market for overseas suppliers;
- orders on some imported goods not being 100 per cent fulfilled;
- the continuing shortage and availability of 20-foot shipping containers.

Along with the global challenges, our local challenges have affected supplies due to the following: Record rainfall in Bermuda caused delays in harvest and crops to some local crop production; and continuous bad weather slowing local fishing catches. This information is vital to the Government to assess the availability of resources; food and other essential items including emergency supplies.

For tsunami exercises Bermuda will again participate in this annual event in March 2024. This exercise is organised by UNESCO under the umbrella of the United Nations and NOAA, and is a regional multi-country tsunami exercise involving approximately 30 countries.

Mr. Chairman, the event coordination occurred this past year for the following events where agency contingency planning was coordinated by the DRRM team:

- Bermuda Triangle Challenge, January 2024;
- Bermuda Day activities, May 2023;
- Heroes weekend, June 2023;
- Cup Match, St. George's, July 2023;
- PRIDE events, August 2023;
- Rugby Classic, October 2023;
- PGA Tour Event, October 2023;

Mr. Chairman, in keeping with our mission of *working together to keep you safe,* we will for the next financial year achieve the following:

Cybersecurity

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The cybersecurity plans for 2024/25 in addition to the legislation already mentioned will include the chief information security officer working closely with the IDT chief information officer and head of the PATI/PIPA unit to improve the Government's ability to identify, protect, detect, respond and recover from cyber threats. Two additional posts will be filled within the cybersecurity unit to assist Government departments with implementing security plans for IT systems, including the identification of threats, vulnerabilities, and appropriate safeguards to identify and protect against, detect and respond to and recover from cyberattacks.

The Cybersecurity Unit will establish the Bermuda National Cybersecurity Incident Response Team [or CIRT] and implement and operate a cybersecurity operation centre to monitor for cyber threats to Bermuda and our critical national information infrastructures.

National Security will also continue to work with the Cybersecurity Governance Board supporting the ongoing development and implementation of the Bermuda Cybersecurity Strategy. Critical national infrastructure planning for all key locations on the Island and conducting the next national [cybersecurity] risk assessment to be completed in 2024.

Gang Violence Reduction Team in 2024/25

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Gang Violence Reduction Team [GVRT] will continue to work in our community to reduce gang tensions and provide a way out of gang life, as well as provide children with alternative life choices to gang life. We must give this generation and the next one a viable alternative to the laws of gang life.

Mr. Chairman, the GVRT will

- support the development and coordination of the National Violence Reduction Strategic Plan;
- continue the "Stop the Violence" campaign;
- continue outreach services;
- continue targeted school support services including individual student case management; mentoring check-ins; specialised small groups; specialised programmes; mediation and negotiation and incident management support services;
- continue to provide the Safe House programme;
- continue to provide the Redemption programme, a 25-week therapeutic incentivised programme for the next group of 15 trainees;
- continue the sixth cohort of the Work Placement and Mentoring programme, a structured 10-week paid work experience providing selected young men and women who have participated in our high school intervention programme with opportunities for career exploration and skills.

The GVRT will extend the I AM programme from 10 to 12 targeted primary and middle school groups around the Island. The programme is built up of a specialised eight-session experiential curriculum which is unique to each 15-student cohort. The initiative was designed to reduce risk factors, enhance protective factors, increase academic motivation and increase developmental factors in the young people participating.

Disaster Reduction Risk Management

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in 2024/25 the team will continue to assist government ministries in developing business continuity policies and plans for implementation post impact of a disaster. The team through the Emergency Measures Organisation will coordinate the Government's response to a disaster (whether natural or man-made) where the local community has been impacted greatly.

This will require the team to meet with both government ministries and external stakeholders in developing and exercising emergency plans such as:

- hurricane planning;
- cruise ship incident planning;
- airport emergency plans;
- major event safety and security plans; and
- critical national infrastructure planning.

Mr. Chairman, the team will continue to facilitate tabletop and live exercises in the planning and preparation process some of which include the following:

Cruise Ship Planning

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: With the cruise ship for 2023 schedule to be over 220 cruise ship visits (a record for Bermuda) the team in coordination with the port agencies, Marine and Ports, the cruise ship agents and multi-agency stakeholders, will host multi-agency tabletop exercises with regular callers to test and develop contingency planning. There are several types of scenarios that the team helps to coordinate planning for.

Airport Exercise Planning

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: For airport exercise planning, the team will assist all the airport agencies in 2024/25 with tabletop and live modular exercises that are required by the Bermuda Civil Aviation Administration. The next large-scale live airport exercise will be scheduled for November 2024.

Major Incident Planning

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The team will hold training for major incident commanders which may be incorporated into exercises or held separately. The team will liaise with the Bermuda Hospitals Board to assist in coordinating the multi-agency mass casualty exercise to be held in 2024. The team will continue developing the evacuation plans in vulnerable areas that are exposed to natural and man-made risk.

Mr. Chairman, the team will continue to work with event organisers in developing their event safety plans for large and/or complex local and international spectator events, as follows:

- Agricultural Show in April;
- Bermuda Day and weekend activities in May;
- Our Kappa Classic;
- Heroes or Carnival Weekend events in June;
- Cup Match in [Somerset] in August;
- Rugby Classic in October;
- PGA Golf in November;
- International Race Weekend next January; and
- International Triathlon in April 2024.

In addition, SailGP for 2024 is still waiting to be announced. This involves key stakeholders such as Bermuda Police Service, Bermuda Fire and Rescue Services, Medical—

[No audio]

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience and Honourable Members in the Chamber, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. We have Honourable Minister Michael A. Weeks, JP, MP presenting for the Ministry of National Security.

You may proceed, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, as I was stating, in addition SailGP for 2024 is still waiting to be announced. This involves key stakeholders such as Bermuda Police Service, Bermuda Fire and Rescue Services, Medical, such as Bermuda Hospitals Board and St. John Ambulance, and, subject to type of event, other government entities meeting with the organisers to ensure that they are in compliance with the applicable legislation and regulations.

Uniform Services Training Programme

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Uniform Services have been challenged with filling entry level officer posts with Bermudians. With the assistance of the Uniform Services, the Ministry will embark on a Uniform Service Training Programme aimed to prepare Bermudians for future recruitment exercises. The programme will provide academics, familiarisation with legislation as it pertains to departments, department-led courses focusing on operation and a fitness programme. The cohort will also have the opportunity to rotate throughout the departments to obtain hands-on experience and will also provide insight into their career of choice. It is intended that the initial programme will train 10 candidates with the aim to expand the programme in 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the staff at the Ministry of National Security Headquarters for their hard work and dedication. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will now move on to Head 6, which is Defence.

[Pause]

HEAD 6—DEFENCE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 6, Defence, which can be found on pages B-266 through B-270 of the Current Account Estimates Book.

Mission Statement and Objective

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Defence, more commonly known as the Royal Bermuda Regiment, is to *Protect Bermuda's Interests.*

Mr. Chairman, their objectives include the following:

a. Force Protection. [These are the] measures and means to minimise the vulnerability of personnel, resources and activities from threats and hazards.
b. Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief. [This is] the organised response to alleviate the results of a catastrophe, the consequences of which put lives and livelihoods at risk. And exceeds the responsible agencies' ability to cope using its resources.
c. State Ceremonial. Provide state ceremonial and musical support for the Government and to promote Bermuda through ceremonial parades, national events and musical displays.
d. International Assistance. Upon request, the Regiment will provide military skills and resources to assist the UN, NATO, regional or international Peace Support Operations or training thereby enhancing Bermuda's reputation in the international community.
e. Enhancing Bermudian Society. The Regiment will continue to provide an important role in supporting the integration and development of Bermudian society.
f. Coast Guard. [The Coast Guard will] secure Bermuda's territorial waters out to 12 nautical miles and eventually to defend the EEZ up to 200 nautical miles.

Mr. Chairman, Head 6 comprises the Defence Department and the Royal Bermuda Regiment (or the Regiment as we refer to it). The Regiment's irreplaceable role is to provide operational and [surge] capacity to support Bermuda, the Government and its people in routine matters or in terms of emergency.

Mandate

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, under the authority of the Defence Act 1965, the Royal Bermuda Regiment's mandate is to be a military force maintaining the necessary standards of manpower, training and equipment to enable it to protect Bermuda's interest at home and overseas.

The Regiment conducts its training and operations whilst also acting as a centre of excellence for all Bermudians and residents to be able to personally and professionally develop while serving their country.

Current Account Funding

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Regiment's budget allocation for 2024/25 as compared to 2023/24 is as follows, which I will further explain on page B-268.

The original estimate for 2023/24 was $8,558,000. The estimate for 2024/25 is $8,827,000. This is an increase of $269,000, or a 3 per cent change.

General Summary
(Page B-268)

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the original budget for 2023/24 was $8,558,000. The Royal Bermuda Regiment was able to maintain the original budget throughout the financial year. The budget estimate for 2024/25 is $8,827,000 which is an increase of $269,000 or a 3 per cent increase. The increase is attributable to an increase in full-time staff salaries, part-time wages, and transport, travel and operational expenses. This increase will allow the Royal Bermuda Regiment to return to its original full-time equivalent and allow the Regiment to support the aforementioned training and operations in accordance with the commanding officer's directive.

Business Unit 16000, Finance: $343,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Finance cost centre covers the Defence Department which holds the civilian full-time staff and the accounting function for the Regiment. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $343,000. This is an increase of $30,000 or 10 per cent. This is attributed to the negotiated cost of living increase for unionised BPSU [Bermuda Public Services Union] BIU [Bermuda Industrial Union] staff.

Business Unit 16005, Recruitment: $115,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Recruitment cost centre covers the advertising, promotion and local training expenses. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $115,000, which is an increase of $2,000, or 2 per cent over the 2023/24 financial year. The sole contributor to this increase is part-time pay for soldiers acting as recruiters.

Business Unit 16010, Regimental Headquarters: $4,455,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Regimental Headquarters cost centre covers all of the Regiment full-time equivalents for Defence, Head 6, as well as liabilities such as employee-related expenses, marine fleet, vehicle fleet and public liability insurances. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $4,455,000 which is an increase of $320,000, or 8 per cent, over the 2023/24 financial year. This increase is to account for an increase in full-time equivalent salaries, rising insurance costs and increases to medical costs for the full-time equivalent staff.

Business unit 16020, Quartermaster Headquarters: $1,512,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the quartermaster cost centre overs all the operational and logistical services for the Royal Bermuda Regiment in relation to facilities for land and sea forces. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $1,512,000, which is an increase of $11,000 or 1 per cent over the 2023/24 financial year. This is due to an increase in the wages for part-time staff and increases to the supply chain costs.

Business Unit 16030, Ceremonial: $288,000.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Ceremonial cost centre covers the ceremonial and the Humanitarian and Disaster Relief [HADR] training expenses. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $288,000, and remains unchanged from fiscal year 2023/24.

Business unit 16040, Internal Security: $225,000.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Internal Security cost centre covers the training expenses related to internal security and Military Aid to Civil Authority [MACA]. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $225,000, which is an increase of $14,000, or 7 per cent, over the 2023/24 financial year. This is due to an increase in the part-time soldiers' wages plus an increased number of troops within the unit.

Business Unit 16060, Bermuda Cadet Corp Junior Leaders Programme: $52,000.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Cadet Corp programme cost centre covers the training and youth engagement of the Junior Leaders programme. As part of the curriculum, staff of the Royal Bermuda Regiment facilitate adventure training, drill, camp craft and similar military activities to young Bermudians below the age of military enlistment. The main aim is to enhance the leadership and decision-making skills of school-age cadets in order to make them better citizens. The programme runs weekly throughout the school year and incorporates meetings, weekend camps and an annual exercise. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $52,000, which remains unchanged from the 2023/24 financial year.

Business Unit 16075, Overseas Camp: $695,000.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this year the overseas camp will take place in North Carolina in April 2024. Since the formation of the unit, the two-week overseas camp has been the culmination of the annual training cycle and remains a mandated requirement by the Governor. The exercise provides tangible evidence that the Royal Bermuda Regiment is fit for its role and able to operate at the scale and intensity required to complete its mission and tasks. The complexity and range of activities conducted on land and at sea are not possible to achieve within the confines of Bermuda. Therefore it is essential that the camp is conducted abroad. It is also a primary component in the retention of Royal Bermuda Regiment personnel. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $695,000, a $125,000, or 15 per cent, decrease over the 2023/24 financial year. This decrease is attributed to a cheaper charter flight cost as this year's overseas camp will be in North Carolina rather than the camp being held in Guyana in 2023.

Business Unit 16080, Training and Validation: $535,000.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Training and Validation cost centre covers the expenses related to the training of recruits and promotion courses. To ensure our military personnel are current, qualified and competent it is essential that the selection and training system provides development and assessment opportunities at all levels, for all specialisms. The Training and Validation budget ensures these courses and qualifications are delivered in the most appropriate and cost-effective way possible, only seeking external instruction when it is not possible through local resources. All routine training exercises subscribe to the UK Armed Forces recognised assurance system, the Defence System Approach to Training, to ensure safety and consistency. The 2024/25 budget estimate is $535,000, which is an increase of $4,000, or 1 per cent, to account for an uplift in the part-time soldiers' wages.

Business Unit 16085, Marine Operations: $607,000.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, moving along, the Marine Operations cost centre covers the costs associated with the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard's operating expenses and part-time wages. The unit has 12 full- time soldiers and two officers. They are supported by part-time staff who train and operate on weekends and public holidays in order to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters 24 hours a day throughout the year. In 2024/25 the budget estimate is $607,000, which is an increase of $12,000, or 2 per cent, from the 2023/24 financial year. This is due to an increase demand for part-time staff and an uplift in part-time soldiers' wages.

Subjective Analysis
Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I would like now to address page B-269 of the Current Account Estimates. This page includes the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates and the employee numbers or full-time equivalents. Mr. Chairman, 10 of the object codes see no change in estimates for financial year

2024/25 over the original budget of 2023/24. I will therefore limit my comments to the other five that have been changed.

Salaries increased by $343,000, or 9.0 per cent, to reflect a 6.75 per cent salary uplift for two years retroactive pay and for the 2024/25 financial year, and filling of four full-time staff.

Wages increased by $68,000, or 3 per cent, which also reflected an uplift in wages for part-time soldiers. Please note that the full-time and part-time staff of the Royal Bermuda Regiment have not received this cost of living uplift and retroactive pay as the other unionised staff have already received. The Royal Bermuda Regiment mirrors its pay increase with the Bermuda Police Service who are currently in negotiations. It is expected that they will receive this uplift in budget year 2024/25, hence the increase to salaries and wages.

Mr. Chairman, the following object codes have been reduced in order to help meet the funding need for salaries and wages. Transport was reduced by $9,000, or 20 per cent, and represents a reduction in maintenance cost of the Royal Bermuda Regiment vehicle fleet. Travel has been reduced by $116,000, or 22 per cent. This is in anticipation of a lower cost for this year's charter flight for the Royal Bermuda Regiment overseas camp in North Carolina as the travel distance is shorter and will use less fuel.

Clothing, uniforms and laundry has been reduced by $25,000, or 12 per cent. The Royal Bermuda Regiment will look to prioritise its procurement process and defer orders to the next financial year.

Materials and Supplies has increased by $5,000, or 1 per cent, to assist in ongoing maintenance costs of the facilities.

Employee numbers. Mr. Chairman, the Regiment currently employs 39 full-time staff and four civilians. This brings the total full-time equivalents to 43 which is reflected on budget page B-269. The Regiment has successfully filled all Coast Guard full-time equivalents. A difficult decision has been made to remove the training officer and orderly room clerk in order to meet budget ceilings for 2024/25. In addition to the full-time staff, the Regiment's part-time strength is 258. This brings the total numbers to 298.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to invite you to turn your attention to page C-7, Capital Development and page C-15, Capital Acquisitions.

Capital Development and Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Regiment's 2023/24 Capital Development and Acquisitions and 2024/25 allocations are as follows:

In 2023/24, for Development we had $350,000. For Acquisitions in 2023/24 it was $191,000. For the upcoming fiscal year of 2024/25, our [Capital] Development will be $750,000 and our Capital Acquisitions will be $229,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Capital Development plan for 2023/24 on page C-7, saw the renovation and collaboration with the Works and Engineering of the warrant officers and sergeants mess bathrooms with the addition of a female bathroom inclusive of showers.

With regard to the acquisition plan for 2023/24, on page C-15, $164,000 is being used to start the replacement of outmoded shelter systems. This replacement is required to ensure emergency preparedness. The remaining $27,000 is being used for the replacement of the residential equipment.

Mr. Chairman, the Capital Development plan for 2024/25 on page C-7 of $750,000 is allocated to start construction of the Coast Guard maintenance shed and classroom. This facility will assist the Regiment Coast Guard team to maintain all water assets as well as provide a facility to carry out classroom training. The [Capital] Acquisition plan for 2024/25 on page C-15 of $200,000 will see the completion of the replacement of shelter systems. A further $29,000 is allocated for the replacement of boat equipment.

Mission and Roles

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, under direction of the Governor as Commander in Chief and in consultation with the Minister of National Security, the Regiment's finances are used to execute its mission of protecting Bermuda's interests. The Regiment achieves this mission through mandated tasks and services as follows:

Coast Guard

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the World Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard has completed three successful years of operations. The Coast Guard represents a continued commitment by the Government to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters for recreational users and those who depend on our blue economy. During the last 12 months the Coast Guard conducted 1,066 patrols, observed over 14,356 vessels, conducted 91 search and rescue missions, and enforced environmental protection laws. These are significant achievements from a relatively small resource. Working with local and international partners, including the US Coast Guard, HMS Coast Guard, and the Royal Navy, the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard continues to provide the following services:

- search and rescue, or recovery;
- interdiction or illegal maritime operations;
- deterring criminal activity on the water;
- enforcement of natural resource regulations;
- enforcing regulations in relation to maritime border and port security.

Mr. Chairman, the Regiment is also mandated to conduct the following duties:

Force Protection. These are the means and measures to minimise the vulnerability of people, infrastructure and high-value assets from threats and hazards. This ranges from military security and public order to explosive ordnance disposal.

Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief. This is the organised military response to alleviate the results of a man-made or natural catastrophe, the consequences of which put lives and livelihoods at risk. Ranging from hurricanes to oil spills and fires, the priorities are saving life, relieving suffering, limiting damage, restoring essential services and setting the conditions for recovery.

Ceremonial. The Regiment provides the only local professional standard military band and accompanying troops to conduct national ceremonial and civic events.

International Assistance. Upon request, the Regiment can provide military skills and resources to assist the UN, NATO and regional Peace Support Operations or training which enhances Bermuda's reputation in the international community.

Enhancing Bermudian Society. Since its inception, the Royal Bermuda Regiment has provided an important role by supporting the integration and development of Bermudian society in the form of the following:

- a common military experience for volunteers from across Bermuda's society;
- the opportunity to enhance life and vocational skills through direct provision of training or providing funding support for specific qualifications;
- involvement in regimental and wider community sporting and social activities;
- youth engagement through Junior Leaders, and in particular in partnership with the Bermuda Police Service, the facilitation of the Outward Bound Adventure Training Centre.

Mr. Chairman, the Regiment conducts the majority of these tasks in partnership with or in support of other Government departments, specifically, the Emergency Measures Organisation [EMO], Maritime Operations Centre, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Customs, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team, the Bermuda Police Service, the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, and the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Output Measures and Objectives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Regiment received 13 volunteers in the July 2023 recruit camp. From February 11 through 23, Mr. Chairman, 18 volunteers successfully underwent the first recruit camp of 2024. There will be an additional recruit camp in summer of 2024 when the Regiment will aim to bring in an additional 25 new volunteer recruits.

In July 2023, the Regiment sent a contingent of 120 soldiers to Guyana to represent Bermuda in Exercise Tradewinds 2023. In February 2024, they dispatched a training team to deliver sub-lethal Public Order training to the seven-nation Regional Security Service based in Barbados.

Major Achievements in 2023/24

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in addition to its public roles including the continued development of the Coast Guard, the Royal Bermuda Regiment has

- actively pursued the Government's commitment to Blue Shield;
- implemented recommendations from third-party assurance of their Coast Guard by the UK Ministry of Defence;
- paraded in London as part of the Royal Coronation in May 2023;
- assessed all personnel on acceptable behaviours as part of an annual training cycle;
- hosted the British Overseas Territories Commanding Officers Conference in May 2023.

2024/25 Goals and Plans

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, looking forward to 2024/25 the Royal Bermuda Regiment is looking to do the following:

- On the 14th of April 2024 the Regiment will be sending up to 160 soldiers to North Carolina for their annual overseas camp to develop advance soldiering and technical skills alongside other Overseas Territories Regiments.
- Send an attachment to Barbados to attend Exercise Tradewinds 2024 as mentors for Public Order and Explosive Ordinance Disposal [EOD] training.
- In June 2024, the Royal Bermuda Regiment will be hosting another chainsaw training module delivered by Kingswood, a UK-based company. This training will not only benefit the Regiment but will also assist the Department of Parks who certify chainsaw operators.
- Participate in the Birmingham [International] Tattoo in the fourth quarter of 2024. The Regiment Band has been invited to participate in the Tattoo which has been running for the past 30 years. Participation will put Bermuda and the Royal Bermuda Regiment and Band on the world stage as the Tattoo will see 6,000 various supporters, spectators at each performance.
- Maximise recruiting efforts toward 360 or more personnel and explore other long-term recruiting options such as expending Junior Leaders or reintroducing the Cadet programme.
- Increase the number of passes of all annual training tests by 10 per cent. As part of the retention and development plan of its full-time and part-time staff, the Royal Bermuda

Regiment will be sending soldiers on the following courses which will assist them with their military career and advancement: Commissioning course; advance drill course; all-arms drill course; intermediate command staff course; advance command staff course; explosive ordinance disposal; physical training instructor course; live fire technical training; urban operators instructors' course.

Closing Remarks

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this past year has showcased our Regiment as a force of professionalism, reliability, and adaptability both ashore and afloat within Bermuda and alongside Caribbean allies. They have notably enhanced the Coast Guard unit's operational capabilities while offering substantial personal and professional growth opportunities for our soldiers.

The year has reaffirmed the Royal Bermuda Regiment stature as a steadfast, honourable and skilled entity delivering critical services to Bermuda in regular periods and emergencies on both land and sea. Continuing a 125-year military tradition, our Regiment stands as a key pillar within our community and a source of collective pride for all of us.

Mr. Chairman, I am thankful to the Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Beasley, who is due to retire from the military at the end of May, as well as the entire team at the Royal Bermuda Regiment for their commitment and dedication.

Mr. Chairman, I now look to move on to Head 7, the Bermuda Police Service.

The Chairman: Before you do that, Minister, let's acknowledge the time that we have. If you would like to move us to lunch at this moment?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that we adjourn for lunch and return promptly at 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: No, you can return promptly at 1:55 pm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I was trying to get away from . . . Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: At 1:55 pm., Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: At 2:00 pm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We return at 2:00 pm. All right, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The Chairman: The Committee is adjourned until 2:00 pm.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:24 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:00 pm

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members. Good afternoon, members of the listening public. We are in the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The debate on today is in relation to the budget for the Ministry of National Security for which there are six heads, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 25 and 45.

We are currently in the hands of Minister Michael Weeks, the Minister of National Security who has concluded Heads 83 and [6] of his presentation and he will now go on to Head 7 in relation to the police.

Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 7—BERMUDA POLICE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, I move on to Head 7, the Bermuda Police Service.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Members, I am pleased to present the current account estimate for the Bermuda Police Service, Head 7, which can be found on pages B-271 through B-275 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure book. Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service's mission is *Making Bermuda safer*.

The objectives of the service are to

- maintain the confidence of the community;
- treat all persons fairly, with dignity and respect;
- protect vulnerable victims;
- reduce crime, particularly focusing on serious crime and gang-related criminality;
- reduce antisocial behaviour; and
- enhance road safety.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service [BPS] carries out its objectives by aligning its

organisational structure to maintain its community safety agenda and the prevention of criminal risk (locally and internationally) through a funded establishment of 473 employees. (That is on page B-274.) This represents a decrease of 19 police officers (full-time equivalents) over the original budget for 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, the BPS continues to advance its 2021–2026 Strategic and Operational Plan. This will allow several key initiatives to progress.

The Bermuda Police Service Gang Targeting Team continues to work with the Ministry of National Security's Gang Violence Reduction Team to reduce the threat in this area and seeks to divert persons from gang-related criminality. However, significant risk to the community remains from gun/gang-related violence and the BPS continues to strive to deter such acts through effective use of intelligence and specialist policing.

Staffing of the previous marine section, on a temporary basis, continues to support the Coast Guard as it journeys toward its full complement of staff.

The BPS continues its work regarding standards of professional behaviour and anti-corruption policy and procedure to which relevant best practice is utilised by the National Anti-Corruption Committee in support of other government departments and the United Nations Anti-Corruption Self-Assessment for Bermuda.

The BPS also continues its work in support of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC) to prevent financial crime, money laundering and counter-terrorism funding, with a strategic focus to maintain its excellent Caribbean Financial Action Task Force [CFATF] grading.

The BPS further continues its work in support of the National Cybersecurity Governance Board to prevent and respond to cybersecurity matters and maintain Bermuda's reputation as a premier international financial jurisdiction.

The BPS is working to implement a framework for greater multi-agency collaboration on the problem of domestic abuse. We seek to enhance communication and improve training with a view to improving service and reducing victimisation.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now draw your attention to the current account estimates for Head 7, which can be found on page B-272. A total of $64,838,000 has been allocated for Head 7 for the financial year 2024/25. This represents an increase of $2,238,000, a 4 per cent increase, over the budget for the previous financial year. Mr. Chairman, in order to meet its responsibilities and mandate, the Bermuda Police Service operates six programmes:

- Programme 0701—Commissioner's Office;
- Programme 0702—Corporate Services Division;
- Programme 0703—Community Policing Division;
- Programme 0704—Support Services Division;
- Programme 0708—Serious Crime Division; and
- Programme 0710—Bermuda Reserve Police.

Mr. Chairman, I will now address each programme and business unit as set out on page B-272.

Programme 0701: Commissioner's Office

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Commissioner's Office is in Business Unit 17000 and has an estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 of $50,161,000. This represents an increase of $3,011,000, a 6 per cent increase, from the fiscal year 2023/24. The increase was required to meet salary and wage increases that came into effect during the 2023/24 financial year as well as further salary and wage increases expected in the 2024/25 financial year. Despite a 6 per cent increase in this budget, it was necessary to severely reduce the overtime budget to accommodate a necessary increase in police officers. As there is a direct correlation between manpower and overtime, it is our mission to make the cuts work with no diminishment of operational effectiveness.

Programme 0702: Corporate Services Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Corporate Services Division has an estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 of $6,505,000. This represents a decrease of $402,000, or 6 per cent decrease from the fiscal year 2023/24. The budget decrease in this division is a compilation of decreases in:

- Business Unit 17010, Human Resources, a decrease of $46,000;
- Business Unit 17020, Finance and Administration, a decrease of $51,000;
- Business Unit 17025, Information Management Services, a decrease of $214,000;
- Business Unit 17190, Training and Development, a decrease of $41,000; and
- Business Unit 17310, Uniform Stores, a decrease of $50,000.

Programme 0703: Community Policing Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Community Policing Division has an estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 of $2,161,000. This represents an immaterial decrease of $4,000. Of interest, however, is that Eastern Area Command and Western Area Command are merged into the Community Policing Unit. This change was made to reflect policing operations more accurately as one Business Unit.

Programme 0704: Support Services Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Support Services Division has an estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 of $3,305,000. This represents a decrease of $183,000, or 5 per cent, from the original budget for fiscal year 2023/24.

Programme 0708: Serious Crime Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Serious Crime Division has an estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 of $2,424,000. This represents a decrease of $159,000, or 6 per cent, from the 2023/24 original budget.

Programme 0710: Bermuda Police Reserves

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Reserves has an estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 of $282,000, down $50,000 based on the original 2023/24 budget but no change from the revised budget which was effective from the 1st of April 2023.

The Police Reserves support frontline officers on watches, working both full day and full night shifts to support Bermuda Police Service delivery. They are equipped at the same level as career officers and trained in most aspects of patrol response duties. Given the current staffing levels on the career side of the BPS, without the Reserves, the BPS would struggle to keep up with the patrol and response policing aspects of its service delivery. The Police Reserves are to be commended for their dedication and commitment to making Bermuda safer, particularly as they are a volunteer organisation with each of their members having full-time jobs.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to address page B-273 of the current account estimates. This page includes the subjective analysis of current account estimates and revenue summary.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, salaries constitute 77 per cent of the Bermuda Police Service budget with the bulk attributed to police officers.

This fiscal year, we have seen a $3,432,000, or 7 per cent increase, bringing the salaries budget to $50,207,000. The increase in the salaries budget is due to arise from bargaining agreements which cover salaries, benefits and overtime—the latter being the most significant cost driver. Overtime expenses, largely due to maintaining the minimum staffing levels required on public holidays, have been cut and the Bermuda Police Service has reallocated these savings to support overall salary expenses. The BPS will continue to look for avenues to innovatively reduce overtime costs further. This financial strategy requires a critical re-evaluation to ensure efficient use of resources while maintaining high standards of safety and service.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, largely from vetting applications, security guard and firearms licensing fees, the Bermuda Police Service has estimated that it will collect $698,000, in line with the 2023/24 original estimate. There is no increase in revenue generating fees for the 2024/25 financial year.

Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents)

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funded employee numbers, or full-time equivalents, decreased by 19 over the original amount from 2023/24 to 473. Despite active recruitment during the 2023/24 financial year, the BPS did not achieve its recruitment goal. Compounding this problem, natural attrition has further contributed to low police numbers. Nevertheless, the BPS is determined to boost policing numbers in our efforts to ensure the BPS has sufficient funded posts to meet current demands.

As of February 2024, the BPS was staffed by 360 police officers (the lowest number in more than 30 years) and 62 support staff. The BPS is 40 police officers below the agreed funded establishment. This shortfall significantly impacts policing activity in response to crime, as well as the welfare of officers who deliver the service. This Government is committed to raising the number of police officers and has approved another recruitment drive for 2024. Recruitment efforts are expected to yield about 25 officers this financial year. However, we anticipate that attrition (largely due to retirement age) will reduce the number of officers by 32, for a net loss of 7 officers.

I take this opportunity to encourage Bermudians to really consider an exciting career in the Bermuda Police Service. There will always be room for suitably qualified Bermudians to join our Police Service.

2023/24 Accomplishments

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to some of the accomplishments the Bermuda Police Service had in 2023/24.

Operation Vega

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, since the inception of Operation Vega on the 1st of July 2021, the Bermuda Police Service has issued over 12,144 traffic tickets and 2,781 Motorist Advice Notices. Additionally, the Bermuda Police Service has increased its communications with the public around road safety through mainstream media and social media platforms. The department looks forward to seeing how this level of

engagement will positively affect driver behaviour and ultimately reduce the number of collisions on our roads.

New Recruit Foundation Course

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in the 2023/24 financial year, 17 new officers started their careers with the Bermuda Police Service. These new officers brought much needed resources to the ranks of the BPS and enhanced our operational capacity to meet our mandate.

Mr. Chairman, I will now provide this Honourable House with some sobering statistics on what the Bermuda Police Service dealt with over the calendar year January to December 2023.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The Minister is just taking a quick pause during his presentation and will be continuing in a moment on Head 7 in relation to the Police. And for those following in the bundle, in the Budget Book, we were [on page] B-273.

Minister, when you are ready to continue, please do so.

Thank you, Minister Michael Weeks.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, as I started to say, we will . . . the police will give some sobering statistics over the last calendar year.

Mr. Chairman, in making Bermuda safer, between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023, the BPS responded to 13,171 events or incidents. Included in that figure, the BPS responded to an average of twenty 911 calls every day.

Mr. Chairman, there were 2,078 arrests during the period. Notably, 264, or 13 per cent, involved the arrest of an impaired driver. Mr. Chairman, 3,584 crimes were recorded and investigated, including four murders, three of which were committed using a firearm.

Mr. Chairman, the BPS dealt with 1,106 road traffic collisions, of which 13 were fatalities and 113 involved serious injury. In the last 10 years, Mr. Chairman, 118 persons have died on our roads and 1,017 have been seriously injured. Mr. Chairman, 7,342 traffic tickets were issued, with 1,834 tickets issued for speed. Of note is that 443 of the speeding tickets were issued for persons driving more than 70 kilometres per hour, or double the speed limit . . . 7,342 traffic tickets were issued; 1,834 tickets issued for speed.

Mr. Chairman, Stop and Search is a powerful tool that allows Police Officers to stop, question and if required search persons for weapons. The tool is used proportionately as and when tensions, particularly gang tensions, increase. The BPS issued 1,133 Stop and Search forms in an effort to reduce opportunities for violence.

Gang Violence

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service is the law enforcement entity responsible for preventing and detecting crime and have adopted a robust approach to tackling gang and gun violence. As early as 2009 the Bermuda Police Service recognised the significant challenge of tackling gangs and guns and that it required high levels of community engagement, as enforcement alone could not address the systemic issues. Since 2009 the BPS has made several adjustments in response to the gun and gang problem and continues to evolve with a focus on leveraging community support and technology to assist in bringing offenders to justice.

Mr. Chairman, the BPS continues to deliver its Gang Violence Reduction Strategy with a core focus on partnership. It consists of three pillars:

- Prevent and Deter (which is Education and Awareness);
- Catch and Convict (which is targeting and suppression); and
- Resettlement and Rehabilitation (which is collaboration).

Mr. Chairman, the pillar of prevent and deter is to stop young offenders escalating into prolific offenders and to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in criminality in the first place. The BPS deploys a school resource officer, primarily to the senior schools, who meets with school guidance counsellors, teachers and students to build relationships and share information that is used to ease tensions. Additionally, opportunities to mediate disputes and model effective problem-solving are implemented.

Mr. Chairman, with Catch and Convict, the BPS deploys a Police Support Unit and a Gang Targeting Unit that are primarily focused on disruption and enforcement activity, specifically as it relates to those involved with gangs. This year has seen several large scale drug seizures, the street value of which exceeds $30 million. All that revenue was destined for criminals who are often engaged with violent crime and might have used the proceeds of the drug sales to purchase firearms. Further, the approach with our partners is to focus on the same key groups of offenders who are causing the most crime. The BPS chairs the inter-agency gang enforcement team that provides an opportunity for information-sharing and collaborative enforcement efforts.

Mr. Chairman, with Rehabilitate and Resettle, the BPS chairs the multi-agency offender management team that provides ongoing assessment and supervision for high-risk offenders. The aim is to encourage effective rehabilitation and resettlement of persons leaving the custody of the Department of Corrections.

Mr. Chairman, the BPS continues to adapt and evolve in tackling the issues of gangs with the necessary emphasis on an evidence-based approach to policing. This includes the use of information, intelligence

and lessons learned. This has resulted in multiple arrests for murder and firearms-related offences, as well as significant seizures of firearms.

Murder Investigation of Note

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has a very robust investigative unit, one that is faced with having to solve many problematic murders. One case in particular was that of Ms. Chavelle Dillon Burgess, whose case began as a missing person report and led to a murder inquiry. Despite the absence of the victim's body, the investigation never waivered and a conviction was eventually obtained for her murder.

Of note, Mr. Chairman, is that the relentless pursuit of justice in this case should inspire hope for all in abusive relationships. This case serves as a poignant reminder that the Bermuda Police Service is deeply invested in ensuring justice is served, even in the most challenging circumstances. Furthermore, it sends a clear warning to those who engage in violence particularly against vulnerable persons, that they will be tenaciously pursued and brought to justice.

2024/25 Plans

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in keeping with our mission statement of *Making Bermuda safer*, the Bermuda Police Service will engage in the following during the next fiscal year:

Policing Issues for 2024/25

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the scourge of gang and gun violence continues to play out in our community. Sadly, we have seen males and females as young as 14 involved in violent exchanges, often using knives to resolve their disputes. The Bermuda Police Service is currently and will continue to temporarily divert resources from community policing to bolster its enforcement efforts to catch and convict those involved in these crimes. However, this cannot be sustained. Until we as a community examine and act on the issues that would cause our young people to think that arming themselves, stabbing or shooting another person is an appropriate way to solve a dispute, we will continue to experience tragic and unnecessary violence and death in our community.

Mr. Chairman, the summer months will bring challenges to community safety across the Island as residents and visitors seek to socialise in larger numbers on beaches, at sports events, on the water and within bars and restaurants. These challenges will include, but are not limited to, increased tensions and risks between gangs, antisocial behaviour, residential and beach parties and drink driving. Additionally, Mr. Chairman, vagrancy and its associated crime is having an impact on the look and feel of Bermuda, particularly in the City of Hamilton. Business owners and the community in general have indeed made several complaints about how this behaviour affects them. They speak of lost revenue, intimidation, and the safety of unaccompanied women in particular. While the roots of this complex social problem are well beyond the capability of policing alone to address, the Bermuda Police Service is committed to dealing with the crimes that are reported, while working with our partners to pursue longer term solutions.

New Initiatives in the [Police] Service

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has a Strategic and Operational Plan for the period 2021–2026 with five key priorities:

- reducing serious crime;
- protecting vulnerable persons;
- raising confidence in the police;
- reducing harm on our roads; and
- developing digital policing.

Additionally, seven Strategic Ambitions have been set to support members of the BPS in achieving their full potential and assisting their professional development. The plan will be governed by the Bermuda Police Service Strategic Executive Group. The seven strategic ambitions include:

- A revised performance development record (PDR) structure enabling greater self-development and professional progress in the BPS.
- A revised Culture Board structure. Introduction of "champions" across the service representing key groups and departments to reflect and develop organisational culture.
- A new staff well-being board to address absenteeism and improve organisational health and safety. Increased focus and support towards issues of well-being including mental health;
- Introduction of a new Recognition and Reward framework, focusing on committed performance, leadership and going that extra step in acts of public service.
- The introduction of new leadership and self-development training programmes.
- The introduction of an Equality and Fairness Board to ensure an open and inclusive BPS, accountable for decisions and a forum for issues to be raised and acted upon.
- A program of social, sporting and other events across the calendar year to bring colleagues together.

Capital Projects

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I now move to page C-7 and Capital Development.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has been given $1,124,000 to develop the old Headquarters building in Prospect, Devonshire. Work has been

carried out on this building on an ad hoc basis over the last few years. It is our hope to complete these works and move persons currently housed in rented offices in Hamilton back to their original office spaces in Prospect. In addition, it is anticipated that senior managers of the BPS will also be returning to the Prospect Headquarters.

Mr. Chairman, I now move to page C-15, Capital Acquisitions. The budget for 2024/25 is $549,000 for capital acquisitions. The capital acquisition budget has been allocated as follows:

- $149,000 for the capital project of replacing all the network switches, most of which are more than 15 years old. Without these switches, the BPS network will cease to function, and operations will be critically impacted. Additionally, due to their age, they are vulnerable to cyberattacks.
- $370,000 will allow the replacement of ageing fleet vehicles. The fleet provides service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week throughout the Island. These vehicles experience a tremendous amount of wear and tear in a short span of time. This year's funding will allow for some of the uniformed patrol vehicles to be replaced.
- $30,000 is allocated for the ongoing updating and/or replacing of all the servers and desktop computers that are used by the 460 persons in the BPS and who make Bermuda safer.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the current and capital accounts estimates for Head 7, and I will now move to Head 12, which is Customs.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Please proceed.

[Pause]

The Chairman: While the Minister is just grabbing himself some water, this is the debate of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. We are currently in the eight hours of scheduled debate for the Ministry of National Security, and you are hearing from Minister Michael Weeks.

Minister, please continue when ready.

HEAD 12—CUSTOMS

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Members, I am pleased to present the current account estimate for the Customs Department, Head 12, which can be found on pages B-276 through B-279 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure book.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department's mission is *Protecting Bermuda's border and promoting economic development*. The objectives of the department are

- to assess and collect customs duty and fees on imported goods;
- to enforce customs laws and administer other statutes controlling the international movement of goods and people;
- to prevent the smuggling of drugs and other illegal commodities, enforcing international conventions for environmental protection and money laundering, and agency work for Immigration, Health, Transport Control and Environment; and
- to provide information and assistance to the public regarding customs laws and regulations.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department's vision is to be a modern, effective and efficient customs administration offering professional service to all stakeholders, using international best practices, maximising revenue collection and protecting the borders of Bermuda. Mr. Chairman, to make this vision a reality, strategic goals have been set for Customs.

Strategic Goal 1: Staffing, Stability and Training

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in order for the Customs Department to carry out its mission, the department will continue to provide an environment that supports the highest level of integrity. Enhancing the department's integrity as a respected law enforcement arm of the government is vital to performing our enforcement functions and will continue to be improved by ongoing training and officer development.

Strategic Goal 2: Legislation and Operation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, to advance Customs' mandate of facilitating legitimate trade, assessing and collecting the government's revenue and interdicting drugs and other contraband, the department will continue to review existing legislation and propose enhancements that will progress Customs' capability to fulfil its mandate in a rapidly changing environment.

Strategic Goal 3: Policy, Procedures and Future

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department's Policies and Procedures are a vital portion of its foundation, and the ongoing programme of updating these enables continuous improvement and further enhance the department's already positive work culture and continues its responsiveness to an ever-evolving environment. Revision of the memorandums of understanding with the department's law enforcement counterparts will build upon the shared understanding of the department's comparable duties, aims and objectives.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now draw your attention to the current account estimates for Head 12, which can be found on page B-276. A total of

$18,372,000 has been allocated for Head 12 for the financial year 2024/25. This represents an increase of $676,000, or a 4 per cent increase, over the original budget for the financial year 2023/24. Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department operates one programme listed as 1201, General, with seven business units. Mr. Chairman, I will now address the business units as set out on page B-276.

Business Unit 22030, Airport Arrivals/Travellers

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Airport Arrivals/Travellers has an estimate of $5,112,000. This represents an increase of $491,000, or 11 per cent. This increase pertains entirely to staff costs. The amount provided for base salaries has increased by $387,000. The amount provided for other staff costs (that is overtime and other contractually agreed allowances) has increased by the remaining $104,000.

Much of the cost of the increase is due to two pay increases which were agreed to since the preparation of the previous budget. The combined effect of these two pay raises is an increase in expenditure of 4.6 per cent, which expressed in dollar terms accounts to $213,000. The remaining $278,000, or 5.0 per cent increase, is primarily attributable to the planned staff increase within this unit of three officers which can be seen by referring to the employee numbers on page B-277. Due to an increase in the provision for overtime, it has become necessary to increase the overtime provisions as air traffic levels have increased since the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

Business Unit 22050, Investigations/Audit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Investigations/Audit has an estimate of $1,069,000. This represents an increase of $146,000, or 16 per cent. Again, the increase is entirely attributable to staff costs. Forty-two thousand dollars is caused by pay raises. The remaining $104,000 is due to a planned increase in staff by one officer to supplement the post audit unit and an increase in overtime provision.

Business Unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Hamilton Commercial Operations has an estimate of $1,329,000. This represents an increase of $314,000, or 31 per cent. Forty-seven thousand dollars is caused by pay raises and the other $267,000 is due to a planned increase in staff by five officers to supplement the post audit unit in collaboration with the investigation audit section and with the intent of working on the introduction of export control.

Business Unit 22080, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Administration has an estimate of $5,109,000. This represents an increase of $26,000, or 1 per cent. The Administration business unit is deemed the headquarters of the department, and a majority of the operational budget is allocated to this unit. For brevity and to avoid repetition, I will elaborate upon all of the notable budget changes during my presentation on page B-277; however, I will briefly mention that the provision for staff costs in this section decreased by $124,000. This is due to the elimination of manual data input with respect to Bermuda customs declaration and a reduction in three staff as a result.

Business Unit 22090, Vessel Clearance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Vessel Clearance has an estimate of $1,805,000. This represents an increase of $786,000, or 77 per cent. The significant increase is merely an administrative one with no underlying changes to the operations. To explain, for several years between 10 and 12 officers assigned to work with the cruise ships and cargo ships clearance have been recorded as part of the interdiction section. The Customs Department believes that it is more appropriate to record and report on these staff under the Vessel Clearance. Functionally, however, there have been no adjustments to how these officers perform their duties as a direct result of this financial reporting change. In essence, all elements of marine operations interdiction work are now reported under the Vessel Clearance business unit.

Business Unit 22100, Interdiction

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Interdiction has an estimate of $2,781,000. This represents a decrease of $1,213,000, or 30 per cent. The decrease is mainly due to a redeployment in staff. I have already spoken regarding the on-paper transfer of 10 officers to the Vessel Clearance section. A further five officers were transferred to the Hamilton Commercial Operations section. In prior years, the courier and post units which fell under the auspices of the Interdiction section had a two-fold role.

Firstly, they reviewed the Customs declarations and, secondly, they physically inspected the contents of the courier and postal packages. This approach was both effective and an efficient deployment of resources when declarations were submitted in paper form. Given that all declarations are now submitted electronically and can therefore be reviewed by officers stationed anywhere, the Customs Department has taken the view that it is more sensible to have all documentation reviews conducted by the Commercial Operations section. This allows the courier unit more time to focus exclusively on the physical inspection of arriving packages.

The significant increase in volume of declarations for the Commercial Operations section to review, however, requires that some staff be redeployed from the courier unit. A further three staff were deployed to the Airport section and one to the Investigations/Audit section.

Business Unit 22110, Seaport Enforcement Team

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Seaport Enforcement Team has an estimate of $1,167,000. This represents an increase of $126,000, or 12 per cent. Aside from the pay raises, the increase is a result of a planned earlier recruitment in 2024/25 than in 2023/24.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-277, on the table headed Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, we see how the allocated funds are intended to be spent. [A total of] 84 per cent of the budget, $15,372,000, has been allocated to pay for salaries, and a further $193,000—

[No audio]

The Chairman: That is absolutely fine, Minister. Yes, please do.

[Pause]

The Chairman: For the benefit of the members of the listening public, we are now in the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2024/25. This is a scheduled eight-hour debate for the Ministry of National Security, and you have been hearing the submissions by the Minister for National Security, Michael Weeks, in relation to Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 25 and 45.

Minister, when you are ready to continue, please continue.

You have the floor. Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I mentioned earlier, this increase is due to two pay raises which were agreed to since the preparation of the previous budget. The combined effect of these two pay raises is an increase in expenditure of 4.6 per cent. If we momentarily turn our attention to the table headed Employee Numbers Full-Time Equivalents, we observe a reduction in the number of estimated Customs staff from the 2023/24 original of 184 to the 2024/25 estimate of 180. However, it should be noted that only 174 positions had full budgetary funding in 2022/23, a difference of 10 full-time equivalents. This difference was due to the planned recruitments expected to commence partway through the financial year thereby reducing the planned funding required.

As of February 2023, the Customs Department had 166 staff members due to retirements, resignations and death and therefore has a need to recruit additional officers, especially as we move further from the height of the pandemic and we see an increase in travellers crossing our borders, which inevitably leads to the increased likelihood of legitimate imports as well as attempted smuggling activity.

Mr. Chairman, of the remaining expense lines the more significant changes are as follows:

Other Personnel Costs are estimated to be $193,000, an increase of $2,000, or 1 per cent. The Other Personnel Costs in question are primarily allowances provided for customs officers being on-call and called out. As you will be aware, the Customs Department has to be prepared to respond around the clock to provide its border control service. From time to time, unscheduled flights and vessels arrive into Bermuda, and therefore the Customs Department pays an on-call allowance to retain a skeleton crew to respond to emergency out-of-hours calls.

Training costs are estimated to be $13,000, an increase of $7,000, or 117 per cent. The increase represents additional funding for training to be provided by an association of certified anti-money laundering specialists. This is in connection with the Customs Department's increasing role in combating cross-border movements of funds derived from or used to finance illicit activities.

Travel Costs—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Members, can you please let us hear the Minister speaking. Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Travel costs are estimated to be $33,000, an increase of $19,000, or 136 per cent. One of the impacts of the pandemic has been the reduced ability to travel. It is anticipated that [travel costs] will increase during the upcoming financial year as Bermuda Customs participates in the World Customs Organization and Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council conferences as well as attending overseas training. The department plans to represent Bermuda at the UK Overseas Territories Sanctions Forum. In previous years, these trips have been financed by Government House. However, the department is now expected to pay for these trips.

Communications costs are estimated to be $126,000, an increase of $2,000, or 2 per cent. These costs represent telephone and Internet costs and are not expected to rise significantly above the rate of inflation.

Professional Services are estimated to be $368,000, an increase of $36,000, or 11 per cent. The main driver of this increase is due to the expanded use of retired customs officers to perform immigration

primary functions. These support officers have the training and years of experience but are employed at a reduced cost rate and on a part-time basis. As a result, this allows the department to work more efficiently as it frees full-time customs officers from performing some immigration functions and allows them to focus on the core aspects of the customs officer role.

Rentals are estimated to be $610,000, an increase of $29,000, or 5 per cent. This expense line covers rent for buildings ($595,000) and equipment ($10,000). The Customs Department occupies two buildings for which it pays rent. The first is Customs House at 131 Front Street which houses its headquarters, administration, commercial operations, investigations and audit sections. During the 2023/24 financial year, the five-year lease for this facility reached the end of its term. Consequently, the Estates Department of Public Works negotiated a new 10-year lease for the same space. The increase in the rental cost under the new lease is $26,000. Building 110 at Southside is a replacement for the training and administration space that Customs formerly occupied within the old airport building. At the airport, Customs only paid $700 per month for a storage room; however, during the 2022/23 financial year, the department was directed to vacate the airport space as its ongoing operation was costing the Government.

Repair and Maintenance is estimated to be $1,202,000, an increase of $58,000, or 5 per cent. This heading includes software costs and the increase is due to an additional software maintenance fee. The software in question is a subscription that will allow the Customs Department access to passenger name record (PNR) data. PNR data is utilised by the Customs Intelligence Unit to expand its traveller risk profiles which, in turn, allows the department to target its searches and investigations with greater efficacy.

Energy is estimated to be $130,000, a decrease of $16,000, or 11 per cent. Oil prices during 2022/23 and 2023/24 were unstable and reached new peaks. It is hoped that fuel costs will remain stable during 2024/25.

Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry are estimated at $120,000, an increase of $45,000, or 60 per cent. In recent years, the department has been impacted by supply chain issues with respect to sourcing uniform supplies. In 2024/25, there is a pressing need to replenish the inventory of uniform supplies.

Materials and Supplies are estimated at $204,000, a decrease of $10,000, or 5 per cent. This category of expense is broad and diverse and includes office supplies, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, food and supplies for canines, computer supplies, consumables for detection equipment and other miscellaneous items. The estimate is reflective of the actual expenditure in the preceding financial period.

2023/24 Accomplishments

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, during 2023/24, the Government of Bermuda was the victim of a cyberattack. It is worth noting that Bermuda's supply chain and Customs clearance times were minimally impacted by last year's cyberattack. Customs quickly adapted to the outage by implementing a simplified manual declaration and release system. Normal electronic declaration submission and release is fully restored.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Nothing like it.

During 2023, we have seen a further increase in the level of travellers arriving into Bermuda. The Customs department processed a total of 348,741 air arrivals during 2023 compared to 273,616, an increase of 75,125 people, or 27 per cent, above the year 2022. A total of 735 yachts arrived during the year 2023 carrying a total of 3,610 crew. In 2022, 838 yachts and 4,896 crew arrived which can be attributed to a number of regattas.

Protecting our borders requires the Customs Department to work well with a number of other agencies domestically and internationally. Customs [GIU] continues to engage in an ad hoc inter-agency working group initiated for the sharing of targeting-and-seizure intelligence data. The working group includes representatives from the US Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA], UK National Crime Agency [NCA], Bermuda Police Service, the Canada Border Services Agency [CBSA], the Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP], and Homeland Security Investigations [HSI/ ICE]. This group has further improved the response time for foreign requests received and the sharing of information as it relates to [Immediate Outcome] 2 [IO2].

In June 2023, on invitation of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC), two representatives of the Customs Department commenced participation on the *Road to Pipa* webinar series hosted by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. The six-month road to privacy compliance programme introduced the competent authorities to Personal Information Protection Act 2016 (PIPA). PIPA received royal assent on 27 July 2016 and will come into full implementation on 1 January 2025. [From] September 12 through 14, [2023], on invitation of NAMLC, several members of the Customs Department attended the Cryptocurrencies [and] AML compliance training webinar presented by Basel Institute on Governance. During the fourth quarter of 2023, Customs completed research and supplied import data to support the important work of the Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN). The data was shared with attendees to the 3 November 2023 conference which was held in person at the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute. The conference focused on drug trends, street values, addiction and treatment.

Sanctions Working Group

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: A Customs representative attended a sanctions forum hosted by Government House Bermuda at the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), 6 March 2022. The forum brought together the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies to learn information and discuss mutual interest. Whilst most of the materials surrounded the ongoing sanctions related to the Russia and Ukraine conflict, the UK non-Russia sanctions regimes were also highlighted. In regard to customs matters, there were presentations on asset seizure, information sharing via legal gateways, maritime sanctions and suspicious activity reporting. Networking with other Customs officials was very impactful. In addition, there was an agenda item focusing on technical compliance and effectiveness under the FATA standards. Overall, the knowledge gained assists the Customs Department to better understand the constantly changing sanctions' landscape.

Initiatives for 2024/25

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in harmony with the Customs Department's strategic goals, the following initiatives are planned:

With respect to Strategic Goal 1, Staffing, Stability and Training, as mentioned earlier the Customs Department intends to complete promotions and a recruitment exercise during 2024/25. This will bolster the activities across the department, but with particular focus being placed on enhancing marine and airport operations. The department will continue to utilise the excellent training modules developed by the World Customs Organization, which are provided as part of Bermuda's membership. Additionally, Customs will engage with the UK Home Office for strategic planning and training opportunities.

With respect to Strategic Goal 2, Legislation and Operational, the Bill in relation to Advance Passenger Name Record [PNR] data is a high priority in the importance of cross-border movements and security. Work has already started, and progress on drafting instructions will advance in the coming year. Operationally, the department will continue to move toward a trusted trader programme, where recurring legitimate importers with a good track record of Customs compliance will benefit from a reduced clearance time following a reduced upfront review which will be substituted with a post-clearance audit.

With respect to Strategic Goal 3, Policy, Procedures and Future, during 2024/25 it is our intention to continue to work to provide support to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee in its important work of preventing money laundering and terrorist financing. Customs plays a highly important role in this area as the enforcement body responsible for the cross-border movement of cash and goods. As mentioned earlier, it is also our intention to develop an export control process which will further mitigate the risk to our reputation and society arising from money laundering.

The department also worked on three MOUs. One, Customs signed off on a revised MOU with Immigration this month. Customs is currently preparing a new MOU with the US Border Control and Bermuda. And three, the Department is in discussions with the Director of Registrar preparing a MOU for trade marks and intellectual property rights.

The department will collaborate with Skyport in the redevelopment of the Air Cargo Terminal to ensure that Bermuda has a first-rate, efficient and secure facility to receive air importations. Customs will continue to meet with developers with the intention of providing Customs clearance for air passengers using smart phone technology.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the Collector of Customs, Ms. Lucinda Pearman, and her team for their continued service to Bermuda. Mr. Chairman, this concludes the current and capital estimates for Head 12, and I will now move to Head 25, the Department of Corrections.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

This is the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. This is an eight-hour debate in relation to the budget for the Ministry of National Security which is due to conclude at 8:15 this evening. We have been hearing from the Honourable Minister Michael Weeks in relation to Heads 83, 6, 7, 12 and 25. And I believe the Minister is now going to move on to . . . in fact, now he is going to move on to [Head] 25. Is that right, Minister?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, sir.

The Chairman: Thank you. Please continue.

[Pause]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just had to get a bit of water.

HEAD 25—DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, it is my pleasure to present fiscal [year] 2024/25 estimates of expenditure for Head 25—the Department of Corrections, which are found on pages B-280 through B-283 of the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure book. The Department of Correction's mission is *To protect the public and provide rehabilitative services*. The department objectives are to

- strive to maintain high standards of security, as this is essential to the safe operation of our facilities;
- provide a humane but demanding regime aimed at reducing re-offending by presenting

inmates with a range of opportunities in which reward is linked to effort, incentives and earned privileges to prepare for life after release; and

- aim to have robust and disciplined regimes and systems in place in order to achieve operation efficiency at all levels.

The department carries out its objectives by providing rehabilitative services across its three inmate facilities, employing a high level of security to ensure the safety of its staff, inmates and the community.

Mr. Chairman, the current account estimates for Head 25 begin on page B-280. A total of $25,727,000 has been allocated for Head 25 for fiscal year 2024/25. This represents an increase of $835,000, or 3 per cent, over the original budget for fiscal year 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, at present there are 174 full-time staff. The 2024/25 estimate of 256 full-time equivalents is incorrect and should reflect 230 full-time equivalents which will be funded in the 2024/25 fiscal year. The variances are due to retirements, promotions and resignations. In addition to full-time employees, the budget will fund facilitators and teachers for inmate programmes. The 2023/24 revised full-time equivalents reflects the actual number of employees at the commencement of the 2023/24 fiscal year and should reflect 223 full-time equivalents that funding was allocated for during this fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the employee number of full-time equivalents for 2024/25 found on page B-282 is actually 230, an increase of seven full-time equivalents when compared to 2023/24. Due to an internal oversight, that will be rectified imminently. The number of full-time equivalents is incorrect in the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. If you could just clarify . . . so it is page B-282.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, sir.

The Chairman: And the number you would like to replace is the number 185 and that should be 230. Is that right?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, 230.

The Chairman: Thank you for the correction.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Pardon?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, 230. The correct number is 230.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Sorry, so just to confirm. Looking at the bottom there, the actual for 2022/23 (just reading across) should correctly be 177. The original for 2023/24 should be 223. The revised should be 185. But it is 256 that should now be replaced with 230. Is that correct?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Got you. Yes.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Please continue when you are ready, Minister.

You have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Corrections faced challenges during fiscal year 2023/24. Recruitment of officers to fill vacant posts have not met target numbers, resulting in a shortage of staff. The department has made every effort to maintain a normal regime but on occasions there have been necessary adjustments based on the staffing levels.

Mr. Chairman, the facilities occupied by the department are ageing and require significant maintenance and repair. The department continues to prioritise finding solutions to address the repairs required as the state of our facilities does not only impact staff but those who are in the custody of Corrections.

Mr. Chairman, fiscal year 2023/24 saw the commencement of the recruitment process for the basic officers to fill vacant posts. Nine officers were successfully recruited during this fiscal year. In addition to basic officer recruitment, the department also recruited for and hired one education officer, two nursing officers and one forensic psychologist post, notably filled by a Bermudian, one canteen statistical officer, one facility manager, one accounts administrator and one principal purchasing officer.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Corrections continues to maintain a high level of security at its facilities. In fiscal year 2023/24, the department completed upgrades to the CCTV systems at the Farm, Westgate and Co-Ed Facilities with funding from capital acquisitions. Razor wire was installed and repaired at Westgate and Co-Ed. Upgrades to the facilities' Black Creek Security System were carried out to ensure that officers are able to maintain internal communications and operate the internal security system.

Mr. Chairman, there were some operational efficiencies created in fiscal year 2023/24. The Animal and Garden programme at the Farm and Co-Ed facility produced eggs and produced for consumption within the facilities, resulting in a reduction in food purchases.

Mr. Chairman, physical plant upgrades over the 2023/24 fiscal year included a continuation of refurbishments and repairs to one of the housing units at the Westgate Facility. Repairs and replacements have also been made to the air-conditioner units at Westgate. Replacement of cell and security doors at the Co-Ed

[facility] has been completed, whilst the replacement of cell and security doors at Westgate is ongoing.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to draw your attention to page B-280 of the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure book, which sets out the current account estimates for 2024/25. Here, under the General Summary, you will note that there are 12 business units within the Department of Corrections. Those business units with variances from fiscal [year] 2023/24 will be addressed in turn.

Headquarters [and OTS]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35000, Headquarters and OTS, is $19,757,000, an increase of $926,000, or 5 per cent, over the 2023/24 budget allocation. This Business Unit is 77 per cent of the department's budget allocation. The allocation will fund salaries and operating expenses for Corrections Headquarters and all custody staff. This includes the uplift in salaries due to agreed changes to the respective union collective bargaining agreements. In fiscal year 2023/24, the Department of Corrections engaged in a very aggressive training programme both locally and overseas. These training opportunities saw

- forty-seven staff members complete CPR/First Aid/AED training;
- certification of two Use of Force instructors who participated in training held in the Cayman Islands which was overseen by the UK Ministry of Justice Overseas Territories Prison programme;
- two staff members completed the Administrative Professional Development course;
- four staff members participated in the Joint Agency Training, Mass Casualty Training hosted by the Bermuda Hospitals Board;
- three staff members received training at Black Creek Integrated Systems Corporation in the Black Creek security system;
- two staff members attended overseas conferences. The conferences included the National Organisation for Treatment of Abuse, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care;
- ten staff members achieved certification in Use of Force;
- twelve weeks of recruit training was held for nine new recruits.

Mr. Chairman, as part of succession planning, staff development training was held to prepare officers for senior officer promotions which will take place during the upcoming fiscal year 2024/25. This training included eight promotion qualifying exam preparation sessions, leadership classes, interview training and budget training. Staff development will be encouraged and supported as opportunities arise.

Mr. Chairman, in the fiscal year 2024/25 training will continue for all staff; however, the department is excited to collaborate with the Bermuda College PACE division to offer a management and leadership training programme that will be facilitated by Profiles of Bermuda. This training will conclude with successful participants receiving certificates of completion from the Bermuda College PACE division. Other training initiatives include recruit training; fire marshal training; incident command training; Use of Force certification/recertification and Use of Force Instructor certification/recertification; and CPR/First Aid/AED certification/recertification.

Farm Facility

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35020, Farm Facility, is $441,000. This represents a $4,000, or 1 per cent, increase when compared to the 2023/24 fiscal budget.

The Farm Facility is an adult male minimum security facility with a capacity to house 90 inmates. Inmates must have completed their core sentence plan requirements and be classified as a minimum to low risk to be housed at this facility.

Mr. Chairman, in the fiscal year 2023/24, despite challenges with the tractor which has now been repaired, the Farm Facility gardens still managed to produce a variety of vegetables including corn, beans, pumpkin, butternut squash, lettuce, mustard greens, onions, beets, spinach, Swiss chard, sweet potatoes and turnips (no strawberries). The Animal Programme was also successful, producing nearly 3,382 eggs for consumption which equates to a savings of $2,087. During the 2024/25 fiscal year, we are looking to increase the number of chickens with an aim of supplying all facilities with eggs.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2023/24, the Work Release programme continued with seven inmates participating. Following their completion of the programme, all seven participants secured employment with various employers before their release. The diverse employment placements showcase the success of the Work Release programme in connecting individuals to various employment opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, with the recent addition of a carpentry instructor, inmates are actively engaged in classes to further develop their carpentry skills. The carpentry shop remains a key part of the Farm Facility's internal activities providing inmates with a space to apply their learned skills.

Co-Educational Facility

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35030, Co-Educational Facility, is $305,000. This represents an increase of $5,000 or a 2 per cent increase when compared to 2023/24 fiscal budget.

This facility, with a capacity of 56 cells, has separate and distinct provisions to house 40 adult females and six young male offenders between the ages of 16 to 21. In addition, Co-Ed houses the department's residential substance abuse treatment programme/therapeutic community, the Right Living House. Educational and vocational programmes are offered based on the needs of the inmates and trainees who are identified through the case management process.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2023/24, the Co-Ed Facility offered carpentry classes to male and female inmates. The aim of this programme is to ensure that persons who are interested are taught a trade which will increase their employability prospects.

The chicken programme that was previously established at the Co-Ed Facility continues to be a success and provides a form of therapy for those inmates who care for the chickens. The Right Living House Residential Substance Abuse Treatment programme continues to provide core treatment interventions/service elements.

The Cisco [Networking Academy] computer programme that was introduced at Westgate Correctional Facility was extended to the Co-Ed Facility during the 2023/24 fiscal year. This programme allows inmates to engage in computer-based programmes in a variety of discipline and the opportunity to obtain certified courses and diplomas.

Due to delays beyond the department's control, specifically related to the cyberattack, the transition of the Right Living House to the Department of Corrections did not take place in fiscal year 2023/24. However, plans are actively in place to have the programme fully managed by the Department of Corrections commencing July 2024.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2024/25, the CoEd/Right Living House facility intends to initiate the following:

- Gardening Initiative—to have the inmates grow their own food and also provide landscaping which will help to provide training in horticulture and landscaping.
- Furniture Making—create furniture from pallets. This will allow inmates to learn new skills and also increase an inmate's employability.
- Expand the Animal Programme at the Co-Ed Educational Facility to include other animals.
- Animal Therapy.

Westgate Correctional Facility

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35060, Westgate Correctional Facility, is $1,136,000. This represents an increase of $16,000 or 1 per cent when compared to the 2023/24 budget. Westgate Correctional Facility is an adult male establishment with the capacity—

[Pause]

The Chairman: Thank you. The Minister is just taking a break for water. He is currently addressing Head 25, the Department of Corrections. And by way of reminder, this is the debate on National Security which is scheduled for an eight-hour debate to finish at 8:15 pm. This is the second to last head and the Minister Michael Weeks has the floor.

Minister, when you are ready, please. Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2023/24, Westgate Facility continued to have challenges as a result of COVID-19 which impacted the facility due to varying degrees of staff absences and limited access by the programme's vendors at various times, which limited both service delivery and the opportunity for [inmates] to continue their case plan recommendations. This was compounded by staffing levels which were not at full strength, impacting the department's ability to consistently operate the facility's normal regime.

Mr. Chairman, in spite of our challenges, the Westgate Facility was able to relax some of the COVID-19 restrictions and allowed the facility to return to some normal operations. In-person visits, the inmate external work programme and special escorts have all recommenced. The department has secured a computer lab instructor to bolster the experience and accessibility of the computer lab, allowing inmates to gain access to additional online educational and technological programmes. This also benefits inmates who require additional support in an alternative style of educational learning. Inmates who are seeking employment as part of their discharge planning can now be given a monitored personal email address allowing them to communicate with potential employers.

Mr. Chairman, an organised Fathers Christmas Event was again held this year in the visits area. The event allowed inmates and their children to have an extended period of time to bond and reflect and provided the children with gifts donated by the Prison Fellowship outreach programme. On 1 December 2023, inmates enjoyed an Inmate Fun Day featuring a football match between the housing units with the winner playing and defeating the Bermuda Regiment team 7-1. The inmates then enjoyed a Christmas meal prepared from donations from the community and staff.

Mr. Chairman, Westgate Facility intends to undertake the following initiatives for the 2024/25 fiscal year:

- Increase the number of inmates involved in work and projects within the facility through the introduction of a job application form [and] interview process which will highlight their work skills and/or experience or aspiration to learn a new skill.

- Under the instruction of a local horticulturalist and farmer, expand on the horticultural programme structured to teach inmates the art and science of horticulture, arboriculture and agriculture with associated sustainable practices.
- Introducing a chicken farm which would help reduce the cost of purchasing eggs.
- Continue to offer online intellectual instruction and inspirational video platforms such as the MasterClass.

Therapeutic Community Centre

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35090, Therapeutic Community Centre, is $785,000, which represents a decrease of $251,000 or 24 per cent when compared to the budget allocation for the fiscal year 2023/24. This reduction is related to the programme being transitioned to the management of the Department of Corrections resulting in a reduction in operational costs.

The Therapeutic Community Centre, also known as the Right Living House, is located at the Co-Educational Facility. The Right Living House is a substance abuse rehabilitation programme that is segregated from the remaining prison population. The programme has the capacity to house 18 adult male offenders with a history of substance abuse and associated criminality. The programme aims to transition residents to the broader community with an increased potential for a life free of drug abuse and criminal activity through providing tools and opportunities for change. The budget allocation funds staffing, operational costs and the inmate programme.

Psychological Services

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35105, Psychological Services, is $344,000. This represents an increase of $7,000 or 2 per cent when compared to the 2023/24 fiscal budget.

This funding provides for salaries for two psychologists who provide psychological services to offenders at each of the three facilities. The psychologists complete various assessments on offenders including assessments of criminogenic need, areas of risk associated with offending, emotional well-being and adjustment personality factors and cognitive functioning.

In addition to assessments, psychologists focus on the provision of evidence-based interventions to meet offender needs. This can be both group and individually based. Interventions can include but are not limited to:

- substance misuse programmes, such as drug and alcohol education;
- drug and alcohol treatment and relapse prevention;
- violence reduction programme; and
- sexual offender programme.

Mr. Chairman, in the 2024/25 fiscal year, Psychological Services will provide the violence reduction group therapy programmes Life Minus Violence and Healthier Sexual Behaviours at Westgate Facility.

Social Services and Case Management

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35106, Social Services and Case Management is $579,000. This represents an increase of $26,000 or 5 per cent when compared to the 2023/24 fiscal budget. This budget allocation provides for staffing of one social worker and four case managers/assessment officers and contracted specific service providers.

Mr. Chairman, the department's social worker is a member of the department's Multi-Disciplinary Team and assists inmates and trainees with offence-specific associated problems in order to address behavioural, social and financial problems. The Social Work Team provides a variety of services to the inmates and trainees, including the following:

- Thinking for a Change;
- Parenting Programmes (Fathers/Mothers and Children Together);
- Grief Counselling; and
- Risk Assessments.

The social worker also assists inmates in securing employment and housing prior to their release. Additionally, the social worker facilitates family support and intervention meetings. Four case managers/assessment officers provide proper assessments and classification for the inmate population. They are responsible for the development of a case plan which drives the rehabilitation process for all inmates. Assisting them in developing risk reduction as well as critical thinking tools to address criminogenic thoughts and behaviours.

The Chairman: Minister, you are going to have to have a word with that PS about putting those difficult words in there for you. Right?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Most definitely.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I will take your advice, Mr. Chairman.

Health Services

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35107, Health Services, is $1,563,000. This represents a $94,000 or 6 per cent increase when compared to the 2023/24 fiscal budget. This increase is related to the number of inmates

requiring health care services. This budget allocation will provide funding for nursing staff and health care services for inmates. When fully staffed, Health Services is managed by a senior nurse and five registered nurses responsible for providing services to the inmate population at all facilities.

Vocational Services

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Business Unit 35109, Vocational Services, is $424,000. This represents a $5,000 or 1 per cent increase. This increase in funding will provide funding for the continued development of an Inmate Co-operative Programme (a Throne Speech initiative), resumption of the National Center for Construction, Education and Research (NCCER) training and trade classes.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the members of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. [We are] looking at the budget for the Ministry of National Security. Currently presenting his presentation on the budget is Minister Michael Weeks who is on his second to last head, Head 25 concerning the Department of Corrections. This is an eight-hour debate, and it is scheduled to end at 8:15 pm.

Please continue, Minister. You have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw your attention to page B-281 of the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure book, which is the subjective analysis of the current account estimates. I will briefly comment on those items which have a notable variance from the original estimates from the 2023/24 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, salaries have increased by $1,441,000, or 8 per cent. This represents the increase in salaries for seven corrections officers' posts. Additionally, it includes the uplift in salaries emanating from agreed salary increases that were negotiated by the Government of Bermuda and various unions.

Mr. Chairman, professional services has decreased by $698,000, or 28 per cent. This decrease can be partially contributed to the transition of the management of Right Living House to the Department of Corrections as well as a reduction in the number of contractors required as the services are not needed.

Mr. Chairman, rentals has decreased by $129,000, or 89 per cent. This represents a decrease in rent, as Corrections Headquarters has now relocated to Westgate. Materials and supplies has increased by $64,000, or 4 per cent. This increase represents materials and supplies that will be needed for to effect minor repairs through the facilities due to ageing. Mr. Chairman, the employee number, or full-time equivalents, for 2024/25 is 256, an increase of 33 full-time equivalents when compared to 2023/24.

Performance Measures

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to draw your attention to page B-283 which outlines the Performance Measures of the Department of Corrections. The forecast for 2024/25 is as follows:

1. The average daily inmate population is forecasted at 129, with 39 of the admissions estimated to be first-time offenders who received custodial sentences.
2. The number of inmates projected to be released on parole is forecasted to be seven.
3. In the fiscal year 2023/24, Mr. Chairman, 58 per cent of eligible inmates enrolled in development and treatment programmes aimed to address the offending behaviours, address educational and vocational needs and improve skills development. The department has a target enrolment of 61 per cent for 2024/25/
4. The Department of Corrections calculates its recidivism rates according to internationally accepted practices. Based on these standards, the rates include persons who have a conviction for a new offence within one, two and three years of their release. The actual outcome for 2023/24 was 16 per cent.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Excellent, Mr. Chairman.

Capital Development and Acquisition

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now move to page C-7 and capital development. The Estimate for 2024/25 is $1,003,000. The allocation will be used for the continuation of the refurbishment of the inmate housing units at Westgate and the repairs to the facilities as necessary. Page C-15 shows the 2024/25 estimate for capital acquisition as [$1,114,000]. The department will commence procurement for an Inmate Management System (Phase 1), which was delayed in the 2023/24 fiscal year due to the cyberattack on the Government of Bermuda network. The allocation will also fund the replacement of two ageing vehicles and a much needed continued upgrade of the Black Cat Creek security system in order to make it compatible with other electronic systems.

2024/25 Plans

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will briefly set out some of the priorities of the Department of Corrections for fiscal year 2024/25.

- The department will continue with recruitment to fill various vacant posts which are mainly custodial staff. Recruitment of custodial staff has been a challenge during this fiscal year.
- The department will work with Ministry headquarters and other uniformed services to introduce the uniformed services training programme which is a Throne Speech initiative in an effort to recruit suitable qualified candidates and fill the needed vacancies.
- As a safety and health priority, the department will work with the Ministry of Public Works to effect repairs and replacements on ageing facility structures and equipment.
- As part of a plan to engage the community, the department will partner with community stakeholders to support the successful reintegration of inmates into the community. The Department of Corrections will also work with community partners to develop projects that can benefit both the inmates and the wider community.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN
HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Minister, I can just pause you for a moment, I would like to recognise the former Speaker of the House, Randy Horton, who is now in the Gallery.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Minister, when you are ready to continue, please do so.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

- Finally, the department will continue to work with other government agencies on Criminal Justice related initiatives. Examples include the Child Safeguarding Committee, the Anti-Corruption Committee and the Offender High Risk Management Team.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Commissioner Joell-Benjamin and her staff who have, throughout many challenges beyond their control, provided exemplary service and delivered on their mission to protect the public and provide rehabilitative services.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks on Head 25. I will now move on to Head 45, the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service [BFRS].

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. When you are ready, you have the floor.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Forgive me. Let me start again.

The Minister is taking a very quick break, and we are in the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The debate is on the Ministry of National Security, and we are now moving to the final of six heads which is Head 45, Fire Services. This is an eight-hour debate, and it is scheduled to conclude at 8:15 pm.

Honourable Minister Michael Weeks is presenting the budget and is now going to take us to Head 45, Fire Services.

Minister, when you are ready, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 45, the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service which can be found on pages B-284 through B-286 of the current account estimates book.

HEAD 45—BERMUDA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service is *To provide fire protection to life and property through the delivery of fire prevention, airport fire rescue, and emergency medical services to the community. We will deliver this through the dedicated and professional service of our uniform and civilian staff in collaboration with our community partners.*

The department's objectives are to

- implement a maintenance competence scheme;
- implement a computer-based learning management system;
- continue professional accreditation for incident commanders, middle and senior managers, airport firefighters, fire dispatchers, and emergency medical technicians;
- continue with the assimilation of the UK National Operational Guidance standards for Professional Firefighting Practices;
- provide the community with access to fire safety education and information; and
- procure specialised vehicles to support emergency response to the community.

General Summary

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the total budget estimate for the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service for the 2024/25 financial year is $16,825,000. This reflects an increase of $1,945,000, or 13 per cent over the 2023/24 financial year. Mr. Chairman, to accurately align the full-time equivalent with the organisational structure, several business units were changed which caused reductions and increases in the budget allocations.

Mr. Chairman, I will now address the main business units which can be found on page B-284.

Business Unit 55030, Fire Prevention: $16,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The fire prevention unit is responsible for public education, consultation and enforcement of the Fire Safety Act 2014. This unit has a budget estimate of $16,000 which represents a decrease of $6,000, or 27 per cent as a result of consolidating the training portion of the budget into the services core training package. To date, during this financial year, the fire prevention division has conducted 400 inspections on commercial and licensed properties. The division also delivered fire safety education programmes to schools through outreach visits and in-station visits.

Business Unit 55060, Central Emergency Fire Service: $6,066,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Central Emergency Fire Service covers the provision of Fire and Emergency Services from the Hamilton, Eastern, and Western Fire Stations. These stations respond to fires, road traffic accidents, emergency medical incidents and hazardous material incidents when required. This business unit has a budget allocation of $6,066,000, which is an increase of $73,000, 1 per cent over the financial year 2023/24. This increase is associated with the new collective bargaining agreement between the Fire Service Association and the Bermuda Government.

Business Unit 55080, Other Services Central: $873,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Other Services Central contains the Vehicle Repair services and Engineering personnel. This unit has a budget estimate of $873,000, which represents an increase of $56,000, or 7 per cent from the 2023/24 financial year. This increase is attributed to the cost of specialised parts to maintain the vehicle fleet.

Business Unit 55090, St. George's Emergency Fire Service: $104,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The St. George's Emergency Fire Services covers the provision of fire and emergency medical services for the Clearwater Fire Station located at Southside, St. David's. This station responds to emergency, medical, fire and hazardous material incident, as well as provides support to the airport operations division of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service for aircraft incidents. Funding for this unit provides operational preparedness and ongoing associated costs to support the facility's functioning. This unit has a budget estimate of $104,000, which represents a decrease of $3,000, or 3 per cent. This decrease in funding will be offset by consolidating similar supplies in Central Emergency Fire under Business Unit [55170].

Business Unit 55100, Emergency Medical Services: $0

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Emergency Medical Services is responsible for equipment and supplies associated with the department's Emergency Medical Response throughout the Island. The funding for this business unit has been reduced by $150,000, which is a decrease of 100 per cent from the 2023/24 financial year. The department will continue to use internal supplies and reallocate cost savings within the department and/or Ministry.

Business Unit 55120, West End Emergency Fire Services: $60,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the West End Emergency Fire Service covers the provision of Fire and Emergency Medical Services for the Port Royal Fire Station located at Middle Road, Southampton. This station responds to emergency medical, fire and hazardous material calls and provides support to the Hamilton and Clearwater Stations for emergencies when required.

The Chairman: Minister, if that is a convenient place to pause, we are just going to change the Chair. We now have the Honourable Member for constituency 11 in the Chair.

Thank you.

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Honourable Members. Thank you, Honourable Member from constituency 22.

We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Honourable Minister [Michael] A. Weeks, JP, MP is presenting for the Ministry of National Security.

You have the floor again, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good afternoon, Mr. new Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I was moving on to business unit 55150.

Business Unit 55150, Training: $838,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the responsibility of the Training Section is to create an educational schedule that will ensure emergency medical training and certification. Structural firefighting training, certification and leadership training courses are in line with local and international standards. This unit has a budget estimate of $838,000.

The Chairman: Minister, may you pause there for a minute please?

I would like to take a moment for the House to recognise former speaker—

Some Hon. Members: That was already done.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN
HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Oh, sorry. And as importantly, recognise Senator Rev. Dr. Emilygail Dill, wife of the presiding elder of Bermuda, Dr. Howard Dill.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Thank you. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, training for the 2023/24 financial year included the following:

- Airport firefighters' revalidation (overseas);
- Skills for Justice awards levels 3, 4 and 6;
- Incident Command certification courses for all supervisors (local);
- Aircraft Crew Commander certification (overseas);
- Twenty-three firefighters completed the foundation aircraft rescue firefighter certification (overseas);
- Emergency driving courses (local);
- Emergency medical technician certification course (local);
- National registered emergency medical technicians certification;
- Emergency medical technicians allied health recertification;
- CPR recertification; and
- Breathing apparatus repair technician training;

Business Unit 55170, General Administration: $3,797,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the General Administration is responsible for the funding and support services of the department. The budget estimate for this unit is $3,797,000, which is an increase of $672,000, or 22 per cent, from 2023/24.

This increase can be attributed to the realignment of seven full-time equivalent and 2.25 per cent uplift received for 2023/24 and a 2.25 per cent salary uplift to be included in 2024/25.

Business Unit 55190, Emergency Dispatch: $942,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Emergency Dispatch cost centre is responsible for answering both fire and medical 911 calls from the community and dispatch the appropriate fire and medical resources. The budget estimate for this business unit is $942,000, a decrease of $28,000, or 3 per cent as a result of consolidating the training budget into the services core training package 55150. During the 2023/24 financial year, the emergency dispatch answered approximately 11,096 calls, which comprised of 6,456 calls for emergency medical services and 4,646 calls for fire related calls.

Mr. Chairman, emergency medical dispatchers coordinate resources required for firefighting operations and provide life-saving medical instructions to the community during a 911 call. The emergency dispatch is operated by a team of eight highly skilled emergency medical dispatchers. They are the voice of calm and reassurance when a person is experiencing an extreme event.

Business Unit 55200, Airport Fire Rescue: $4,129,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this business unit provides Aircraft Emergency Rescue and Fire Fighting Services at the L. F. Wade International Airport, as prescribed by the Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements (OTAR) Part 140. The L. F. Wade International Airport operates as a Category 9 airport. The category of an airport determines the maximum size of aircraft that lands at the airport, the manpower requirements for the airport fire rescue, the equipment requirements for the airport fire rescue and the extinguishing media used by the airport fire rescue.

Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for this unit is $4,129,000, an increase of $1,581,000, or 62.0 per cent. This increase is attributable to the funding of 24 additional full-time equivalents and a 2.25 per cent salary uplift for filled posts during the 2023/24 financial year and an additional 2.25 per cent uplift for the 2024/25 financial year.

Subject Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now provide the subjective analysis of current account estimates which is found on page B-285.

Salaries

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for salaries for the financial year 2024/25 is $13,667,000, an increase of $2,231,000, or 20 per cent from the financial year 2023/24. This increase is attributed to the funding of the salaries for the 24 full-time equivalents to comply with the local airport regulatory requirements to provide fire protection for the L. F. Wade International Airport. Cabinet approved the increase of full-time equivalents assigned to the Airport Fire Rescue from existing vacant posts to comply with the airport audit.

Due to time constraints and the urgency to man the section, the department had to onboard Canadian overseas firefighters after the finalisation of the 2023/24 budget. Cost savings will be identified

throughout the Ministry before requesting a supplemental. This has resulted in a shortfall in other key areas of the available PIDs for the structure division which may lead to an increase in overtime in the division. To this end, the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service has engaged management consultant services to conduct a manpower review of the organisation. Further contributing factors included funding required to support salary increases in line with new collective bargaining agreements between the respective unions and the Bermuda Government.

Other Personnel Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, funding allocation for other personnel costs is $239,000 for the 2024/25 financial year. This represents an increase of $104,000, or 77 per cent, from the financial year 2023/24. This increase is attributed to costs associated with the new collective bargaining agreement between the Fire Services Association and the Bermuda Government. The collective bargaining agreement includes new benefits and increases, pre-existing benefits relating to emergency on duty pay, telephone allowances, specialist skills pay, standby pay and shift premiums.

Communications

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for communications is $322,000 which represents an increase of $28,000, or 10 per cent, from the financial year 2023/24. This is a result of incremental increases for desk telephones, mobile and data lines that support the operations of the emergency dispatch.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for repair and maintenance is $657,000. This represents an increase of $28,000, or 4 per cent, from the financial year 2023/24. This is a result of funding required to maintain the ageing vehicle fleet, air conditioning and infrastructure-related building maintenance and cleaning services.

Insurance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for insurance is $354,000 for the 2024/25 financial year. This is an increase of $31,000, or 10 per cent, from the financial year 2023/24 and is a result of increases in insurance premiums.

Budget Reductions

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, to align the budget allocation for the 2024/25 financial year, funding [for] the following line items have been reduced when compared to the 2023/24 financial year.

Training allocation of $844,000 is a decrease of $145,000, or 15 per cent. As previously stated, cost savings will be the result of deferring noncritical courses to the 2025/26 financial year.

The travel allocation for noncritical airfare, such as conferences and subsistence, has decreased by $74,000, or a 100 per cent decrease.

Energy allocation of $386,000 is a decrease of $43,000, or 10 per cent. The department will identify energy reduction measures and if required identify cost savings to fund this cost centre.

Clothing, uniforms and laundry allocation of zero dollars is a decrease of $173,000, or 100 per cent. Expenditure analysis will identify opportunities for funding reallocation from existing cost centres during the 2024/25 financial year.

Materials and Supplies allocation of $278,000 is a decrease of $55,000, or 17 per cent. The introduction of Office 365 will help the organisation realise savings through paperless initiatives through collaborative workspaces.

Revenue—Fire Protection and Airport Operation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the estimates for the service can also be found on page B-285. The revenue estimate for the 2024/25 financial year is estimated at $165,000, a decrease of $155,000, or 48 per cent. The department has three revenue streams and will be addressed individually.

Cost Centre 8457: License General

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, all commercial buildings and large residential properties undergo Fire and Life Safety Risk Assessment and apply for a fire certificate. Fire certificates are valid for one to five years based on the risk level. Relicensing inspections occur over the life span of a building. The projected revenue for licences is $35,000, a decrease of $11,000, or 24 per cent. The decrease is attributed to a reduction in the number of fire certificate renewals/inspections due to multi-year validity periods granted for buildings.

Cost Centre 8461: Application Fees

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this cost centre is related to the administrative costs associated with the application renewal, transfer and issuing of a fire certificate. The projected revenue for licences is $80,000, a decrease of $44,000 or 35 per cent. The decrease is attributed to a reduction in the number of fire certificate renewals/inspections due to multi-year validity periods granted for buildings.

Cost Centre 8877: Reimbursements

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, revenue generated from airport operations providing fire protection

to after-hour aviation flights at the L. F. Wade International Airport. This includes general and critical care air ambulance flights. Revenue for the 2023/24 financial year was budgeted at $150,000, a decrease of $100,000, or 67 per cent. The decrease is attributed to less demand for service due to the majority of these operations taking place during normal operating hours.

Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents)

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the employee numbers or full-time equivalents can be found on page B-285 and reflects an increase of 10, from 156 in the financial year 2023/24 to 166 in the financial year 2024/25. This increase fills all establishment funded and unfunded vacant posts. The reassignment of PIDs from [Business Units] 55060 and 55170 was necessary to more accurately reflect the business activities of the respective units thus allowing for more accurate recording.

Capital Acquisition Funding
Page C-15

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman the Ministry of National Security has budgeted $3,603,000 of capital acquisition funding for the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. This funding will allow the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service to complete the procurement of four new major foam vehicles to provide fire protection at the L. F. Wade International Airport. This procurement project was initiated during the 2023/24 financial year. Delivery of the vehicles is expected to take between 12 to 18 months.

2024/25 Goals

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service is in discussion with the Department of Lands and Buildings regarding the current and future needs of the Clearwater/Airport [Operation] Division's buildings due to the increase of personnel and to house the new major foam vehicles. The Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service will revisit its strategic plans to establish a fit-for-purpose multi-purpose training simulator to be located on a designated parcel of land inside the aerodrome. A local training facility will permit fire fighters to practice core competencies without having to travel abroad annually resulting in cost savings for the Government.

Community Risk Management Plan

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, to address the risks associated with private residences and commercial buildings, the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service will begin work on a community risk management plan. This plan will help to identify critical infrastructure and assess all the current and future risks facing our community. The plan will influence how priorities are set and help us determine which specific projects need to be implemented to address the identified risk. The plan will consider the views and needs of our communities and our partners. The research and data will help to understand who and what is most at risk from fire and other incidents and when and where they may happen. The data gathered will help us better determine our levels of response to different types of incidents.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank Chief Fire Officer, Dana Lovell and his team for their service to the community. They continue to remain in the frontline providing exemplary service in protecting Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my submission for the Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 25 and 45.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister Michael A. Weeks, JP, MP.

For the listening audience and the Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Honourable Minister Weeks has concluded his presentation of heads for the Ministry of National Security and now the . . . sorry, the Shadow Minister for National Security Michael A. *[sic]* Dunkley of Devonshire shall present—

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That should be Michael H. Dunkley.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Honourable Minister of Education asked me what the "A" stands for and I was . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the National Security heads this afternoon. And I thank the Honourable Minister for his presentation. Last year, we allocated five hours of time and the Minister spoke for about four hours and forty minutes. So this year, I tried to determine if he could stand on his feet for eight hours and it was clear that he could not. So now . . . we are sure that we will have adequate time to debate the Ministry.

As usual, the staff within the Ministry (the PS and all the heads of department) have compiled a comprehensive brief going through all the line items, and it certainly is appreciated.

Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to see the increase in funding this year, and to some extent last year as well, after a couple of years of austerity measures. I do note, Mr. Chairman, that some of the increase in funding, and in particular areas it is a majority of the

increase in funding, is a result of the fact that there have been uplifts for wage negotiations that have taken place after a period of time. It is critical that we examine just what the programmes and policies are for their effectiveness.

I want to commence my comments by again echoing what the Minister said and thanking all personnel. Obviously, the Ministry of National Security is one of those gruelling, very critical and important ministries within government. It has issues that certainly are entrenched in our community, some of them more than others as we try to eliminate them or reduce them, such as violence, such as antisocial behaviour, breakdown of the family units, noise in our communities. As the Minister mentioned, vagrancy . . . road safety is a critical problem. Emergency personnel are at the frontline of all the duties they do day in and day out, the responding personnel. Customs are critical to border responsibility. Corrections . . . a lot of their work is behind the scenes, but it is critical to making sure that the sentences imposed by the courts are carried out and also those who are incarcerated have the opportunity to reform and rehabilitate themselves.

The Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, Mr. Chairman, they have the critical responsibility of taking care of emergencies at the airport and throughout the Island. The Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, Mr. Chairman, is broken down into two critical areas: airport safety and structural safety.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, it is questions now. We have already had the general debate.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: You are correct, Mr. Chairman, but as I have done for many years and . . . people do for the debate, they give an overview of what is taking place and what the Minister said. And I am not going to be here long, but I have to set the context for some of the things we are going to talk about. But I appreciate your direction, Mr. Chairman.

As I was saying, and this is the last point on that, Mr. Chairman, the Royal Bermuda Regiment now has the extended responsibility over the past couple of years of the Coast Guard initiative which started back probably six or seven years ago and now the Regiment has grown into that with a . . . as the Honourable Minister said during the debate, has grown into that with a full complement of staff that is required for that operation.

Mr. Chairman, this Ministry is quite rightly so one of the largest ministries within Government because of the importance of it and the various heads in there. It is the fourth largest Ministry which accounts for 13 per cent of the Government expenditure at the present time. And that is a . . . it is a significant amount. But when you look at Police, Customs, Corrections, Fire Service, it is critical that they do have the funding that is required. And it is also . . . it is critical that we look at where the funding has been spent and how the funding has not been spent as well. When I looked at the budget for this year, Mr. Chairman, because I think all Members of this Honourable Chamber are aware that when the Budget Book comes out for the next financial year, you see revised numbers for this financial year and actual numbers for the last financial year. All of those sets of numbers, and there are four sets of numbers, are important to look at. The simple fact, Mr. Chairman, is that if you see an actual number for 2022/23 and it is the first time you have seen that number and it is higher than our estimate for 2024/25, there is something in there that made that happen—

The Chairman: Honourable Member—

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: —and you need to look at the reasons why that happened.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, I remind you we are here for questions, not debate, not for preambles. Questions.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Chairman, I certainly appreciate your guidance, but if you only ask questions, you don't put context to what you are asking. And that is my important context.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, you may not respect the individual, but you are going to respect the Chair.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Honourable Member, I take that comment to heart because . . . who says I do not respect you as an individual?

The Chairman: I said you—

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I respect the Chair and I respect you as an individual.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, Honourable Member—

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: No, I think we need to back down here a little bit and start again . . . fresh.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, I am the Chair. I am the Chair.

I said to you earlier that we are here for questions. You then proceeded with a preamble. You then continued with a preamble. So I am asking you again to respect the Chair's direction to get to the questions. That is all I am simply asking you.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Honourable Chairman, I do respect you and the Chair.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I will get to the questions and I will try to . . . I will try to limit the dialogue around the questions. But if I do not explain the questions . . . and you laugh . . . I am not laughing because this is a serious subject. We talk about the budget that is put to this House. This is the people's money and so I will try to keep it very tight under your guidance.

The Chairman: Yes, please.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And I am sure you will keep me tight.

The Chairman: Yes, you can assure yourself on that. And if the situation was reversed, I know you will do the same.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I hardly think so, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Because it has be put in context . . . and I have been in this House for 27 years and I have seen this Budget Debate for 27 years. And I have seen a lot that goes on and I think I have learned a little bit around it.

So, the first question to the Honourable Minister then, if you want questions here. Last year, Honourable Minister, in your budget, you said that there would be . . . and I counted as I went through every single head with the Minister last year. The Honourable Minister said there would be at least 87 new hires within the Ministry. I have counted them up and there are only 51. Can the Honourable Minister give some explanation of why the Ministry did not meet that goal of hiring 87 new people?

Mr. Chairman, last year I stated that I did not think it would ever happen . . . for a number of reasons. And the reason why I start out with asking that question, Mr. Chairman, is because this year littered through every single one of those Ministry heads, we find the commitment again to recruit. If it could not happen last year, I think the people of Bermuda deserve some understanding on how it will actually take place this year. So that is the first question to the Honourable Minister.

The Honourable Minister also talked in detail, Mr. Chairman, about cybersecurity last year. And he talked in detail about cybersecurity this year. So, I ask the question to the Honourable Minister, In light of the fact that it appears that the cybersecurity initiatives for last year have not been met, how can we be sure that we will meet those commitments this year?

Mr. Chairman, I think we all recognise that in September last year, and the Minister referred to it in his comments, there was a hack in September 2023. Now, if you refer to the [1]Hansard from last year's debate, Mr. Chairman, you will see on at least four occasions where the Minister spoke about the importance of cybersecurity and what was going to be done to maintain adequate security.

Now I know you don't want me to give much of a preamble, so I will not even ask for your permission to read some of the various parts of the Hansard. But I draw people's comments to the Hansard and in there it is very clear about the importance that Government gave to cybersecurity as the Minister spent a lot of time on it. And there were commitments made. But here we are a year later, and we had a major hack. Quite interesting, Mr. Chairman, that that's the case. Since that is the case and you want some questions, I have got a number of questions for you, Mr. Chairman, directed at the Minister (and I am sure the Minister has got his technical staff ready to write down some of these questions).

First question in regard to cybersecurity. How much is being spent in the next financial year in dealing with cybercrime and cybersecurity? Please break it out from the heads where it is put in there.

Next question to the Honourable Minister. How much was budgeted to be spent in the current financial year on cybercrime and cybersecurity?

Further question. How much was actually spent in this current financial year on cybercrime and cybersecurity?

Another question, Mr. Chairman. Other than the attack in September of 2023, how many other attacks on government systems have there been in the past year?

Mr. Chairman, next question. If there were any other attacks, have they been fully rectified?

In regard to the attack in September 2023, what remains outstanding to rectify all government systems as of this point?

Mr. Chairman, another question in regard to cybersecurity and cybercrime. Has Government at any time paid any ransom for any attacks on our system to get it up and running or to get information back?

Next question, Mr. Chairman. Is there any outstanding information that the Government is still trying to get back from the hack in September 2023?

Next question, Mr. Chairman. With all the work being done and all the commitments that have been made by the Government, how can the public feel confident that we are in a relatively safe position when it comes to cybercrime?

Now, remember, in the Honourable Minister's presentations. The Honourable Minister talked extensively about it, and he also talked about DRRM being involved in that. And the new hiring of the disaster risk management position. Can the Bermuda public feel somewhat comfortable that we are in a relatively safe

[1] *Official Hansard Report*, 3 March 2023 Ministry of National Security, beginning on page 672.

position? And I know the Minister alluded to an attack today on the US health system, and I am well aware that attacks happen all the time. But we have to put ourselves in a position of relative comfort. And I am sure that everyone is on edge after last year not knowing if all of the information is recovered or if confidential information was recovered and what position we are in.

A further question in regard to cybercrime, Mr. Chairman. What outside agencies are assisting with it at the present time in helping the Bermuda Government, and what are the terms of their contracts?

And the last question I have at this time, Mr. Chairman, is how many employees are there in the cybercrime space within the Ministry? I do not believe the Minister broke those down when he gave us the employee numbers.

So those are a start of the questions on cybercrime, Mr. Chairman.

Changing course slightly. Last year in the budget brief, there was a commitment for a Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act and the same for legislation. This year the Honourable Minister says that it is in the drafting stages. Can the Honourable Minister please provide a backdrop or timeframe of when we believe that . . . when the Government believes that those pieces (the Act and the legislation) might actually make it to the floor of the House of Assembly? Because obviously they appear to be critical pieces for us. They appear to . . . would appear to allow more strengthening of our firewalls within this big challenge (which is only going to get bigger as time goes on). And so the sooner they come here in a comprehensive way, the sooner that we can fortify the structure that we need to deal with our business here within the Bermuda Government.

Mr. Chairman, another question to the Honourable Minister. Last year, the Honourable Minister talked extensively about a national strategic plan on community and violence in Bermuda after a conference that I believe was held in September 2022 at the Hamilton Princess Hotel. There has not been much talk about it at this time, so I ask the question for the Honourable Minister of National Security, When will that national strategic plan on community and violence in Bermuda be tabled in this House and become a public document?

Mr. Chairman, Head 83 on [page] B-263. The Minister went through a number of those . . . went through all of those line items. And I had a couple of questions in regard to some of those line items, Mr. Chairman.

Administration, he explained the increase. And that was for the salary uplifts. The Parole Board, the Honourable Minister said that those changes were because . . . that it was anticipated to be more frequent meetings in the next financial year. So a question to the Honourable Minister. I have looked at government reports and laws online and, Honourable Minister, the last parole board report I can find is in 2020. So I believe we are outstanding for at least three parole board reports. Perhaps somebody can clarify if those reports have been done and if they have been tabled in this Honourable House.

Mr. Chairman, the Minister also mentioned, on line item 93004, that there will be additional money for meetings . . . and that is the Police Complaints Authority, as you follow in the Budget Book, Mr. Chairman. In regard to that, a question to the Honourable Minister. There has been some concern recently in regard to the Police Complaints Authority, information that has now been made public about them, and the efficiency of the work that the Authority does (and I am not going to get into the details of it). But in light of the fact that the Minister, I am sure, is aware of these concerns that people in the community have had, and in light of the fact that this is the case, can the Minister please assure this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda that the additional allocation for additional meetings is going to mean that those concerns will be taken away and there will be more substance to some of the results from those meetings, Mr. Chairman? Obviously, there were concerns raised over a number of different times by people.

I believe the Police Complaints Authority can be an important independent body for resolving issues within the police. And if we are going to have that body, I think we need to make sure that it is effective. So, while $31,000 in the stretch of things is not a lot of money, and I believe that $31,000 only pays for fees for the members who sit on the board, the question to the Honourable Minister is, Can the Honourable Minister please ensure this House that he is comfortable that this body is effective, or can the Minister . . . well, no. Can the Minister please provide any information that he can if Government is currently reviewing the responsibility and the mandate of the Bermuda . . . the Police Complaints Authority on 93004?

Mr. Chairman, staying on page B-263, 93007, Disaster Risk Reduction Mitigation. You will see in 2022/23, the budget was $26,000 then it went to $12,000 after having no budget for the financial year and then it has jumped up to $190,000. The Honourable Minister I believe stated that this was specifically . . . that most of that funding was for hiring of the individual that was coming on to manage that area. Question to the Honourable Minister, In the past, is my assessment correct that up to date (and until this new person is hired) staff to manage DRRM and to assist with EMO (Emergency Measures Organisation) and all the important functions that they have had up to this date have been seconded from other parts within the Ministry to make the matter work? And now going forward there will be one individual responsible and, question to the Minister, Will people still be seconded as needed to do the function?

It is clear, Mr. Chairman, that DRRM has over the past few years grown in areas of responsibility. And obviously in those areas of responsibility, I think there

is a critical importance in those areas of responsibility as well. Can the Honourable Minister please provide some information to this Honourable House on . . . other than what he provided today, which I thought was helpful on the initiatives for the coming year, are there any plans for Government to make this section even more responsible and give them more commitment to look at other areas? Because right now it is a significant responsibility, and, certainly, if the predictors are correct (as far as the hurricane season goes and future years), they could be facing a very busy time from . . . you know, when our hurricane season, from June to November, and ours typically is very compacted in June to September. We want to make sure that the responsibilities do not come too wide because we still need to be very specific in certain areas.

Mr. Chairman, the next line item down, 93008 on page B-263. Are you with me, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Yes, Gang Violence Reduction.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I knew you would be.

The Chairman: I am from Devonshire.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: He is from Devonshire.

The Minister did outline that there was a cut in that budget of $154,000 and that there was a reallocation of that funding to uniform training programme. And I certainly can understand that . . . that critical need. I appreciate the overview that the Minister gave this year, and of course last year as well, in the Gang Violence Reduction Programme. At times I have been critical of the programme because you cannot always gloss over everything and say that it is good. But that doesn't mean that I don't believe that there is some good work taking place in that programme because it is important that we are out there with the committee.

One of the aspects of the Gang Violence Reduction that I was always very keen on (and the Minister did mention it today) was the G.R.E.A.T. programme in the schools. Part of life is being able to break down barriers. And I find nowadays as we get more in-tune to our own little world with cell phones that we forget personal communication and there seems to be a growing gap between the young and the old because of a lack of communication. So anytime we can get people together that normally would not be together, I think is critically important. So programmes like that and some of the other programmes in that are very important and I still believe at $792,000 there is a good size budget for those programmes to be conducted.

Question to the Honourable Minister in regard to 93008, the Gang Violence Reduction Programmes, Can the Honourable Minister please give a breakdown on how the money is spent on programmes or personnel and outline how the money is spent on those programmes, Mr. Chairman? I appreciate that.

Mr. Chairman, an interesting thing that I did when I started poring over the numbers . . . and sometimes you pour over the numbers so much so that your eyes start to lose a little focus, so you have to take a break. But in looking at the numbers that have just come out for 2022/23 the budget . . . there was an increase of the original budget for National Security in total by $3.5 million. And I will get into that more and ask questions to the Honourable Minister when I get into those areas. That is all those increases such as the Fire Services and the Department of Corrections. A lot of those increases are coming specifically down to my view because of paying overtime and the lack of recruitment of uniformed officers into those various posts.

A question to the Honourable Minister. I know there have been significant discussions, and I commend the Government for having those discussions. With all of those Heads (83, 6, 7, 12, 25 and 45) about staffing and recruitment, has Government thought of any other initiatives to try to attract personnel into the Uniform Services? Because I can reflect back not too many years where if you did a recruitment advertising forum, people would flood to them. But that is not the case anymore. And I think that unless we start to lead the horse to water, we are not going to get any benefit from what we are trying to do.

So, question to the Honourable Minister, Other than the one that you mentioned in your brief today, are there any other programmes to try to attract people into those professional roles . . . which I think are roles that everyone will agree are critical to our community and they are roles that we all respect and also . . . they are needed. They are good jobs. They are good jobs. I think we need to do more to go out and attract people. Perhaps put some courses on in the Bermuda College to get people to understand the role—and the Minister of Education is listening closely and maybe they are thinking about it already—and to get people to understand the roles and what is required so we can incentivise people to get involved there. Give bursaries for people to go on education and those types of courses because right now we are not . . . right now we are struggling, and I don't see that changing much as we go forward.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And the Minister of Education just interjected about signature schools. I look forward to hearing all about that.

But who would have thought, Mr. Chairman, that 10 years ago we would struggle to get people in Uniform Services. But that is the case, and the Government knows that is the case, clearly, because two years ago we had to go get Canadian firefighters to come in for a short term because we were up against a crunch of it.

Mr. Chairman, looking through my notes here . . . and I appreciate the Minister when he made his presentation going through the objectives and the

statements, the mission statements and things like that. I think those are critical and sometimes we must be reminded of them because sometimes with everyday challenges that we have in our communities, we can get pushed off in another direction.

Question, generally to the Minister, because this can apply to this Head 83 on [page] B-264. And I probably in my time in Parliament I have probably had the answer before, but I need to remember it again. There are salaries and then there are wages. Salaries is the large component of remuneration to people. Wages is always the smaller component of remuneration to people. Can the Honourable Minister please provide for me what goes in that line item of wages? What are the items that always go in that line item, the wages, that cannot go into salaries?

The Honourable Minister did say that on page B-264 in regard to Training under the increase in budget of $80,000 or 400 per cent, Mr. Chairman, that that was due to cyber and disaster training. Can the Honourable Minister please give some understanding on what type of courses there will be and how many people will be involved in those courses?

Mr. Chairman, staying on the Subject Analysis of Current Account Estimates on page B-264: Professional Services. There seems to be a bounce all the time in Professional Services. And I understand when you do accounting that there are some things that you put into a certain category because you just cannot list 50 things on a page every time. So, Professional Services quite often can be a catch category.

In this line item here, Professional Services, in 2022/23 it was $904,000, Mr. Chairman. You will see that it finished on budget for the current financial year which ends in a month at $1.413 million, Mr. Chairman, and then it is reduced to $1.305 million, a reduction of $108,000, or 8 per cent. Can the Honourable Minister please outline specifically what those professional services are this year? And I could have missed it but, What was the reduction for the last financial year of $108,000 in Professional Services?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Which head?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: [Head] 83. Page B-264. Sorry, Head 83, page B-264.

Mr. Chairman, I did get the correction last night or the night before on [page] B-264. There was a correction [to the] Budget Book that the Administrative Staffing is only going to increase by two this year and the Disaster Risk Management Staff increasing by one. So there will only be . . . there will be 10 positions in there, not what is listed in the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, looking now at the Performance Measures on page B-265. The first performance measure: Percentage of Information Systems Risk Management Programme Policies approved. It is a high percentage for the current financial year (90 per cent) and then it is estimated to be 100 per cent for the next financial year. Question to the Honourable Minister, Is this an appropriate performance measure? Because it really doesn't say anything other than there was a very small number of systems that were not approved this year. I would like to see more in regard to why systems were not approved and what makes systems important for us to improve.

I have said it before many times in the Budget Debate. I think performance measures can add a lot to a debate but sometimes they just . . . they do not mean anything. Let us save some paper. Take some of those out that don't mean anything, put some in that actually can mean something.

Then it goes down to the Gang Violence Reduction Programme: *Percentage survey questionnaire data showing improvement in knowledge and skills development among at-risk youth participants of prevention programmes*. Last year we finished with . . . 85 per cent of those who were questioned showed improvement of their skills. But if I am reading that right, shouldn't we also know the percentage of high-risk, or at-risk, youth . . . sorry, the number of at-risk youths that we have and how many participated in the survey? That would be the more meaningful outcome because right now . . . it is one thing to say that at-risk youth participated in prevention programmes, but if we don't know how many didn't participate in those programmes, then we could be missing a whole significant number of people that we need to get into those programmes.

It is good to see that 85 per cent of those surveyed showed improvement because that shows that there is progress in the programme. But I would like to see a survey showing that 95 per cent of at-risk youths participated in these questionnaires and that really shows us that we are getting to the bottom of a big challenge we have. We are spending a lot of money on it. And if we don't show improvement in this area, we will continue to have deeper and deeper problems in our community. Let's face it, Mr. Chairman, I am sure the Minister knows from his work in the Ministry about how we are losing people to that type of lifestyle. We are losing people emigrating overseas [due] to that. And it is becoming generational, because the father was a gangster, now the son is a gangster, and that becomes the thing to do.

Mr. Chairman, going back up one in the Performance Measures, it says: *Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team, contingency plans progressed*. This is a question to the Honourable Minister, and I hope I am not talking too fast for the able team within the Ministry to get these questions down, but it says *Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team, contingency plans progressed*. For 2023/24 the goal was 100 per cent, revised to be 60 per cent. [For] 2022/23 the outcome was 60 per cent. The target for the next year is 85 per cent.

Now, to me (and the Minister can correct me if he believes that I am off base here), those numbers show that a lot of work is not getting done. Well, not a

lot of work . . . a lot of planning, contingency planning, is not able to be done. Can the Minister please provide some insight on that matter? If it is not done in the time that the Minister and the department commits to getting it done, is it still being progressed in the next financial year? And if that is the case, will it hold up plans that are being talked about for that financial year?

One of the very important things to me, Mr. Chairman, is that what you have on the agenda today you got to get it done because if you push it to tomorrow, tomorrow is going to be another important, busy day. So as much as you can, you have got to push things forward, make decisions and . . . especially when we talk about disaster risk and cybersecurity, we have to make decisions because the disasters will happen and there will always be people out there trying to break into your system. We have to make decisions to make sure that we are (as much as possible) staying ahead of the curve. I think traditionally we, as Bermudians, . . . when it comes to disaster risk . . . even before we had DRRM, I think we were pretty capable in dealing with the hurricane challenges we had and other disasters we had.

Mr. Chairman, if you will allow me to preamble just a bit, I see you have candies now, so you have sweetened up.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Chairman, the Minister did talk about a tsunami exercise this year. When I was the Minister, I am not sure what year it was, but I think it was probably like 2016, we were talking about hurricane preparedness at that time. And somebody had brought in a copy of a newspaper from either the late 1920s or the early 1930s to show what we were talking about at that time. But also on the front page, was a reported tsunami in Bermuda and how the water level had gone up in Flatts. I mean, that was almost 100 years ago. Right? And I thought, *man, there has never been a tsunami in Bermuda*. But it was right there.

So, yes, we do need to . . . the first thing is we need to discuss these things. And I applaud the initiative on the tsunami because while we appear to be in a much better position than other remote islands, we still need to understand it, one, and be prepared for it as we can. And, Mr. Chairman, a big part of the understanding is knowing what you might face and then people will feel more comfortable.

Mr. Chairman, I am still on Head 83, Ministry Headquarters, National Security. Question to the Honourable Minister. You mentioned it under this head and I think I missed you a little bit on the last head when you were talking about the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. You mentioned under this Head 83 training required for airport emergency programmes. And then under Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service you mentioned looking to develop a training facility down at the aerodrome for up-to-date training programmes that . . . because our facility (my words, not yours) is somewhat outdated. Those two are not interconnected, I assume. So if you could just give more clarity on what specific training you referred to under Head 83, training for airport emergency programmes.

The Honourable Minister did mention tabletop exercises for the seaport and for airport and for immigration challenges. I am pleased to see that those exercises continue because when I was the Minister, I found they were important for everyone involved and we have become a busy place in the summertime. So it is important to protect our reputation and our name because we don't want to be seen on the news by not handling something in the appropriate way.

Mr. Chairman, I am still on page . . . I am still on Head 83. Question to the Honourable Minister, in talking about cyber challenges for 2024/25, the Minister mentioned a Bermuda National Response Team and Centre. Can the Minister please inform this Honourable House when that will be set up and if there is any funding for that National Response Team and Centre in the budget for 2024/25?

When it comes to cybersecurity, the Minister also mentioned an assessment to be completed in 2024. Can the Honourable Minister give a commitment when that assessment will be completed and if that will be available for Members of Parliament to review?

The Minister mentioned a Uniform Services training programme and there were 10 candidates. Can the Honourable Minister (and I expect there will be plenty of time at the end of this debate) provide some more information on what this Uniform Services training programme involves? My understanding from the comments you said in the brief, Honourable Minister, speaking through you, Mr. Chairman, it is . . . tried to put ourselves in a better position to have more people apply for Uniform Services. So, I would like to know more on how this programme is going to work within National Security or is it going to be a broad-based programme that might touch on education as well.

I did briefly talk about the national crime plan, Mr. Chairman. That has been talked about for some time now. I ask the Honourable Minister when it will be available to be tabled in this Honourable House and to give an update on how far along it will be, unless it is going to be tabled sometime during this Budget Debate.

The Honourable Minister talked about . . . the CCTV programme ongoing. And certainly, I am supportive of that programme and my colleagues are. We are disappointed that we did not make progress in the last financial year. But now there has been a lot of movement on the ground because we have seen cameras going up and people have talked about it. Some questions in regard to that. Mr. Chairman. I think back in the Budget Book, back on page C-15 under Ministry Headquarters, Capital Acquisitions (76902), CCTV Systems. There is no money allocated for this year. The money was allocated in last year's budget and $1.057

million was . . . or has been spent. Can the Honourable Minister please update and clarify to the House on what else is involved in the budget to have that system become fully operational? I assume that $1.057 million, Mr. Chairman, is the purchase cost of the equipment. If I am wrong, the Minister can correct me. But it is a capital acquisition . . . the Opposition would like to know what the instalment costs for that would be. He did say a rough date [for] when it would come online.

The second question to the Honourable Minister . . . I have no idea where the cameras are going to be located. I have not asked the Minister where the cameras are going to be located. As a citizen, I really don't have too much concern of where the cameras are going to be located because I believe in having CCTV to help you. Everyone has got them. People have got them around their private homes and business and everything nowadays. But we do need to address one aspect of it and, Mr. Chairman, it is . . . you know, people either want you to help them out right away—they want the police right away, they want the Minister there right away—or they say *somebody is watching me.*

So, question to the Honourable Minister, Can the Honourable Minister please ensure this House that when cameras are taken off the beaten track . . . because right now we have . . . we had about 100 cameras that were all over the Island, but they were on the main roads. And I understand they are being put on some roads that are not considered main roads now and there have been concerns in the community. All Members' constituencies, I think, have heard about it. Can the Honourable Minister say how we are working towards alleviating that? Because I don't want this tool to be held up in getting complaints about a thing. That question, I would appreciate getting an answer on it.

And also, Mr. Chairman, can the Minister provide some understanding of what the protocols will be around the use of those cameras? Because obviously some of those cameras will be able to toggle and search and move in position. I think that has people concerned. Some of those cameras might be moveable cameras to be put up in other areas.

Mr. Chairman, I know that the Minister is listening to me, and he has got a smile on his face so that means he has got a lot to say.

Sticking with CCTV which is on [page] C-15 in the Budget Book, Mr. Chairman. Question to the Honourable Minister, Is any of the old system still in place and working at this time?

Mr. Chairman, just looking through my notes here before I move on to the next head.

The Chairman: Member, may you hold for a minute, please?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Sure.

The Chairman: Give you time to gather your notes.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience and Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Honourable Minister Michael A. Weeks has given his presentation on the Ministry for National Security and Shadow Minister Michael H. Dunkley is giving robust questions and preambles.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: As long as they are robust.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Chairman, it seems like every time you and I have a conversation it is robust. But don't worry about it. That is what Devonshire people do.

I noticed you have got my favourite candies in that dish, and you are not throwing one my way, but my mother . . .

Several Hon. Members: Whoa! Ooh!

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Somerset.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I almost stumped him, too.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that ends my preamble and questions for Ministry Headquarters, Head 83. And let me thank the staff and I think this is probably the PSs first year, so thank Colonel Lamb for his work. I wonder if it is all that he thought it was cracked up to be at this point in time, or if he wants to go somewhere else. But certainly, I know Ministers appreciate permanent secretaries that they can build good relationships with, and I hope Minister Weeks has built a good relationship with Colonel Lamb.

Turning on to the next head, Head 6, Defence. First off, Mr. Chairman, page B-266. If I can just make a correction. These department objectives are in here all the time and they get massaged from time to time. And that is cool. I think it is good that they are in there. But if you look at the bottom of page B-266, International Assistance. The second to last line, or the last line, the last line is a double print. So, if next year we can just correct that to take it out because when I was reading this one night, I thought that I was seeing double . . . and I was! But it was real.

My first question to the Honourable Minister, on the next page [B-267] under recruiting it says the Royal Bermuda Regiment is to recruit and retain a standing deployable force of up to 420. But the way I see the numbers now, Mr. Chairman, is that the Minister said

that 360 was what they were shooting for, and 301 was what we currently have.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I am pretty good with words, but we got to get a better aim then because . . . let us put the question this way. Are we still capable of a standing deployable force of 420 within the Royal Bermuda Regiment?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Are you talking about the Regiment or the Police?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: No, I have moved on to Defence, Head 6. The next head. Yes. Where the correction is . . . I am on [page] B-267.

So, are we still capable, is it still possible to have 420? Or is that 420, by the agreement of the commanding officer with the support of Government and Government House, now 360? And I say that because, Mr. Chairman, it is obvious that this area (Head 6) is having recruitment issues as well.

If you go to [page] B-270 in the Budget Book, Minister, the original outcome for 2022/23 was 50. It ended up at 26. The original forecast for 2023/24 was 50 and it has ended up at 33. Now the targeted outcome for 2024/25 is 30 and I think the Minister might have mentioned 25 in the brief. Last year (I believe) we had two recruitment courses . . . or this current financial year we had two recruitment courses. And it appears that we are not getting the numbers to come in the door.

Piggybacking on that is the deployable force. A question to the Honourable Minister, Is there any concern within Head 6, Defence, that what is happening right now as far as the numbers that are recruited is going to continue to decrease? And will that put them in a more difficult position?

I know the Honourable Minister did say when he gave his brief . . . and I am just looking for my notes. I think the Minister can correct me if I am wrong, but he mentioned at least one time that part-time wages had increased for staff at the Regiment. I would hope that this is not because of the fact that there are not enough trained officers on the ground.

The Minister did mention on [page] B-268, that Finance [line item] 16000) that the 10 per cent increase was to wage increases. If you look at [line item] 16005, Mr. Chairman, I want the Minister to provide some feedback because in 2022/23 the final number for recruitment was $69,000 as an expense. In 2023/24 it is supposed to be $113,000 as an expense and the estimate for the next financial year is going to go up to $115,000, a 2 per cent increase. Recruitment is pretty close to doubling in two years. Can the Minister please provide some information, some feedback, on how that additional money is being used and what is its purpose? Is it to try to bolster the numbers or is there other recruitment avenues that they are chasing?

Staying on page B-268, line item 16040, Internal Security. If you look at the Budget Book, there has been a 70 per cent increase in Internal Security over the past two years. The budget in 2022/23 was $147,000. It moved up to $211,000 last year and it is going to increase by another 7 per cent to $225,000 in the [2024/25] financial year. Can the Honourable Minister please provide some information on that increase . . . significant increase two years ago and a smaller increase this year and what that is attributed to? Is that to salaries and wages from another line item being put in there? Or is there additional work that has to be done?

[Going] down two lines, Mr. Chairman, to 16075, Overseas Camp. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the Minister's explanation about the overseas camp, and I fully accept that it will be much more expensive to get a charter for the overseas camp. I don't know if the people in Bermuda know, but all the soldiers and recruits and everybody are taken out there on a charter flight. And I know from my time as Minister that sometimes it was difficult to negotiate these flights. First off, you have to deal with reliable companies. You don't want to be shafted at the last minute. The price of charters can vary all over the place and most of the time it is up. Can the Honourable Minister explain the increase in the charter . . . the original budget to Guyana last year was $820,000 and it increased to $860,000 in the revised forecast. North Carolina, we have been there a number of times and that camp I think is very productive and effective for us. I know the Regiment likes to go there. So we will see that charter come down by $125,000. But that $40,000 extra [in the revised estimate], can the Honourable Minister explain what took place at that time?

Also, Mr. Chairman, in regard to Training and Validation. The Honourable Minister mentioned the 4 per cent increase in Training and Validation but I would like to get some understanding on the significant increase from 2022/23 to 2023/24 from $449,000 to $531,000 because that is the first time we have seen that final number. What is the $82,000 increase in Training and Validation for that year related to?

Mr. Chairman, [line item] 16085, Marine Operations. That is the Coast Guard, as the Minister explained, and now they are down to 12 full-time staff and two officers and part-time staff supplementing them. The Bermuda Police Service is still working with the Coast Guard as the Minister said this year and last year in helping them get off their . . . get supply to mandate and make sure the patrols are right.

Question to the Honourable Minister, Is there any timeframe when the Bermuda Police Service will not have to assist the Royal Bermuda Regiment anymore with those patrols? And at current, with the Bermuda Police Service still assisting, is the budget for those police officers out there coming from the police budget or the Royal Bermuda Regiment budget? The work by the Coast Guard certainly is very important, Mr.

Chairman, and so we applaud those who want to get involved. Certainly being on the water is not nice 365 days a year, so we know it is not easy.

Turning to page C-15, the Capital Acquisitions, Mr. Chairman. The Minister referred to $29,000 for a boat or vessel. Can the Honourable Minister please explain what that $29,000 is going to cover? Because if you buy a pretty supercharged motor nowadays it costs you more than $29,000 so I would like to know what that is in regard to.

The Minister mentioned shelter systems, $200,000. And $164,000 was budgeted in the current financial year and none was spent. Can the Honourable Minister please provide some understanding of why the $164,000 was not spent in the current financial year?

Turning to page C-7, Mr. Chairman. And page C-7, for the listening audience, is Capital Development. The current financial year (which has a month left) . . . there was an allocation of $50,000 for a Coast Guard maintenance shed and $150,000 for the Officers' mess and $150,000 for the Coast Guard unit in St. David's. None of that was spent, Mr. Chairman. Can the Honourable Minister please provide some details why none of that was spent? And could the Honourable Minister please explain the $750,000 for Coast Guard maintenance shed? How is that allocated for the [2024/25] budget?

Another question in relation to that is . . . that $750,000 is under line item 75362, Defence, Coast Guard Maintenance Shed. Can the Honourable Minister please provide the location of that shed? Is it up in Dockyard? Or was it down in St. David's?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: It's a secret.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Minister says it's a secret.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But as soon as you build it, it will not be a secret so you may as well let the cat out of the bag!

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But I appreciate your levity to break up the debate a little bit.

The reason why I ask is because there was $150,000 allocated for a Coast Guard unit in St. David's that for this financial year was not used. And there is no money for the next financial year. So, can the Honourable Minister please give an update on what are the plans for the Coast Guard unit in St. David's? There is only a spending allocation of $300,000 in total for that unit. That is not a lot of money . . . $300,000. So, I am wondering what is going to take place with that base. The spending is based under the letter "N" which is a new project, not previously reported. I assume it was reported last year for the first time, but $300,000 nowadays with construction costs . . . hard to build anything. Can the Minister please give an update on the Coast Guard unit in St. David's and if that project has been pushed aside for more important issues (which we could accept)? What are the plans going forward? Because $300,000 is not going to give a unit . . . I mean, you could not even buy a boat for that, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, on [page] B-269 . . . I am just scanning [page] B-268. I think I covered everything. Page B-269, Travel. We see the Travel budget for 2022/23 the actual, $386,000. And then the original for this current financial year was $524,000 and then it bumped to $655,000 and now it is down to $408,000. Can the Minister provide some information detail on the bump of that? I assume some of it has to be related to the overseas camp. However, the overseas camp only went up by $40,000 but that travel budget went up by over $130,000. Can the Honourable Minister please provide some feedback on what the case is there? I assume that travel covers not only the travel component for the overseas camp, but it would cover travel components for officers going for training overseas or all that type of stuff. So if the Minister can give some more information on that.

I will finish on that page, page B-269, to once again just try to get some assurance from the Minister on what we are going to do about the recruitment numbers, because I don't like the signs that I am seeing with those numbers on page B-270 of the Budget Book.

Turning to page B-270, Mr. Chairman, the operational strength of the Regiment as a percentage against the Regiment's establishment of 365. There are a lot of numbers that go around in regard to the breadth of the Regiment. The deployable force of 420; 365 the Regiment establishment. But this number here for the actual outcome for 2022/23 and 2023/24 original, revised, and then the targeted outcome for this current year [2024/25] is 78 per cent, 75, 77, 75 per cent. So, can the Minister please provide some information . . . is the Royal Bermuda Regiment comfortable with a 75 per cent percentage of the Regiment establishment? Is it comfortable that they will be able to fulfil their mandate across all the areas that they have?

I did not get the chance to ask this question last year because there were only 17 minutes to talk. That is why we have eight hours this year so we will not run out of time. I thought, Mr. Chairman, that after the Minister spoke that I would just say I wanted to see if the Minister could speak for eight hours. He can't, so no questions. But when I saw you in the Chair, I had a lot of questions come to mind. So I might as well get them off my chest.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But this question was not answered last year, and I would like some help in understanding it.

As a former Minister I know some things. But I want to know if this business unit, item number 2, *Number of Soldiers listed as Long-Term Absentees* is even warranted to be a performance measure, because number of soldiers listed as long-term absentees . . . well, the actual outcome from 2022/23 was 77. The original forecast for this financial year was 60, but now it is going to be 88. And then the target outcome for next year is 25.

Now, 25 seems like an improvement so I will give them that. But can the Honourable Minister please explain what is being done to get this number down? Because performance measures (to me) mean something. Like, Mr. Chairman, you and I . . . if we are going to be evaluated as Members of Parliament, we would take those performance measures seriously and want to improve on them every year. You know? I know we talk about it. But we want to improve on them because that is how the people feel about us. But I am not understanding this. I am not really understanding or believing these numbers are worthy. So, I need an explanation on what we are doing.

Are we even addressing this? Because if we are not, we need to clear it up so we can move on to important issues. We have 88 people who are absent this year—absent from what? One training session? Missed two weeks of training sessions? That number does not tell us anything, Mr. Chairman.

What does tell us something is that if you look at the next line item, *Percentage of Soldiers who passed their military standard tests,* and see that the original forecast for 2022/23 for the annual personal weapons test was 95 per cent. Mr. Chairman, it was 95 per cent; it dropped to 65 [per cent] in the final outcome. I am pleased to see that the original forecast for this year was 65 per cent and they upped it to 85 [per cent]. That means they made progress. But what I would like to see for next year is a targeted outcome with like 90 per cent. Don't keep it at 65 [per cent]. You have soldiers who cannot pass an annual weapons test? I mean, they have plenty of time to go train. Now a lot of people say, *What is Dunkley talking about, teach people how to shoot?* But if you are in the Regiment, you need to learn what critical drill is there.

Physical fitness. Personal fitness tests . . . 50 per cent. That is a failure! Because they are not letting people 65 like me in there anymore . . . 66 in June, Lord give me breath. Fifty per cent. And the outcome for this year is 60 [per cent] so that is an improvement. But then the target for next year is 55 [per cent]. Minister, can you ask the commanding officer can we at least get that up to 80 per cent?

When they come for their training sessions on Tuesday night/Thursday night they should go out for a run to start. Go for a run and do 50 push ups. Then get to your stuff. I say that because I believe that when you have training and when you learn things outside the scope of what you normally do, it enhances and improves your life. But to me, as we talked about on Monday in the health debate, the most critical thing in life is your health. But yet we see . . . we got people in the Regiment, personal fitness, 50 per cent. Physical fitness, 50 per cent. Operational fitness test, 50 per cent. That is not acceptable. And then the numbers do not increase. So can the Honourable Minister please ask the commanding officer what his intentions are to improve that and how we intend to get there.

Mr. Chairman, that brings me to Head 7 the Police. The department objectives are listed on page B-271 and I support them 100 per cent. But what I am very concerned about is enhancing road safety. And in spite of the work by the Bermuda Road Safety Council, we are failing in this regard.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, may you pause there for a minute?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, sure.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening public, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Honourable Michael H. Dunkley is giving robust questions and—

An Hon. Member: And preambles.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: —and preambles, and this debate commenced at 10:47 am and is due to conclude at 8:23, approximately three more hours of preambles.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Nice.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I hear the Whip saying *Don't encourage him!* And I see Colonel Lamb in the back there and I know Colonel Lamb can give some preamble too.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: No, no. I am going to try and tighten it down because while this is an important Ministry, and I could speak for three more hours, I think it is important that others have an opportunity to speak and I also think that it is important that the Minister . . . he cannot address all the questions. But he can address some of the questions and maybe get a commitment to follow up with some answers going forward from there. Because I think . . . we provide a lot of support to the Government. And some of the things we say

are critical. But if they are taken on board, they can work.

One of the big trumpets last year was recruitment. And it is not happening. And here we are in police, the same thing is happening. The Minister said that the operational numbers are the lowest they have been in 30 years. Now, I am not so sure of the veracity of that statement, but I accept it because we have seen them gently slide. And the Minister said the overtime budget is being cut to fund more officers and I applaud that. Obviously, overtime will be more expensive. Overtime will lead to burnout. Overtime will lead to morale issues.

The question to the Honourable Minister is, How can we be assured that we are actually going to get the numbers that we want? Another thing about the Budget Book that I always have some disagreement with is that . . . take a look at Police on [page] B-274, Mr. Chairman. The original total number of civilians and officers for the budget in 2022/23 was 492. Okay? The revised budget is 435. Right? But when the estimate for 2024/25 comes out, they will always relate the estimate for the next financial year with the original for the last financial year. So you will see in the next line going on, it is a decrease of 19 officers. But it is not a decrease of 19 officers. It is a decrease from the original budgeted number, but we never got there. We are finishing at 435. So, you know, if we keep going that way, it is going to be the steady slip—the steady creep—backwards. Right?

And here is the challenge. I support the general increase in the police budget. And the police have managed their budgets quite well over the recent years. You take a look at them, and you will see the budgets for the police come in pretty much spot on all the time. I do not know how they do it. But I guess they are police officers, so they know how to get things done. One of the biggest issues now within the police is staffing, because if you look at the challenges they face, whether it be gangs, guns and violence . . . And the Minister gave an overview of what is taking place there. I ask a question to the Honourable Minister: How many police officers actually work in that department? And do they work in that department full time? Because from what I understand, a few years ago a commissioner said, *Okay. We're going to put all the officers in the Commissioner's Office.* And it took a lot of line items out of the book, but it gave the Commissioner the flexibility to move personnel where he needed to depending on the challenges of the day, Mr. Chairman—Somerset or St. George's, depending on the challenges of the day.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: So, with those challenges of the day, if we do not have sufficient staff and the kettle is hot . . . there is a lot going on. You cannot utilise your staff in those departments. You have to pay overtime to make it happen. And as soon as you start to get on top of that—as soon as you cool down that kettle, so to speak—then you will pull back on the overtime. But sometimes you cannot pull back on that overtime because you could be in the summer period when you have a lot of events on. You have to make certain securities, and I get it. It is tough. The big part of managing a business is you have your staff 365 days a year, but business changes from one month to the next. So in the summertime, you have a lot more people in Bermuda. You have a lot more going on. You have cruise ships. You have, you know . . . You have everything happening. You have events. You have carnivals. You have the Cup Match, and it is going to be big this year because it is up in God's country in Somerset. St. George's people probably will not go up there because it is a long ride home.

Some Hon. Members: Without the Cup.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Without the Cup and crying in their Gatorade or whatever it is, Mr. Chairman.

But seriously, if we do not have people dedicated to those departments, you cannot get the work done.

Now, the Minister talked about . . . and I am trying to look as I talk. He talked about Operation Vega. And I support Operation Vega. In fact, you know, two days ago, they had a truck full of bikes in my driveway and an officer outside with his gun. And one of the people who used the driveway called me up and said, *Hey. You should tell him not to be there.*

I said, *What? Are you crazy? I am not happy with the way people drive on these roads. All of them can come in there every day of the week if they want to.* Right? Because, you know, we complain about road safety, but we do not want it to happen to us. You complain about how people drive or how people speed, but if *we* break the law, *No. I am a good driver.* But if we are serious about that . . .

The Operation Vega statistics show me very clearly that as a pinpoint operation it does well. But also, with my experience in life generally, it is clear to me that it is only a pinpoint operation. So to the Honourable Minister, How much time does the Roads Policing Unit actually spend on the roads? And what other responsibilities do they have? Because I understand that one of their responsibilities—and it might be a newfound, unfortunate responsibly—is to investigate road fatalities. Now, somebody has to do it. And there are a lot of them there who are outstanding. And I do not like to say this, but the fact of the matter is it appears that when we make progress on an investigation then something else happens and there is another one to look at. And the community mourns for a while but then we forget and then we go driving stupid again and all that type of stuff.

And so, I ask a question to the Honourable Minister: How much time do these officers spend on the road and how much time do they spend investigating fatalities? And what other [things] do they [spend time

on]? Because if they are not on the road the majority of time, we are losing the battle. And people call our road habits a *culture*. It is not a culture. It is only a culture in people's minds because they have been able to get away with it. Right? It is a bad habit that is now becoming engrained in their lifestyle.

Mr. Chairman, two days ago, I was driving up Collector's Hill and a guy came at me from 50 yards away, popping a wheelie downhill, with potholes.

[Inaudible interjection]

An. Hon. Member: That's a different debate.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: That's a different debate. No, but the thing is I thought, *If this guy hits a pothole, he will be in my lap.* How many people get injured by the poor driving habits of themselves and others? So if we are going to be serious about road traffic enforcement, we must do it. I do not even have time for people who say, *All you want to do is catch speeders and stuff.* No, no. I want our roads to be calm because while we talk about it, our visitors talk about it. They do not want to get on a bike anymore because bikes are dangerous.

So Minister, I ask those questions and in addition, Has the Government considered increasing the road traffic unit to allow them to have more resources to get more people on the road to do their job? Because while Operation Vega works, you stop and then two weeks later people are right back to it because they know you are not out there. That is the way it is. And I understand police have to juggle their resources.

Another thing is the Minister mentioned community policing—the Community Policing Unit. You look at page B-274 . . . and if I am jumping around too quickly, Mr. Chairman, just ask me to slow up. But I have not eaten my candy yet, so it is not sugar. Community policing. You know, this is serious business, so I have to move.

Community policing has seven people allocated for the 2023/24 budget and nobody finished a year in community policing, so they were moved to other areas. I get that. That is the responsibility of the Commissioner to do what the Commissioner deems right. The Government House and Minister can have a say in that. But all of a sudden for this current fiscal year we are going to find 17 police officers going into community policing.

I can tell you right now, Mr. Chairman, it would be manna from heaven if it happened. I do not think it is going to happen because where are we going to find 17 officers? We cannot be taking them from other duties because we are tight in some of those budgets already. It is going to be hard to raise people because the Bermuda Police Service only hired 15 people last year. I think they tried to do two recruitment courses. It used to be you would get 100 people applying and you would have to whittle it down to 15.

So how are we going to have community policing be up to 17 [officers] next year from zero? So when you take it away . . . man, in Devonshire we had a good community policer officer. You know, we had a good community policer officer for a while. It was always on . . . Minister Rabain knows as well because he was on the chat that we have going. And he would deal with stuff, and he would come around and check people out. That is what we need. You take that away and what do we have? You have more vagrancy in town. That is where people drive . . . I had my aunt here recently. One thing she said to me was, *I cannot drive down Front Street anymore. It makes me cry.* I said, *Why?* She said, *Because of the boarded-up shops and the vagrancy.*

But then you get community issues in your constituency. We all have those trouble spots in our areas where there is excess noise or people partying all the time. I know the Minister has it in his constituency because I have one of his good constituents up there who calls me from time to time. They are all over. But if you do not have police who are dedicated to that you have to pull somebody from somewhere else to do it. So can the Government give assurance to this Honourable House that this 17 is going to be real? Seven went to zero so I cannot see how zero is going to 17. It just is not going to happen.

Now, looking at these numbers again, Mr. Chairman, on page B-274 we started out with 492. We finished with 435. So that is minus 57. Yes, and I have talked a lot about attrition. When you have a sizeable number of employees like that, attrition can be as high as 10 per cent a year. Right? So, the Minister mentioned 32 leaving in the next fiscal year. And we are going to try to recruit 25 so we are dropping another seven. Where are we dropping the seven from? You cannot drop them from community policing because there is no one there. If you are going to take them from court liaison, you cannot take them from there. You cannot take them from the workshop because they have to fix the vehicles. So where are you going to take them from?

But when we look at the 2024/25 estimate, we have 473 staff, so we are only going to be 19 now from next year, but because the current number is 435, we say we are going to have 473. Mercy sakes. Where are we going to come up with 48 officers in one year? I mean, we have to be real. I do not think it is going to happen. So can the Honourable Minister tell me how that will happen? Because we are going in the wrong way. And if we continue to use overtime, as I said, it will burn out morale and it is expensive. So forget where we were going to be at the end of this year, 492, and where we are [going], 473. We are at 435. You said we were going to get to 473. Right? Thirty-eight officers? Where are we going to get 38 from and train them and get them on the street?

The other thing I want to say about this, Mr. Chairman, and this is a question going to the Minister:

How are we going to improve on the human resources function? And I am asking it in Police, but it is germane to the whole area because, you know, I think Bermuda is struggling because people have emigrated, so we have less people looking for jobs. I am not going to get into that, but in the private sector their human resources are much more nimble. They know that if they do not grab somebody quickly and make sure they fit for them, they are going to lose them.

One of the challenges we had in Corrections when I was the Minister was psychologists. And I will get to that. But you know, we hired a psychologist one time but by the time we got him approved and everything through immigration . . . blah blah, blah. *Oh, sorry. I got another job.* We had to start all over again. So we have to make sure that we can do something about this because a lack of officers impacts programmes and impacts overtime, and we cannot continue to allow that to happen.

I dealt with gangs, guns and violence earlier. I asked how many people are in that unit. And it is important. And I would like the Minister to assure us that the police work closely with the team within the Ministry of National Security Headquarters to deal with those challenges.

I have questions in regard to retirement. And I will ask it in regard to Police. But, Mr. Chairman, I think it can fall into all the services because their retirement age is 55. I would have to estimate, Mr. Chairman, that . . . I know the Police are bringing people past retirement age—people over 55—back. They keep their seniority, and they conduct operations as they are directed to. But I would have to guesstimate based on what I knew a few years ago about the Police, probably a quarter of the service could be 55-plus.

Could the Minister please inform us what that number is? I ask for that number because when we get there we are really treading water to try to get to a better position. You cannot tread water for too long unless you are, you know, Michael Phelps. So in regard to that, Minister, has there been any discussion about changing the retirement age throughout Uniform Services, and certainly Police as well, to 60? Because while that option does have some challenges faced with it, I think it is worthy of discussion because we have to get to a better position other than what we are in at the present time.

I cannot imagine that there have not been one or two police officers, or people in other services, who have left early because they are tired and burned out and all that type of stuff. So this retirement at 55, bringing officers back and the majority . . . the amount that are in the service is an issue. Looking at changing that policy is certainly an issue.

Also, if we operate like that, Mr. Chairman, one of the most important things in these services, and certainly in the police, is promotions to make sure you have qualified and effective people in promotions. Continuing on like this is going to impact our ability to have strong leadership going forward, and I want to be assured that we are going to deal with that. The Minister did mention professional standards and what is being done with that. I can appreciate and understand that when you are looking at that it can be a very challenging task at times because some of the changes can be starkly different from what officers are used to dealing with. So I will ask the Minister a question to hear from the Commissioner, How has that impacted morale in the service? And do they believe they are making adequate progress in these professional standards (which are important but they have to be implemented in the right way)?

I have another question to the Honourable Minister. Going to page C-7 in the Budget Book, Mr. Chairman. The Minister did refer to the Police Headquarters in Prospect. And one of the interesting things about all these numbers that we look at in the back, there is a code established to them on the side. So the Police Headquarters in Prospect has the code of "D," which, Mr. Chairman, as you know, is an order of cost based on preliminary costs. Now, these can change from time to time based on the scope of the project as it becomes more clearly defined.

So, the first question to the Honourable Minister is, Has that project been more clearly defined? Is it intended for that budget of $70 million to be in the ballpark for what is taking place? And the Minister talked about $1.124 million being allocated for this current financial year to move some officers back up there. I know it is quite a large building, so I imagine there is a significant amount of work to be done up there. And I assume, because of the work being done . . . you talked about moving people out of renting spaces. Will they be able to continue their duties in the appropriate fashion if construction continues around them? I have always been a big supporter of having that compound maintained and used properly. Capital development is always the hardest thing, especially when you get into difficult positions with government budgets. But I would like to know more about what the plans are further past this year and how they will be done. Can the Minister explain what the work entails in there?

Mr. Chairman, I am on page C-15 now. I have questions for the Honourable Minister. I am pleased to see there is continued funding for police vehicles—$370,000 this year. Obviously, you know, there has to be continued funding for it because of the amount of wear and tear they take and the amount of time they are on the roads. The Honourable Minister did say that the network servers were pushed off from the current fiscal year to the next fiscal year. But he did go on to talk about the poor condition they were in and the critical need there is for them. Can the Minister assure that we will get the work done this year and we will not have any issues because the work was pushed off for one financial year?

Then in the next line item down, the Minister mentioned on [line item] 76505, Police Computer

System Update. There was, Mr. Chairman, $719,000 in the budget for the current financial year. It was not used at all, and there is no budget for the next financial year. So can the Honourable Minister please give an update to this Honourable House on what is taking place in that regard?

Mr. Chairman, a few more questions before I move on. I am just looking at my notes. Backtracking to road safety, I have a question in regard to road safety. Has there been any representation by the Bermuda Police Service to the Government to discuss legislation changes in regard to searches to stop and check ones to see if they have been drinking? The Minister mentioned some statistics from the last year, and those numbers are startling. And those numbers really are not going to change because when you advertise where you are going to be and when you will be there, a lot of people pay attention to it. I hear people talking all the time. *They are going to be out tonight. So we need to be careful and need to do this.* But you know, no one tells you when they are going to get drunk and jump in a vehicle, so why should we tell them when we are going to stop and search?

I remember very clearly that we started these discussions when we were in the Government and there was an element of the discussions that said, *Well, you know, there is a constitutional responsibility to do these types of things.* And while I can understand that, I do not accept that this has to be the way. Look, the Minister talked about stop and search and how it is an important key. And remember when it was put in under the PLP—I think it was about 2009 or 2010—under Minister Perinchief. There was a big kickback about it. And quite rightly, the PLP kept it and the One Bermuda Alliance kept it. Because when things heat up, you have to be able to do those types of things. And if the police abuse their authority, then we have things that should stop that. But here we have an issue with drunk driving. I am sorry to see somebody walk into . . . I am not going to name any place, but they walk into a place, buy a six-pack of beer and get in their truck at ten o'clock in the morning. It has to stop. So why should we tell people that we are going to be out checking you tonight? If somebody is moving all over the road, they should be stopped and they should be breathalysed.

We need to be serious about this challenge we face because right now people take it as just a slap on the wrist. *We are being warned. They are going to do something for this weekend,* or, you know, whatever like that. It does not work. So I ask the question, Are the police comfortable with the current approach to doing checks for sobriety? And has the Government given any consideration to some changes about it? Because I would certainly support it and I think my colleagues in the Opposition would support it.

And while we do that, I have a question to the Honourable Minister, Have the police made any representation to Government as we put this new CCTV system in about changing some of the fixed penalty legislation? It is $50 if you run a red light. That is crazy. People are running red lights all the time. People do not care about a fine. It's $100 with no driver's licence. There are people driving around . . . I do not want people to say, *You know, Dunkley, when things are tough, you do not want to fine people*. But it has to mean something. If you break the law, the penalty has to mean something. Or you know what? We do not have a job up here. We let people do what they want to do and we forget about it.

But it is part of the broken window theory that I talked about. We have to uphold the law. And sometimes you can push too far. Sometimes you do not push hard enough, and you get the challenges we face with drunk driving and people running stop lights. So now that we have these new cameras in, warn people how they are going to work, what they are going to be looking for. And you know what? If I go through a red light, I will pay that ticket. I have no problem paying that ticket because I broke the law. And you know, breaking the law does not make you a bad person. We all have letdowns, man. You know, I will not tell you any stories but . . . how many people do not pay parking tickets? They put them in their car when they get a parking ticket. They put them in their glove compartment and forget about it, and then when they go to clean their car, they find the parking ticket. I am just making this theory up, Mr. Chairman, you know.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: *They say*, MP Richardson.

So, you know, we need to get serious about this. I want to know the conversations . . . not "know" the conversations, but I want to be informed if we are having conversations about how we improve some of the things Bermudians are talking about. They are talking about these types of things, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, performance measures for the Police. I am sure that the Commissioner is listening to this debate. Or I do not know if the Commissioner is in the back of the room, but the Minister and the PS can tell him. Please do something about page B-275. It is a waste of paper. It does not say anything. We do not have a revised forecast. We do not have any target outcome. So take it off there.

Put some performance measures back in there. Let's hold them to account, because they come up with achievements and objectives. But let's . . . even if they are easy . . . even if they are easy-to-tick box. *Percent change in the public's perception of safety about Bermuda's roads.* I like that. But why? It is 55 per cent. Why are we dropping it? Because it is 35 [per cent] now? And it is not all the Police's fault. We are all in this together. Right? So let's do something. Can the Minister show me that we are going to do something about it—not wasting paper—and have some proper performance measures?

Honourable Minister, has there been any discussion with the police about confiscated assets funds? We have a confiscated assets fund and quite often money will go into it, probably not often enough. But I think that those departments that are helping interdict this stuff . . . we should ring-fence a certain amount of that money to be put into their budgets to allow them to have that ability to use those monies to improve their services. So have there been any discussions about that? Or is a confiscated assets fund going to be continued to be used for programmes and things we have done in the past? The Police, Customs—they work hard. They should be able to share in some of their success rather than take a picture on the front page of the paper and say what they have done.

I think the last thing I will ask on this, Mr. Chairman, is, Can the Honourable Minister please provide an answer to how many police officers are currently on suspension and how many of those are on full pay? And how long will it take to resolve those issues? And can the Honourable Minster please provide any information if anybody is on any long-term sick leave? I would say long-term sick leave for a major injury or something like that, not if you are recovering from the flu for a couple of weeks or whatever.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I go to Customs. I think in some of these departments, we are going to have to see supplementaries come in shortly, Mr. Chairman, because if you look in the Budget Book for Customs, you will see that for 2022/23, the original budget was $16,575,000. It has risen now to $17,473,000. I got that $16,575,000 from last year's Budget Book. So, you know, it is an $899,000 increase. I am sure there will be a supplementary that comes for that. And it looks like those supplementaries—those increased costs—are to cover shortage of staffing as has been recognised by the Honourable Minster during the debate. And I think this department has the issue as well of over-55 staffing.

And you know, if you need it to hit you on your forehead any more than it is now, look at HM Customs where we can see on page B-277 the original forecast for total officers was 184. We finish at 166. No, I think you said 168. The Budget Book was correct. So, we finish at 168. And we are going to finish this next financial year at 180. Now, that cannot be right.

Another thing that is not right . . . and I just recognised this. That is why I paused, Mr. Chairman. If you look at the head for employee numbers, it should not be "2021/22." It should be "2022/23." It should not be "2022/23." It should be "2023/24." It should not be "2023/24." It should be "2024/25." So, we are one year wrong, but I know what they are doing here. Those numbers apply to those years that I just listed. But in the Budget Book, the titles are wrong. Are you with me, Mr. Chairman? Page B-277.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes. But you are with me where I [said there need to be] changes. Yes. So we need to correct that for next year.

So, we are short by 16 from where we are allocated to be. But next year we are going to get 180, which is 12 more than we currently have. But in this financial year they have only managed to recruit 4 Customs officers. So can the Honourable Minister assure or provide some detail as to how we are going to go from 4 to get the required 12 officers that we need?

I appreciate the Minister's explanation of the interdiction numbers and Hamilton commercial ops, and the airport arrivals-travellers. That makes sense. But I need to know that we are actually going to get somewhere in this because if we do not, we are going to be in a more difficult time.

Now, I appreciate retired officers coming back and working, and they are paid being part-time use. But that is going to become more and more and more. And that is going to hurt our budget and it is going to lead to burn out of officers. And as we get busier (and I hope this year is busier than we expect), these are frontline people—frontline people who greet our cruise ships, greet people at the airport, have to interdict things. And clearly, the community has to have confidence in what they do. So we need to make sure that they can get it done in the right way.

I am staying on page B-277, Mr. Chairman, because I would just like a breakdown from the Honourable Minister on professional services. The Honourable Minister did say the professional services line was for retired officers being used, and maybe the answer is solely in that, because if you look at the original budget for professional services in 2022/23, it was $86,000. It finished at $231,000. Then this current financial year is $332[,000] and then it is $368[,000]. To the Honourable Minister, Is that the only item covered in professional services, the overtime for retired officers?

I am staying there, going down to line item Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry. The Minister did explain about some of the challenges with that area. But I find it hard to believe that in two years the allocation for clothing, uniforms and laundry has doubled from $65,000 to $120,000. So can the Minister please provide some understanding other than what he did? Do we think we are going to continue to see increases like that in future years? And I have to applaud the way our Uniform Services look. They always look smart—all of them. They always look smart. And that is important, because I cannot say that about some other places that I have been.

Turning the page, Mr. Chairman. First, I am going to look at page C-15, Capital Acquisitions. Customs only had $20,000 last year. It was not used. So can the Minister please provide some understanding to that?

Mr. Chairman, I recall the Honourable Minster said in the last year's budget that the X-ray scanner at the docks was going to be improving—new equipment for it. So can the Honourable Minster please give an

update on that piece of equipment? And can the Honourable Minister please also update what is going to be done with the structure that houses it? Because it does not look like it belongs on the dock and it does look like with the first blow we get in the hurricane season it will come down. So, that piece of equipment is critical for the operation down there. I think it helps Customs do their job. It has probably paid for itself. So we need to reinvest in that so not only does it work well but it does not look like an eyesore on the docks, Mr. Chairman. It is referred to in the performance measure and I am pleased to see that the number of containers that are scanned on the Hamilton Docks through the gantry is staying at high levels, and they are going to push for 90 per cent for this next financial year. That piece of equipment worked well, so let's make sure it keeps working for us.

Mr. Chairman, I am turning now to Head 25, Department of Corrections. I certainly applaud the department for the work they do, but they are up against some real challenges. You know, I believe we are going to have supplementaries in this department as well. Because if you take a look at the 2022/23 numbers on page B-280, it is $23,360,000 final for then. But the original budget was $19,411,000. So that is an increase of $3,949,000 we are seeing this year. And a lot of that is within headquarters and within the farm facility. And that is a significant increase, and I am sure it is down to overtime. So can the Minister confirm if overtime was a challenge at that time and will we be seeing supplementaries come during this Budget Debate to deal with that?

Mr. Chairman, I have another question for the Honourable Minister then. If that final number for Corrections in 2022/23 was $23,360,000, and we now budget $22,424,000 for Corrections—about $900,000 less than two years ago—taking in mind . . . I assume there has been some uplift to salaries, how can Government feel comfortable that we will actually be within budget for this financial year? That is a simple question, and it is going to lead me to my next questions, Mr. Chairman.

If you turn the page to B-282, you will see that the original number of staff for 2023/24 is 223 and we finish at 185. The Minister says with the change in the Budget Book we will be at 230 for this year. So the Minister says there will be a change in seven staff for the financial year. But when you look at it, if we only have 185, that means you actually have to get 45 staff to get back where you are. And when you put attrition in there, even 45 is going to pull you back. So what does that mean? You know?

I have a question for the Honourable Minister. Can the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House what the overtime budget for the current financial year is, 2024/25? What was paid in overtime for the financial year 2022/23 and what was paid in overtime for the financial year 2023/24?

Mr. Chairman, there is no way we are going to make those numbers. We are fishing from the same pool, and we are going to continue to go backwards. And what scares me about all this, Mr. Chairman is that . . . simplify what happens at Corrections just for the sake of this development here. Corrections do two things. They house people who were sentenced, and they try to rehabilitate and reform people. So if you are falling short in resources, something has to give. And I have to believe that where we are struggling is with programmes. And to me, just to take somebody and lock them up . . . yes, it is important based on our laws and what needs to be done. But locking up a man or woman without giving them an opportunity to do better for themselves creates a harder, more bitter person. We need to do better than that.

If you look at the Therapeutic Community Centre . . . what? We did not have a programme last year because we did not have any people working in it? Right? You know, programmes get no credit in the facility, but programmes are the most important things. Right? And that is why I asked questions about parole when it came under Ministry Headquarters because if the parole board cannot get reports to review inmates for release, they push them back three, six, nine months, whatever.

I was a Minister. I sat on the parole board meetings. I understand how it works. Nothing is more crushing for a person than when they do what you ask them to do and then you push them back. So, while we say we are going to get levels up to 230, first off, you are setting a bar that you cannot jump over. You are going to walk under. So can the Minister assure me we are going to get there and how we are going to get there? Can the Minister . . . because there was very little talk about programmes in there. Can the Minister give some assurance that these programmes are effective and working? Critical programmes that people need.

Also, I appreciate the update from the Minister on the work that is taking place at Corrections. And it is an ageing facility. But one thing that was not mentioned was . . . and I know Public Works is busy. Can the Minister provide information to the House that when Public Works cannot do the job, then Corrections can go out and get a bid to get work done rather than wait? I know there are places in the facility where there are leaks in the roof and you can see the stars. If you do not have a secure facility to keep stuff out and to make sure that you do not get rot within your facility, you are going to struggle with that. So, there is a dysfunctionality to this process in how we are going about it. And unfortunately, the corrections officers are on the frontline, and I do not see any help coming to them at the present time because the numbers are just not going to juggle there.

So I have been pretty straight to the Honourable Minster on that. There is a lack of officers. They have had two recruitment classes and only have nine officers. So nine officers, they worked hard to get them

last year and were supposed to get 45 in the next year. And it is not going to happen. Can the Honourable Minister . . . based on seniority and the over 55-year-olds, we have had a number of recent retirements. At least two very senior positions recently retired. Two others are going to retire. Can the Honourable Minister please give some understanding of succession planning and how we are going to get experienced, capable people to fill those positions? Because as the Minister knows, and as you know, Mr. Chairman, leadership in any organisation is very important.

Mr. Chairman, the Minister did mention last year about a strategic plan. And I believe the Minster did say that management services are reviewing the organisation at the present time. So I have a question for the Honourable Minster, What happened to the original strategic plan? Why the change to have management services review it? And when will the management services report be available? And will it be shared in the House?

I understand the management services report is much more confined on what is best for the department going forward. I would have thought that we would have a more strategic plan—not only what is best but some of the challenges that we face and how we are going to deal with them. So I appreciate the Honourable Minister answering those questions in relation to this strategic plan.

It is good to see that based on changes that we made as legislators and changes that have been made in the courts that the numbers are coming down within Corrections. And you are getting people up there who (my words) deserve to be up there. Some probably do not think they do. But they deserve to be up there. So, looking at the performance measures, this first one, the *Average total cost of incarceration per inmate per annum based on maximum capacity,* is 372. It does not do anything for me. It just tells me that the costs keep going up every year, not substantially, but that type of number does not do anything. Now, the numbers of daily inmates and admissions and discharges . . . those things are good. They are very good. Corrections has been good with recidivism. That is one positive about the numbers as we go forward.

Mr. Chairman, being cognisant of time and staying with Corrections and shortening up on the preamble (which I appreciate your levity), the final question to the Honourable Member on Corrections is, Can the Honourable Minster please provide how many corrections officers are currently on leave for disciplinary issues?

Okay. Head 45 (before I finish with my preamble, Mr. Chairman), Bermuda Fire Rescue Service. Mr. Chairman, some of what I said before applies to the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. And as we know, Fire Rescue has two important parts—the airport and the structural division. And to some degree in the past couple of years, the Government has concentrated on the airport because of necessity with OTAR [Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements] and all of that stuff. And this year, if you take a look at page B-217 *[sic]*, Capital Acquisitions . . . page B-215 *[sic]*, Mr. Chairman, Capital Acquisitions, you will see that Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service has $3.6 million—

The Chairman: Excuse me, Honourable Member. You said 217 or—

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: [Page] B-215 . . . sorry, page C-15.

The Chairman: Just wondering.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: My glasses are fogged up.

The Chairman: You might want to say that clearly because somebody might have misinterpreted that.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: So the Minister did talk about the $3.6 million that is allocated to appliances, and those will be for appliances at the airport. There was $1.381 million allocated this year that was not spent. So obviously we need to make sure that the airport is staffed in the appropriate way. But also, I think we need to remember that the structural part of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service also has some needs that need to be taken care of as well. So, there is no allocation for appliances for the structural side of it. And I know some of those appliances must get up in age. So can the Honourable Minister please give some indication on Government's thinking going forward as far as the structural side of it and their need to update some of their equipment, Mr. Chairman?

We should not forget, Mr. Chairman, that we are blessed because our building codes are pretty tough, and rightly so. That helps remediate against fires and things like that. But when we do have major incidents (and we can all remember), it is a 5-alarm fire. You need to get [appliances] there. Like the most recent two would be the one down at the boat slip and the one down at the dump. Now, can the Minister assure me that the firefighting capabilities for both of those incidents were up to par? Because in my knowledge, whether limited or not, it would appear to me that there must have been some appliance problems or pumping problems for those two incidents to go on for the length of time that they needed to go on. So can the Minister give some assurance that both of those incidents were handled in an appropriate and in a timely way to deal with those challenges?

Mr. Chairman, if you take a look at the Budget Book again, you will see where the budget process has not been operating very well for us because the budget for the current financial year is $16.8 million, but the final numbers for the Bermuda Fire and Rescue service in 2022/23 was $16.7 million. So, with the salary uplifts and all of that, we are only budgeting $110,000 extra. But if you go back and look at 2022/23, the original

budget was $3.2 million, so there was an increase through the year of $2.5 million, and that increase is largely put down to overtime because obviously, you know, in the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, you have to man your stations. You cannot send out a truck with two people. You have to man your stations in the appropriate way.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Well, I was a volunteer fireman, Mr. Chairman. In the days when . . . See? He leads me into the preamble.

An Hon. Member: You walked right into it.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: We walk right into it. But in the days when you had the beepers, I was working the early morning shift in the company. I was the first guy to crawl through that back fence to get on the second truck. And I appreciate what they do. I do not know enough though. But take a look at the numbers again, you know, $156,000 for 2023/24 and that is $24[,000] at the airport, so the Government filled the airport. I am not going to get into whether it was done timely. But they filled it. We had to do it. And we are in a much better position.

But through that period the structural service has suffered because, you know, the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service hired (and this question the Honourable Minister answered for me earlier this week) 23 people. They all went to the airport. So the structural services side of things continue to struggle with those people. And now with everyone fishing from the same pool, how are we going to get those numbers up to where we expect them to be? We are not only asking for 10 as the Budget Book says. There are 140 who are currently employed there, so we are asking for 26. You add up all those numbers and you are well over 100 this year.

So last year, it was 87. Remember where I started. It was 87. Now we are over 100. The pool is getting smaller, but the water level is rising. We are in a more difficult position. And you know, with frontline people, burnout happens quite quickly. And it is important that we pay some attention to the structural division. Let me rephrase that. Give them some love. Right? Because they are frontline people that Bermudians will see when they come around for something. And you know, if we do not deal with personnel, if we do not deal with vehicles, the public could feel the consequences of not dealing with that.

Now, I am pleased to see that the Minister reinstated the ambulance service when there were changes that were not talked about much in the budget last year, and there were some changes to it. And it came back on April 1, I think after being withdrawn for some time. The fire service has a frontline role in that. And I would have thought that at least you would have seen vehicles in relation to the structural part of it but also with ambulances. Because we are critically short of ambulances on this Island. You know, somebody is borrowing from St. John's and somebody is borrowing this and somebody . . . you know. It certainly does not bode well for what we have to do because . . . we do a good job at getting to emergencies in a timely basis. Let's make sure that this can continue.

Now, having said that about the structural division, the Honourable Minister did say that last year there was going to be a comprehensive review of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. Now, I would like to know what happened to that comprehensive review. Or did it fall to an internal review by management services instead (because no one likes to be reviewed)? But when we are going through some of the challenges that we currently have, I think it is important that we do have the review because that can help us believe those challenges and that can help us provide a way of going forward.

Now, the Minister talked about hiring overseas. So, this applies to all the heads in this debate. Can the Minister give us some understanding of how the hiring overseas is going to take place—in any Ministry—whether we are going to be hiring experienced officers in those ministries or we are taking advertisements for people who want to work and we are going to train them? Because time is not on our side, Mr. Chairman. Time waits for no one, and time never loses, so it is not on our side. And the 55 age limit applies to this department again. So I think we need to deal with that.

I would like to give my thanks to Chief Fire Officer Lovell. I served in the volunteers with him, and now it is good to see him leading the organisation. He is a good, honest man. And I think he will do well as long as he understands the challenges that they face and does not let it get to him too much.

I have a couple of questions on costs before I go into my preamble, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, on page B-285, Training. In 2022/23, it was $262,000. It went up to $989,000 in the current year and $844,000 this year. Can the Honourable Minister please give some understanding as to the large increase in training last year and continuing this year? I have my assumptions, but I would rather not assume. I would rather know more clearly.

Mr. Chairman, I might have missed it in the presentation. But Repair and Maintenance on the same page was $389,000 in 2022/23. It jumped to $629,000 and it goes up another 4 per cent to $657,000 this year. Can the Honourable Minister please give an overview of why there was a large increase last year and the continued large number for this year?

Mr. Chairman, in Customs we had in clothing and uniform as a pretty large expenditure for this year. But in the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, we have Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry at $41,000 in 2022/23, $173,000 for the current financial year, and nothing for this financial year. I cannot believe that nothing is going to be spent. And I think if something is going to be

spent, it should be shown now rather than vired from another department. But I know Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service purchased some stuff on the Island here, and they have to [send] some stuff over here, but I cannot believe nothing will be sent. And if that is the case, why would it jump from $41,000 to $173,000 last year? Why that big increase? And why is it down again to a very low level?

Mr. Chairman, with that, I will thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak. And thanks to the Minister for his brief. And I appreciate his help in answering those questions. And again, I want to say to all those in these services to keep your head up in spite of us politicians going back and forth. We want the best for you, and we will try to do our best for you as we can hopefully work together.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

To the listening audience and my fellow Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Honourable Member Michael H. Dunkley has finished his questions and preambles.

Would anyone else like to speak to this?

The floor recognises Honourable Ben Smith from constituency 8, Smith's South.

And with that, I take leave of [the Chair] and hand over to Honourable Scott Pearman, my batting partner for today, from constituency 22.

Thank you.

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good evening, Members.

As you have just heard from the Honourable Member for constituency 11 who was just in the Chair for the last two hours, this is the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2024/25. And we are listening to the debate on the Ministry of National Security, which debate was listed for eight hours. And the Honourable Shadow Minister, Minister . . . MP for constituency 10, Michael Dunkley, has just taken his seat after lots of preamble and post-amble.

We now are to hear from the Honourable Member from constituency 8. So MP Smith, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to start on page B-265 for Head 83. My focus is on [business unit] 93008, Gang Violence Reduction Programme.

Honourable MP Dunkley was mentioning some of the target outcomes that were written on this page and how we do not have a lot of information to really hone in on what the progress is and how we are helping our young people who are at risk. So, I have a few questions in this area. My first question is about the number of youths who are actually in this category of at-risk. How do we measure young people who are at risk and what is the number presently that we have that are in this at-risk category? And if the Minister could provide to us whether that number has increased or decreased over the last year.

In this statement for this Gang [Violence] Reduction Programme, it mentions the percentage survey questionnaire data. So my question is, Is there any other way to gauge the progress of these at-risk youths who are going through these programmes and developing skills? Because a survey has been taken, and we do not know presently how many people are participating in this survey. Is this the only way that we can gauge progress on whether the systems that have been put in place by this group who work with our at-risk youth are actually working in the way that we intend it to? So if the Minister can let us know whether there is any other way being utilised for us to gauge the progress of this particular Gang Violence Reduction Programme.

Mr. Chairman, I have a couple of questions under Head 7, page B-274 and it is [line item] 17040, Community Policing Unit. So, in the Minister's brief, he mentioned that there was going to be some focus on community policing, but as MP Dunkley mentioned, there were only seven people who are responsible for community policing presently. Could the Minister please explain to us what areas the community policing group are responsible for presently? And the reason I ask that specifically is because of the situation that is happening in Hamilton. As Hamilton is the hub of our international business community, it is also the frontline of what happens when our tourists come here, specifically if you are going to have cruise boats that are going to line up on our Front Street. Presently, what happens for a lot of those people, the first thing they are going to be greeted with is some of the vagrants that are kind of populating specifically on Front Street, but we have seen an increase in our community over an extended period of time.

We understand that there are significant issues with homelessness that are being addressed. But when it comes to this being the hub of our community when it comes to international business and tourism, is there a specific goal in place to increase the community policing in order to give the support to the city to move people along so that we do not have loitering, public urination, open drinking, aggressive begging? These are all issues that the community is presently dealing with.

Mr. Chairman, earlier today MP Cannonier and I actually took a walk in that area to specifically see what it is that I am referring to today. And the greeting that you are getting on Front Street, this main area for Bermuda, is a strong smell of urine across our Front Street. That is where we are presently. We have to have a way to tackle it, and if it is going to mean that we need to increase the police presence there to help

them move along . . . or can the Minister tell us whether there is another plan in place in order to move the group of people who are congregating, sleeping in doorways during the day, interfering with customers who are trying to go to restaurants and going about their day on Front Street? I think it would be important for us to tackle it considering that it has an impact on both pillars of our economy and also on our citizens who are having to go through the parking lot and be harassed by people. I think it is an important factor in looking at the numbers that presently are responsible for it. Can the Minister give us an idea if there will be an increase of the policing in that area and what the focus point will be for that?

Mr. Chairman, this comment will be for all of the heads within this department. There will be a line that is under Energy. And there is a cost that goes with Energy for each of those. Can the Minister let us know whether there has been any programmes put in place? Or have they looked into a way to reduce the energy consumption for all of these departments? Is there a renewable energy plan? Will they be trying to implement something so that in the future we will reduce the cost of energy throughout all of the heads in National Security?

Mr. Chairman, on page B-280, under [Head 25] Department of Corrections, MP Dunkley brought up that there are several programmes that are supposed to be happening within this particular head. One of the things that is always important to highlight is that what we are trying to do is reform behaviour by incarcerating people and if we are not putting in the programmes that are actually going to lead to the reform, when we return these ladies and gentlemen to our society the problem will continue to persist. And in many cases now, we have some people that are going to be incarcerated for long periods of time, which means that if we do not do everything we can to reform them during that period, in 15 to 20 years from now we will be returning some people who have been in since they were 20 years old. And the impact on the future generation will be significant.

So, I think it is important that we get some answers to how many people are actually participating in the education programmes, what are the education programmes, what is the outcome that we are expecting? Are we providing them with the tools that are going to allow them to be able to be employed when they come out? Are we seeing the inmates who are participating in these programmes be able to progress in a way that will lead to employment when they are finally able to come out?

More specifically, the psychological services that you will find under [item] 35105, can the Minister let us know . . . he spoke about some programmes that were in place for sexual offenders. I would like to know whether we have a number of the sexual offenders actually participating in the programme, and whether we can get an insight into whether that progress is happening before those sexual offenders are being released back to our community. I think it is important that if services are provided are those inmates taking up those services in order to get the reform to protect our population when they finally return to our country. So, if the Minister give us some information into what is happening in that area, I think it would be really important.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Are there any other Honourable Members who wish to contribute to the debate?

Yes, I see the Honourable Member from constituency 12, MP Craig Cannonier. You have the floor.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

On page B-272, I will go right to my questions. There have been quite a few so I know it is going to take the Minister a bit of time. At the bottom of page B-272, business unit 0710, Bermuda Reserve Police. I do not think that the employee numbers are included. If I am wrong, then please correct me. However, the question I have, because someone has been talking about this here, with the shortage of police officers, especially on the beat, or street, if you will, I don't know the capacity for the number of Bermuda Police Reserves. Is there a limit? Twenty or thirty, whatever the case may be? But I think it would be great for the public to know whether or not . . . it might be something that they may want to look into. How is the recruitment of reserve officers going? This could be an area . . . obviously, it cost less. I think they are given a bursary at the end of the year. I don't know how much it is. Maybe we can find out that answer also.

Has there been any consideration, in addition to asking the question about how the recruitment is going, has there been any consideration of improving the numbers so that they could help with assisting, obviously in their capacity with policing the city and other areas as well, social events, like football games, cricket games and the likes? It would be considerably less costly if we did that.

Also, when we were with this particular number here, you can see it is less $50,000. But the numbers are pretty consistent, I would say. But when I look at the revised amount it says $282[,000]. So I don't know what is happening there. It looks as if we may be cutting back with the reserves when I would have thought that because it is less costly it might be an area where we might want to spend a little more time in, just a few more dollars to see if we can get some more police reserves out there assisting with the good work that they do in assisting the police officers.

Also on page B-282, I am going back to the Department of Corrections, Head 25, but I would extend this to probably all of the Heads, 6, 7, 12 and 25. I do recall that the Minister was saying he was going to be looking to employ and also to extend it to overseas applicants as well. So, under each one of those Heads, 6,

7, 12 and 25, I am just curious as to whether or not we actually . . . how far did we get with entertaining overseas applicants? How many did we entertain within each one of those heads, and did we actually take on any overseas applicants to help assist with the challenges that we are having? And is it the intent going forward for this budget year to continue in that capacity knowing that as we just heard from the Minister and from the Shadow Minister that we are woefully short in all of those areas?

So, we do need to do something about that headcount. And it would be nice to know whether or not the [ads for] overseas applicants have actually taking place and whether or not we have put the ads out.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Is there any other Honourable Member who wishes to speak in the debate?

There appears to be none, in which case, Minister, I will call upon you to respond to the questions put by the Honourable Members from constituencies 10, 8 and 12.

Minister Weeks, you have the floor. Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I tried to stay abreast of all the questions and comments so I will try to be as thorough as I possibly can in my answers.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to start off with the recruitment issue. That is a hot topic, period, with a lot of us. Last year it was noted that the Government had tried with all the uniformed services having added up to 87 new recruits and I think the Shadow Minister pointed out that we only got 51, 52 in total. This year we are looking at trying to get 101, I believe. And the struggle is real.

What we have to realise is that we are doing our recruitment training course, or camp, a cadet programme I should say, that we are trying to implement to try to address our recruitment challenges. And our recruitment challenges are not necessarily because the pool is shrinking, because the pool has remained the same. Each uniform service may get 100, 150, maybe 200 applicants for 20 to 25 jobs. It is the qualified candidates that we are having trouble with. This is not a new issue. This has been going on for quite some time. This Government is now looking at putting together a cadet training programme to help to address those issues. As a last resort, we are looking to go overseas for anybody to fill the uniformed services posts.

So right now, it is a challenge. And some of our uniformed services, especially police, cannot wait until they get people trained up. So they may have to go overseas quicker than other uniform services in order to keep their numbers up and be able to address the issues and the safety of our country. The last recruit class for the Department of Corrections was looking for, I believe, 30 people, 30 men and women. They ended up having 9. One of those 9 was the spouse of a work permit holder. So, we are looking to fill those spots.

It is something that no one wants to admit, but I think we have to face the fact that we have to fill these posts. And if we cannot in the immediate term fill them with Bermudian men and women, more and more we have to come to the realisation that we may have to go overseas until we get our recruits up to scratch in our new cadet programme. What we cannot do is change the requirements or bring down the requirements just to have Bermudians in these posts. So, [the answer to] that question is that we are definitely looking to increase Bermudian recruits by going through a rigorous cadet training programme that will be implemented this new fiscal year.

Another question was, What is the budget allocated for cybersecurity for 2024/25? There are three posts, $353,426.17, and $155,000 for third-party assessments and consulting services, $40,000 training and conference, $8,000 for penetration testing software, $2,000 for subscriptions. This is a total of $558,426.20.

We had a question, Mr. Chairman, how many cyberattacks have occurred on government systems. The answer: Cyberattacks on government systems occur at a nearly constant pace. The overwhelming majority of these attacks are successfully blocked. It is unrealistic to expect that we will be able to block every attempt or to block 100 per cent of the attacks. Cyberattacks continue to increase in frequency and sophistication. We improve our defences and the attackers improve their methods of attack. We must continue to improve our defences and also improve our ability to detect and respond to attacks. Additional resources and capabilities within the Cybersecurity Unit will greatly improve our ability to identify threats and vulnerabilities and to quickly respond to attacks to minimise their impact.

Another question by the Shadow Minister of National Security was how many staff are enrolled in the investigation of cybercrime. All police officers are involved in the investigation of cybercrime. At this point [there are] 360. As the impact of a cybercrime grows in complexity—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I'm getting to that, Shadow Minister.

As the impact of cybercrime grows in complexity and cost more specialised officers lead the investigation. There are in the region of 10 officers who are specialists in the investigation of cybercrime.

There was a question about the parole board.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITORS

The Chairman: Minister, before you move on to your next [answer], let me just recognise in the Gallery . . . I understand we now have Bermuda's 19th Cub *[sic]* Scout Troop here, or at least half of them (maybe the other half are still in the hallway). But we would just like to welcome them to Bermuda's Parliament. You are here tonight for the Budget Debate and, specifically right now, the Budget Debate is involving the Ministry of National Security. And the Minister from the Ministry of National Security is Michael Weeks. And he is answering a number of questions that have been put to him by various MPs here in the Chamber. So, we welcome you.

And, Minister, you have the floor.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to the troop here to witness this debate.

Mr. Chairman, moving on, there was a question by the Shadow Minister about how many . . . or the last parole board annual report, I think he said was in 2020. There actually have been parole board reports in 2021 and 2022. And as we know, 2023 has just ended. So they are pretty well up to date on the parole board reports. They have not been tabled as yet, but they are up to date.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Ok, moving right along, I did not stop any preambles that were going on when I was sitting down. But, yes, moving on.

There was a question on gang violence reduction. The question was when will the Violence Reduction National Strategic Plan be presented in the House, and what is the current progress update?

The Violence Reduction National Strategic Plan is in its final stages at the Ministry of National Security Headquarters, with minor adjustments being made for completeness and effectiveness in collaboration with stakeholders. Once completed we will promptly develop a detailed implementation plan spec-ifying actions and timelines, and responsibilities. Our commitment is to launch and execute the plan for the benefit of our community in the first quarter of the next fiscal year.

There was another question, Mr. Chairman: How can the public feel confident that we are safe from cybercrime? Cybercrime legislation currently being drafted has been updated to meet the requirements set out in the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. Following this convention helps to ensure that we are aligned with international recommendations and will provide the police and prosecutors with the legal instruments necessary to investigate and prosecute cybercrime.

There was another question about the Police Complaints Authority. The answer to the question about the Police Complaints Authority is that we anticipate that more funding will enable them to keep pace with the important work that the Police Complaints Authority does and, by extension, hope to allay the public's concern, if they have any.

There was a question about the budget allocation for the Gang Violence Reduction Team for 2024/25. [A sum of] $512,965 is for the coordinator, manager and outreach workers and case managers; $200,000 is for redemption and workplace cohorts and other programmes, $44,300 is for general stationery and training supplies; $35,000 is for our safe houses. That [adds up to a] total of $792,265.57.

There was a question about how effective the Police Complaints Authority is. We are confident that the work they do is conducted with due diligence and expertise by highly qualified individuals.

Another question about cybersecurity was how can we be sure that cybersecurity initiatives will be met this year. There has been significant progress in drafting the cybersecurity and cybercrime legislation during the past year. Job descriptions have been developed for the new positions needed within the cybersecurity unit. Once the job descriptions have been approved and graded by the Public Service Commission we can begin the recruitment process to fill these positions within the 2024/25 budget year.

There was a question about the initiative to attract persons to our departments. The number of applicants (and I said this already, but) is not new. It is difficult to attract suitable qualified persons. And some of the uniformed services, actually pretty well all of them have increased their advertising on radio, interviews, social media. And we are even looking to take a review of the whole recruitment process. I think there is a five-step process from the time a person applies and they become successful. That process is being looked at and reviewed as we speak. So, we are looking at . . . we are leaving no stone unturned in trying to set up a situation where we can hire more and more, or as many Bermudian men and women as possible before we go to residents of spouses of Bermudians and overseas. So we are diligent in trying to do our best to try to increase, not the pool, because the pool is large, but to increase qualified applicants.

There was a question about the responsibilities of the Disaster Risk Reduction and [Mitigation] Team. We are mindful of the evolving needs of the Disaster Risk [Reduction] and Mitigation planning. To that end we conduct regular training with external agencies to stay current.

There was a question about what goes into the wages line item. Primarily weekly employees and for the Ministry this line item is for the uniformed services programme cohort.

And a further answer as to what goes into the line item on wages, is that as far as the Defence Department, the Regiment, is concerned, it is to pay for 250 part-time and reserve soldiers who are not considered government employees.

There was another question as to the makeup of the DRRM [Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation] team. Historically, the team was made up of seconded staff from various uniformed departments. For the last year, due to shortages of staff in the uniformed services, we have engaged retired officers as consultants to perform the DRRM responsibilities. However, Cabinet has approved the permanent composition of the DRRM team and we will be recruiting for a disaster coordinator post in the very near future. Therefore, we are aiming to fill the remaining position of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation team.

We were asked a question about the professional services budget for 2024/25. This covers cybersecurity, government consultants, part-time teachers for uniformed services cohort, Redemption Farm, and workplace cohorts.

There was a further question, another question on recruitment. I know it is a hot topic, so whoever gets up on their feet always refer to recruitment. But I said earlier that we are doing a full review of the recruitment processes. And we hope to be able to advise in the very near future how we are going to improve our recruitment processes.

What remains outstanding from the 2023 cyberattack to be recovered? IDT [Information and Digital Technologies] would need to respond to this. Rebuilding IT systems falls within another ministry, not within the Ministry of National Security. And that goes too for the question about whether or not a ransom was paid on the cyberattack. That is a question best answered by our Honourable Premier who has addressed this issue previously on a number of occasions.

Question: When will a national response team be established? The answer: The national response team will be established shortly after two posts within the cybersecurity unit are filled and we are looking to advertise for those two new cybersecurity posts hopefully in the first quarter of 2024/25.

We were asked about Bermuda Fire and Rescue. The answer is that the Bermuda Fire and Rescue is still in the strategic planning phase for the multipurpose training simulator. A plan of this nature will have to be socialised between a number of ministries. Its inclusion in the brief is for our shared situational awareness.

We were asked a question about the makeup of the cyber team. We currently have a chief information security officer. Cabinet has approved a cyber security unit and we have started the process of recruitment of two information security officers to form part of this unit.

There was a question about the old cameras. Are any of the old system, and how many of those cameras are still working? There are 63 cameras that are still in operation from the old system. The old system will continue to provide images until the new installation replaces it.

How will the Government address privacy concerns around the CCTV system? The Ministry, assisted by the Bermuda Police Service, will host public information sessions to address community concerns about privacy and the CCTV system. This will include information on locations and protocols. Like the Honourable Shadow Minister, I know that he had calls from concerned citizens like I have. We look to allay those concerns by letting them know that the way the cameras have been placed will not be in a place to invade privacy.

And just as a reminder to my honourable colleagues, I had made it clear that we are putting up 256 cameras. So, you can imagine the CCTV network that this Island is going to have once it has been completed. It is not going to be everywhere. It is not going to be in places that everybody agrees with, but it is for the good of the Island that the network that has been put in place.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: There was a question: When will the next National Cyber Risk Assessment be performed and its results reported? The 2022/23 National Cyber Risk Assessment and report was completed in March of 2023 *[sic]*. A gap analysis of the recommendations has been performed against the [National] Cybersecurity Strategy and Government Cybersecurity Programme. However, due to the cyberattack in September 2023 and the need for additional staff in the Cybersecurity Unit, this assessment will not be completed with additional staff and within the Cybersecurity Unit. It is anticipated that another National Cyber Risk Assessment will be performed during the 2024/25 budget year.

There is a question about how much installation of the upgraded new CCTV network and civil road and electrical works cost break down. There is a total cost of $1,035,500 for cameras and software. Civil and electrical works is $210,000, and special poles for select locations, $20,000 to date. The total installation costs for the new upgraded CCTV network is $1,265,720.10.

There is a question of outside help on the cyberattack. It has already been reported here in this House and in the media [that] Government engaged a cybersecurity company that has experts in this arena, and they tremendously helped with recovery efforts. More detailed technical questions on this ought to be directed to the IDT [Information and Digital Technologies].

What is the time frame for the Bermuda Police Service to cease assisting the Coast Guard with staffing? Given the nature of the role and its overlapping with crime, it is anticipated that the Bermuda Police [Service] will always maintain a close working relationship with the Coast Guard, which will probably include an element of staffing. Currently there are two police officers allocated to the Coast Guard.

Where does the budget for the police officers working in the Coast Guard come from? The budget for the police officers working in the Coast Guard comes from the Police.

What are the protocols for camera placement? There are no cameras off the beaten track. I answered that as far as making sure that privacy is not being infringed upon.

There is another question about recruitment, and the Royal Bermuda Regiment's answer to the question [of] recruiting expenses [is] that the Regiment is continuing to adapt to voluntary enlistment. The sole contribution to the 2 per cent increase is that more part-time pay for soldiers to actively recruit from the community. So, we are doing everything we can to try to increase recruitment right across the uniformed services.

There is a question as to why the cost of $40,000 extra in the overseas camp for the Bermuda Regiment. The part-time wages increased as well as the number of soldiers due to attend this year has increased to 160, which is 40 more than in 2023.

There was a question on the increasing cost related to training and validation. [It] is that this cost centre paid for the attendance and the coronation in London—last year was the King's coronation—and the cost of the external provider for chainsaw training.

There was a question on the $750,000 capital building expenses for the Coast Guard maintenance shed. [The answer] is that construction is due to start in the 2024/25 budget year. This facility will assist the Royal Bermuda Regiment team to maintain all water assets as well as provide a facility to carry out classroom-based training.

There was a question by the Shadow Minister referencing the I AM programme and the G.R.E.A.T. programme. Why isn't the entire student population surveyed to identify the number of at-risk students? The 85 per cent figure noted specifically relates to a programme outcome for the I AM programme, which is a targeted intervention prevention programme and not all of the various programmes run by the Gang Violence Reduction Team. More specifically, is not reflective of Island-wide youth data. In the I AM programme, our school selection process for this programme involves a needs assessment conducted by the GVRT in collaboration with school administrators and student service departments to ensure support reaches where it is most needed.

Regarding data on the at-risk youth in schools, the last comprehensive attempt was the trauma indicator check list in 2017, which identified 510 students at risk for various reasons not solely related to gang violence. Since that survey, the Gang Violence Reduction [Team] has built current initiatives and services including incident management support, school mediations, restorative justice sessions, community programme partnership, workplace programmes, and youth outreach that all target and work with at-risk youth of all ages.

There is another question on the Coast Guard maintenance shed. The location of the maintenance shed will be in Dockyard. I think it is at Scenic House up in Dockyard.

There is a question on the $149,000 for the St. David's Coast Guard location. [The answer] is that the unit is repurposing the old post office building down in St. David's. Funds are due to be carried over to the 2024/25 budget year.

The answer to the question on the $50,000 and the $149,000 in capital development for 2023/24 is that these funds have been allocated to the renovation of the warrant officer and sergeants' bathroom. Work is due to be completed in March 2024.

While I am on this here, you know, since I have been the Minister I have noticed that there was a time I believe in the former Government, for about two or three years, [when they] did not do any capital renovation or development, so we are really playing catch up.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. But not necessarily just on the Coast Guard but I am talking right across the board.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: No. I am saying not only Coast Guard. I am not going to get stuck on Coast . . . I am going right across the board—capital development and acquisitions wasn't done, so . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

How many post-55 officers do we have? At today's date there are 65 officers who are post-[55] out of 360 who are in the Police Service. Wow!

I think I answered the question, why is there a bump in travel for the Royal Bermuda Regiment when they go to overseas camp? It is solely related to the charter to Guyana—longer distance, fluctuating fees.

There was a question and comment on raising the retirement age for the Uniformed Services. We are currently looking at doing so. The police service already keeps officers to the age of 60, and we are now looking at raising the age to keep suitable officers until the age of 65.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITORS

The Chairman: Minister, if I could just pause you there. I think that the 19th Bermuda Scouts. I think I said Cub Scouts earlier. I apologize. [The] Scouts, [the] 19th Scouts, are going to leave us.

On behalf of the Members of the House of Assembly, let me thank you for coming and being in the Gallery this evening. I assure you that things can be a little more interesting in here than the Budget Debate, but there we go. Thank you very much. [We] appreciate you taking an interest in your political system.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Minister, I interrupted you, and when you wish to continue . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Oh, you were right on a roll, right on a roll.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: That is right. That is right. I was trying to break your chain of concentration.

Members, and for the benefit of the listening public, this is the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2024/25. The debate we are in right now is the debate for the Minister of National Security, and it is an eight-hour debate. And I think we have an hour and fifteen, hour and ten minutes to go. Minister Michael Weeks is on his feet responding to questions from various MPs in the Chamber.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay, yes. I was addressing the question about raising the retirement age. The police service already has raised their retirement age to 60 for those who are still able to perform their duties. There is some debate about raising it to the age of 65. This is one of the ways we are looking at the whole recruiting process and how we can keep experience among our ranks, you know, because the uniformed service straight across the board is looking for that experience and those people who can still contribute. So, raising the age to 65 is something that is being looked at as we speak.

There was a question about how many regiment soldiers there are. What is the establishment? The unit can hold up to 420 personnel and ideally has 360 committed personnel. Although it is below this number at 300, it continues to multiscale its personnel to meet its demands.

How much time does the road policing unit actually spend on traffic enforcement duties? We anticipate approximately 30 per cent of road policing officers time is spent on traffic enforcement and the rest is spent on investigating significant crime such as road traffic fatalities.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We could argue about what the problem is, but it is people's habits that we have to address, too.

The Chairman: Minister, a moment of levity if you permit me. There was a detailed study of this issue in the State of Ohio last year, and they polled a number of people about their driving habits and the driving habits of others. And 94 per cent said they were either good or excellent drivers. When they were polled on the ability of other drivers on the road, only 23 per cent said others were good or excellent drivers. So, that gives you the perception as to the driving ability out there.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I think I have seen something of the sort, but we have to mix the police presence with community awareness.

An Hon. Member: That is not a good ratio.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We could debate how much a good ratio is but moving on answering the rest of the questions.

There was a question on long-term absentees in the Regiment. Those who were conscripted are being signed off of service. Members of staff spend a significant amount of time chasing up absentees. Regiment headquarters is expediting the discharge process of those who have served more than the initial three years and two months and no longer wish to serve. Those who joined as volunteers and have not completed their initial period have been informed of their infraction and will be actively pursued joining next fiscal year.

There was a question on annual training tests in the Bermuda Regiment. The Regiment is pleased with their attainment this year and will be pleased to review the standards expected in the next training cycle. It is worth noting that the commanding officer has increased the standard expected in shooting and fitness, and the soldiers have exceeded expectations. Furthermore, Colonel Beasley introduced a behaviours test, which is an assessment on core values, bullying, harassment, and DENI, which makes it the only department in Government that makes this an annual requirement of its people.

There is another question referencing how many police officers are dedicated to working the gang problem. The Bermuda Police Service Strategic and Operational Plan speaks to the reduction of serious crime and harm to which gang violence is intertwined in the reduction plan. All units [and] departments within the Bermuda Police Service [BPS] have a role to play in targeting gang crime, and a deployment plan is disseminated weekly to the entire BPS to address. Each department has a role to play: Intelligence Department, gathering of information and dissemination of intelligence packages; Tactical Department, addressing the enforcement, disruption, and dynamic incidents of gang

crime; the Crime Department, investigate the gang-linked crimes to prong the matters for prosecution; Community Policing, building confidence in neighbourhoods and providing visible patrols and disruption plans.

How can we assure the public that the police network switches will be upgraded? The procurement process has begun, and we anticipate completion in the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Million-dollar question: How will the police recruit 48 officers this year? Recruit Foundation Course 83 commences in March 4, 2024 (which is actually this Monday), and will be completed on July 18, 2024. There is a total so far of 15 students. Recruit Foundation Course 84 commences October and will be completed in February 14, 2025. This course will consist of both local and overseas untrained students. It is anticipated [there will be] a total of at least 25 students.

Localisation Course 78 [for] overseas recruits will commence on October 7, 2024 and will be completed January 13, 2023. This course will consist of eight firearms officers.

Have the police engaged in discussions with Government about changes to roadside sobriety testing? The police are continuously engaged in discussions with the Ministry of National Security and Ministry of Transport about legislative changes to reduce the harm on our roads. This includes changes to traffic penalties and new offenses to keep pace of changes in driving behaviour.

There was an inquiry about Customs, and it was about professional services breakdown: consultant services, $100,000; contractors, $200,680 (primarily the retirees working on immigration, but also for other overhead services); membership fees are $67,393, which gives us a total of $368,073, consultant services, external consultants to implement export control.

There is a question referencing Corrections. What is the overtime for fiscal year 2023/24? From April to December, [it] was approximately $4.7 million.

Another question referencing Corrections. Can the Minister provide information on how many officers are on leave due to disciplinary issues? There are no officers on leave in Corrections due to disciplinary issues.

There is a question as to whether or not the Minister can assure that the programmes in Corrections are effective. The prisons utilise best practices. The offending behaviour programmes are all evidence-based and widely utilised in other correctional facilities and in other jurisdictions.

There is another question referencing Customs. Why is the capital . . . [page] C-15, $20,000, why was it not used? Since the Budget Book has been published, $5,000 has been used. The $5,000 has been spent on $2,500 on a conveyor belt at the BMPC [Bermuda Mail Processing Centre] facility, which should make it work and packages flow more effectively and safely. The other $2,500 is for passport scanners to be used as development machines to integrate into the Customs Automated Processing System. There are no immediate plans to spend the remaining $15,000 before the end of March 2024.

There is a question about the upgrade on the dock X-ray. The new X-ray is in Bermuda ready to be installed. Repairs need to be made to the building. Once these are completed, then the X-ray can be installed. [We] expect it to all happen before October of this year.

There was a question about the review of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. The internal review of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service by the management consulting section has been completed and will be presented to Cabinet very shortly. It has a number recommendations for improvements and organisation structure. The internal review will proceed. An external review will be conducted by the UK Inspectorate in 2024 which will review operations and structural infrastructure.

There is a question as to whether or not the overtime up at the Corrections was a challenge and the department require a supplemental. It is a challenge as we are short staffed, and there is a requirement to meet the minimal staffing levels for staffing. What is the overtime for fiscal year 2022/23? Cumulative overtime total for the fiscal year 2022/23 totalled $5,522,825.

I think there was a question from Deputy Opposition Leader about energy. The answer related to the question on energy is that the Regiment is currently part of the solar energy programme for 2025.

There was a question: Can the Minister give information [as to] whether the Department of Corrections can get a contractor if Public Works cannot do the job? Public Works does contract out a number of projects. However, at times there have been some challenges in contracting contractors for various reasons, [for] example, unavailability and the like.

There is a question about whether the Regiment recruits from overseas. The answer is that we do not require recruiting from overseas for full-time staff except [for] two specialist positions.

There is another question for the Department of Corrections. How far did we get with entertaining overseas applicants? Did we take on any overseas applicants? Has the ad gone out to any overseas applicants during the 2023/24 fiscal year? The ad was only extended to those persons who had permission to work in Bermuda or their spouse. We hired one officer on work permit.

I think I answered this one already. [Is there] any thought to change the policy for retirement age for police officers from 55 to 60? The Government is considering wholesale changes to the Public Service Superannuation Act that would include increasing the retirement age for police officers.

Question: How have professional standards changes impacted morale in the service, and do they feel that they are making any progress? The Bermuda

Police Service is on a journey to ensure officers' conduct is what the community would expect from the police officers. Good progress is being made with imbedding the code of ethics and the everyday conduct of officers. While officers welcome the clarity that the standards bring, they continually seek to ensure that the standards are consistently applied, which they are.

There is a question on Headquarters capital allocation. Mr. Chairman, $1.1 million has been allocated to refurbish the Police Headquarters. This is welcomed by the police and will reduce costs without impacting productivity.

There is a question about vehicle capital allocation in the Police Service. Procurement has begun to acquire in the region of 12 new vehicles in the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Records management system capital allocation. The Bermuda Police Service was not able to complete the procurement process for [a] new records management system in the 2023/24 fiscal year. The BPS are applying for a carryover and hope to complete the procurement in 2024/25.

There is a question: How many officers are on suspension? Five officers are on suspensions on full pay in accordance with the Police (Conduct) Orders 2016.

Further question: How long will they be on suspension? The BPS is governed by the Police (Conduct) Orders 2016. The process of the investigations and timelines are prescriptive and must be followed. The BPS recognises the importance of detailed and thorough investigations. Investigation reviews on suspended officers are conducted monthly by the deputy commissioner to ensure accountability, adherence to the timelines, and efficiency.

How many police officers are on long-term sick? The Bermuda Police Service considers an officer to be on long-term sick if they are out from work for a consecutive 30-day period. Using this definition, we have five officers who have been out on long-term sick.

Reserve police numbers. Currently, there are 31 Reserve officers. The Reserves are actively recruiting new members. Currently, budget is not a limiting factor in the number of officers in the Reserves.

There was a question of how many at-risk young people there are on the Island. How many students are in the GVRT programme? Has the number of at-risk students increased or decreased? The Gang Violence Reduction Team appreciates the inquiry concerning at-risk youth particularly in relation to gang involvement. It is essential to clarify that our focus is specifically on students vulnerable to gang influence. Their efforts are to extend the young enrolment numbers encompassing targeted interventions such as case management services, work placement, mentoring programmes, and initiatives like the I AM programme and the G.R.E.A.T. programme.

There was a question of how many people are participating in education programmes. The answer to that is 36. These programmes include the GED program, language arts, maths, science, and social studies, also Bermuda College, the AACE programme courses, [and] CISCO [Networking] Academy certified courses. Students also participated in individual courses such as novel writing and a language course. During the summer, classes were held in Spanish, theatre, drumming, basic computer, and Government's FinTech programme. A total of 31 inmates participated in the summer programme.

There is another question about Customs. How will Customs be sure to recruit 12 or more officers? We can only keep recruiting to build up our numbers. However, with the new initiative for the Ministry recruitment plan, it is sure to assist with adding to our numbers.

Government's plan to address the replacing of the structural vehicles. That is a question referencing the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. It is acknowledged [that] the structural vehicles are in the last quarter of their service life but are still within the threshold of safety and reliability. Each vehicle is maintained to a very high standard and the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service has resiliency within its structural division fleet. Should a primary vehicle go offline for service and repair, the airport operations division fleet has been prioritised because of their lack of direct replacement in this highly specialised fleet. The Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service senior command continuously monitors its assets and programmes as budget requests for replacement vehicles way in advance of vehicle's end-of-service life.

A question was asked about the energy line in the Budget Book. DOC [Department of Corrections] has been selected, two of their sites, for a pilot programme that is being managed by Public Works to install solar panels to reduce costs.

There is a question: How many staff in the Department of Corrections are age 55 or over? [There are] 27.

The police's response to their renewable energy plan. While the Bermuda Police Service does not currently have a renewable energy strategy, they are always examining ways to reduce energy costs. They explore electric vehicles, replacing incandescent and fluorescent lights with LED bulbs, [and] the use of occupancy sensors and timers to ensure energy is only consumed when needed.

There was a question about confiscated assets fund allocations to law enforcement. The Bermuda Police Service welcomes a dedicated confiscated asset allocation to law enforcement based on a value of funds recovered by the police. This is consistent with other jurisdictions. And on occasion the absence of a specific provision for the type of allocation has resulted in challenges when the USA seeks to share recovered assets in joint law enforcement operations.

There was a question referencing the Department of Corrections. Can the Minister give us some understanding of succession planning? The Department

of Corrections, Mr. Chairman, is providing training for staff to be prepared for more senior posts as well as being given acting opportunities when available. The training includes the management programme for eligible staff which is being facilitated in collaboration with the Bermuda College. We are pleased to announce that there are 37 staff enrolled. The promotions process will commence in July 2024.

There was a question again on the Department of Corrections. When will management services provide an update on the strategic plan? The previous strategic plan is still in place as there were some things that were not accomplished due to COVID-19. Once the new strategic plan has been finalised, an update will be given.

Still on the Department of Corrections. Are the departments hiring experienced persons from overseas? The Department of Corrections are short-listing overseas applicants who not only meet our basic requirements but have some previous experience and knowledge of law enforcement.

Still on the Department of Corrections. Are we seeing the inmates able to progress to employment when they come out? There are no numbers tracked between persons and vocational educational programmes and obtaining jobs from that training once they are released. We have seen some cases where we know this has happened. Also, there were some inmates particularly at the farm facility who were successful in gaining employment prior to their discharge from Corrections, and the training they received while incarcerated contributed to their success.

There is another question referencing the last two major fires that we had. The question was: Can the Minister assure that the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service had appropriate fire-fighting capability at both the Boatport and airport dump fire? Yes. The Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service has sufficient vehicle capacity for both incidents. Both incidents were large by most standards. The Boatport fire was extinguished within 12 hours, and this can be attributed to the highly flammable materials involved. The airport dump fire was much more complex because of the difficulty of access to the ocean as a water supply because of the shoreline and the material dispersed therein. In every major incident, equipment may experience difficulty.

However, the Fire Service has resilience and redundancy built into its systems of work, and the deployment of spare pumps and equipment is part of our standard operational procedures to ensure there is no break in any fire suppression operation.

There was a question about police response to vagrancy. The Bermuda Police Service is well aware of the impacts of vagrancy particularly in the city of Hamilton. The BPS is in partnership with the Corporation of Hamilton and the Chamber of Commerce to explore ways to reduce the impact of the criminality and reduce other undesirable aspects of this behaviour. As staffing levels increased, the BPS will consider a dedicated resource to this matter. BPS is also exploring how introducing new powers for Corporation of Hamilton staff might assist in tackling this issue.

There is a question referencing the Gang Violence Reduction Team. How does the Gang Violence Reduction Team measure their progress and effectiveness of the Gang Violence Reduction Team programmes and services that are servicing the young people in our programmes? The Gang Violence Reduction Team is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of our programmes and services through various methods to ensure clarity and alignment with our objectives of reducing gang violence and strengthening community support. In our youth programmes, such as the I AM programme and Gang Resistance and Education Training, which is G.R.E.A.T. for short, we employ the following methods to track progress and effectiveness: student surveys, student feedback, parent feedback, school meetings and teacher updates, quantitative data tracking, [and] regular reviews and evaluations. These comprehensive evaluation methods enable us to continuously assess and enhance our programmes ensuring they are finely tuned to meet the community's evolving needs and effectively combat gang violence.

Those, I think, are all the questions that were asked of the last couple of hours.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the Minister's answers to the first sets of questions that were posed.

Is there any other Member who wishes to speak in the debate?

There being none. it would appear.

Minister, would you like to conclude by moving your heads?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I would like to thank all those Members who participated in today's debate. And if there are any other questions that you may have or may come to, please do not hesitate to send them to the Ministry and we will endeavour to get the answers to you in quick time.

So, Mr. Chairman, I move the Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 25, and 45 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 25, and 45 be approved as printed.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 25, and 45 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.]

The Chairman: Minister—

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I move—

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection?

No objection. Agreed to.

Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

The Chairman: Sergeant, when convenient.

House resumed at 7:42 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Speaker: Good evening, Members.

Are there any objections to the House rising and reporting progress to sit again?

There are none.

Members, that brings us to the close of business for today. Would the . . . Deputy [Premier]?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you for the indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

We are now at what point in the . . .

The Speaker: We are closing House. We are closing House.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I just want to make sure.

Mr. Speaker, I do now request [that] the House do adjourn . . .

The Speaker: Until Monday.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: —to March 4 at 10:00 am.

The Speaker: I see no Members rising, so I will rise.

Members, the House business for today is completed. I thank Members for their participation. As we now rise for the weekend, I ask you get much rest so you can come back next week and do it all over again.

With that, the House now stands adjourned until Monday morning at 10:00 am.

[Gavel]

[At 7:43 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Monday, 4 March 2024.]

[This page intentionally left blank.]

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
4 MARCH 2024
10:00 AM

Sitting Number 12 of the 2023/2024 Session

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

Ms. Beale will lead us in prayer this morning.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Ms. Kara Beale, Assistant Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members. I trust everyone had a good weekend.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Good.

The House is now in session.

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

The Minutes from the 1st of March have been deferred.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: MP Dunkley has notified us that he will be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: There is one this morning in the name of the Premier.

Premier.

ISSUANCE OF NEW GOVERNMENT GUARANTEES

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Issuance of New Government Guarantees in accordance with section 2AA(3) of the Government Loans Act 1978.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: On the Order Paper there is one Statement, but we have been asked to carry that over until the next sitting.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are none.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: MP Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would rise on a very sad, sad note to bring condolences to two families in my constituency. On the passing of Ms. Jennifer Swainson, to her daughter, Jana, and son-in-law, Karl I extend my deepest sympathies. MP Ming, I am sure, MP Foggo and MP Cannonier are all family-connected in one way or the other. I extend condolences to that family.

And to the family of my good friend, Ritchie "Bunny" Foggo, Sr., who has passed away. Boy, that is tough. One of the persons I first met coming into St. George's, a great sportsman, Mr. Foggo, from a great sporting family. But he was well known for softball, in

particular, cricket. And indeed, a stint when he coached St. George's Cricket Club to taking over from a little mutiny situation that came from our reliable historian, Brutus, to tell us that he went undefeated after he took over the team from the beginning. And did that one stint, and then did not bother . . . was not able to do it again. But he did us proud at that particular time.

[Congratulations] to the Bermuda Olympic Association on staging the Equip Workshop that has brought persons here from overseas, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Chris Jenkins was joined by Mr. Peter Dunne [Bermuda Olympic Association President] and Ms. Branwen Smith-King [Bermuda Olympic Association Secretary General] to provide this intern programme that is going on right at this time with persons here from the Caribbean. And it is the first in the region. Mr. Jenkins is the President of the Commonwealth [Games Federation].

Finally, I want to send congratulations to a young man. The Bermuda Junior Under-20 Football Team was overseas, but especially I single out my great-nephew Daion Swan-DeSilva, who is commonly known as the "Super Sub" coming off the bench for [North] Village yesterday, scoring two. But also, the good work overseas reminds me of the great Randolph Horton who used to come off the bench, pull up one sock at a time—Mr. Speaker, you would know that—in the seventh minute and get up and change the dynamic. And I just want to say how proud I am, as scouts are looking, and we are hopeful that this young man will go on and do well and get a very fine university education through football and put his focus on education. But also, if the opportunity presents itself, as it does to talent, he may have an opportunity to go even further in the sport.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP Ming.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. How are you today?

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mrs. Renee Ming: I would like to be associated with the comments on Ms. Swainson and just to let her children, Jana and Garic, who are my age . . . let them know that they are in our thoughts and prayers at this time.

On a happier note, Mr. Speaker, I would like to give congratulatory notes to three officers in the Bermuda Police Service who were recently promoted to Superintendent. And that would be Dennis Astwood, Jerome Laws and Sherwin Joseph. Dennis and Jerome I have known since Berkeley, and they are what I would call career police officers. They came out of Berkeley and joined the Cadet programme. And they have been there ever since, which means that if you look at that in years, Mr. Speaker, they have been officers for 35-plus years. So career police officers definitely within our community, and we congratulate them.

I am associating MP Swan with the comments for Mary Basden. I gave them a week before last, but I am associating him. I did associate him at that time as well.

But I just want to congratulate those officers on their promotions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Foggo, you almost missed your opportunity.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: I know! I am a little slow this morning, aren't I?

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I did not share my heartfelt condolences for Mr. Bunny Foggo. And some in Chambers would know that he is the father of a former MP, Dean Foggo. His other children are Terry, Richard Junior and Linda Foggo. The Member who took his seat previously did share some sports accolades regarding Mr. [Richie] Foggo. He was an avid, avid boat person, loved to fish. And he definitely was a loving father. He will be greatly missed by all of his children. And I will say that his elder daughter, Linda, is my die-hard . . . though she is my cousin, she is more than that. She is my absolute best friend. And I call her my sister.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will say one more thing. The mother whom we shared is named Lucille. And my mother was named Lucille. So that brought us even closer. But to that particular Foggo family, I definitely say heartfelt condolences. And it is a loss. Hopefully they will be able to fill that void with fond, fond memories of who their father was. And thanks to the Dorothy Crane facility that helped to take care of him in his later years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will associate the entire House in sending a hearty congratulations to the choir of Northlands Primary School. Mr. Speaker, Northlands Primary choir recorded a rendition of Kirk Franklin's song, "Bless Me." And it was posted on YouTube quite a while ago. But it was only here recently that the recording artist, Kirk Franklin, recognised that and posted

it on his Instagram page as well, congratulating those young students out there. So I just want to have a congratulations sent from all of us here in the House to the choir of Northlands Primary and of course to Mr. [Terry] Henry, the music teacher who did curate that rendition of "Bless Me."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Cannonier.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Good morning, colleagues, and Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I just wanted to add to the condolences to Jennifer Swainson. I just wanted to say that she was a beautiful lady. Actually, she was godmother to myself and my sister. And my parents were godmother and godfather to their son and daughter, Jana and Garic. She had been sick for a while, and it came as a complete surprise to me that she had passed. But I do fondly remember as a kid when St. George's Colts were St. George's Colts and my father and all of them back then in the day, had great cheerleaders. You know, back when communities really, really stuck together. So I can remember those fond times, they were over to the house getting drunk and eating up my lunch food—

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: After celebrating victories over just about everybody out there playing football. So I just wanted to again add to the words that were already spoken in condolence [regarding] Jennifer Swainson who was a beautiful, just a beautiful, beautiful lady. And she will be a loss. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister Furbert.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to give congratulatory remarks to Mr. Eddie Ming. I know many of us in this room know him for his work that he does with our drummers or percussionists. I had the opportunity to meet with him. I would like to associate MP Roban, the Deputy Leader. I know many of us know him for the work that he does in the music industry. But this weekend I had the opportunity to visit his studio. And he was actually celebrating . . . he has a group called "Nanas and Papas." And he was celebrating the grandparents who go way and beyond to be able to assist their grandchildren with getting to music lessons. But he has this group to celebrate our seniors in general.

And I just want to congratulate him for the many years of service that he has done, particularly with teaching many students about percussion. And also being involved in the culinary arts and making sure that people are aware of the benefits of vegan foods. So I want to just stand to congratulate him. It was an interesting time. I had an opportunity to speak to the seniors who were there, just to speak to them about ageing and the beautiful relationships that grandparents can have with their grandchildren.

And also wanting to congratulate the PLP's Founder Day awardees. I will associate the whole House with that, and Lt. Col. Hon. David Burch, who led the speech for that day, was the guest speaker. Our awardees for Founder's Day were Quinton Mallory, Raymond Santucci, Margaret Giloth, Edward Swan and Bermuda Is Love. And I have to mention this because one of the exhibits at the Black History Museum that Paget Primary students put on, going through some of the rooms I noted that the PLP Founders Day Awards were actually part of the displays. And so they do mean much to the awardees who actually receive them. So again, just wanting to send big congratulations to all of the awardees for PLP's Founders Day event.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

No other. Good.

We will move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker: There are none at this time.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: Members, that leads us to the Orders of the Day. And again for our listening audience, we are in another day of the [Committee of Supply following the] annual Budget Debate. And as always, there are eight hours set aside for the debates each day. This morning the first four hours will be Tourism, and later in the day the last four hours will be the Ministry of Finance.

And it is known that the Speaker is not in the House during this process so that those debates take place in the Committee of Supply. And when the House is in Committee, the Speaker has to be out of the House. So during the sessions, you will be in the able hands of the Panel of Chairs led by the Deputy Speaker. And this morning we will have the Premier lead us into Committee, and then Chairman MP Jackson will chair the first session.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

MP Jackson, you can assume the Chair.

House in Committee at 10:17 am

[Ms. Susan Jackson, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Chairman: Good morning, Members.

We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. This morning we will hear from the Junior Minister responsible for Tourism, Culture and Sport. And we will be hearing his brief on Heads 71, 20 and 52.

Junior Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move the following heads, Head 71, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport Headquarters; Head 20, Sport and Recreation; Head 52, Department of Culture be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I am pleased to present the financial year 2024/25 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, which can be found starting on page B-242 of the Estimates Book. Madam Chairman, I will briefly discuss the Ministry as a whole, followed by information for Head 71, the Ministry Headquarters, and then in detail the two departments that fall under that Ministry, namely, Head 20, the Department of Sport and Recreation; and Head 52, the Department of Culture.

HEAD 71— MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT HEADQUARTERS

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, before I get into the details of the budget, I want to acknowledge the transfer of the Tourism portfolio to the Ministry in early November 2023 and the transfer of the Youth Section of the Department of Sports and Recreation to the newly titled Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. Madam Chairman, you may be aware that one of the action items of the Bermuda Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027 is to grow the tourism sector by increasing the visitor attractions through signature events. Increased funding will be provided to local entrepreneurs who are curating tourism experiences. The objective is to enhance tourist satisfaction and bolster their local experiences.

As stewards of our nation's reputation and prosperity, we recognise the importance of ensuring a vibrant and memorable experience for all who visit our shores. The aim is to develop a more comprehensive approach to showcasing our country's rich tapestry of culture, people and natural assets. Madam Chairman, while the transfer of Tourism means that the Hotel Regulatory Policy section now falls within the Ministry, it also entails the provision of the Bermuda Tourism Authority (known as the BTA) grant.

Madam Chairman, looking back over the past year, I wish to briefly share some of the successes of 2023 for my Ministry inclusive of the Department of Culture and Department of Sport and Recreation. And I acknowledge that I am the Junior Minister representing the substantive Minister, Senator the Honourable Owen Darrell. Madam Chairman, the commencement of the Anti-Doping in Sport Act in December 2023 and the repeal of the Anti-Doping in Sport Act 2011 means that Bermuda is now fully compliant with the World Anti-

Doping Code. And our flag continues to fly at international competitions.

Madam Chairman, Minister Darrell once again attended the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) forum held for Ministers responsible for Sport in the Caribbean on the 16th of January 2024 in Kingston, Jamaica. Minister Darrell made a presentation on Bermuda's experience in complying with the WADA Code which culminated with the Anti-Doping legislation. And attendees were very appreciative of the presentation. Indeed, Bermuda's process may be replicated by other islands.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda Day is a family-oriented day to celebrate our Island home and cultures within it. And, Madam Chairman, despite the weather, the Ministry, led by the Minister Darrell, had signature moments for a very successful and colourful Bermuda Day Parade. Crowds braved the elements and watched the Gombeys, who danced in the rain (among others there), and the crowd continued to cheer the Majorettes. And dancers moved along the parade path. Madam Chairman, it was certainly a sight to behold. Despite the downpour, the procession of participants continued. The theme was *A Bermudian Renaissance,* and a very apt theme given that 2023 was the first year since 2019 without COVID-19 restrictions.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda Literary Awards held once every five years attract entries of the highest calibre, and 2023 was no exception. Prizes were awarded in six categories including cultural merit, drama and screenwriting, nonfiction, children and young adult fiction, and the Brian Burland prize for fiction.

Sports

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, turning to sports, Minister Darrell supported our athletes in overseas competitions, attending the 50th CARIFTA games in Nassau in April 2023 and the Special Olympics in Berlin in June of 2023. Madam Chairman, in Nassau, Minister Darrell witnessed the many outstanding performances by our athletes. And in Berlin he watched as our athletes proved that their abilities transcend any limitations. They showed the true meaning of our courage, determination and the power of a positive spirit and exemplified the values of sportsmanship, camaraderie and fair play, serving as remarkable ambassadors for our Island.

Tourism

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, while Tourism has only been under the auspices of the Ministry for four months, I would like to take the opportunity to update the House of the activities of the Bermuda Tourism Authority during the past year, as well as offer insight into its upcoming goals. Madam Chairman, I will now briefly highlight some of the Ministry's priorities for fiscal year 2024/25. Madam Chairman, the Ministry intends to continue to develop and celebrate our people, and align the Department of Culture and the Department of Sport and Recreation with Tourism through a variety of initiatives. We recognise the value of sport to our country and continue to explore avenues that will promote Bermuda as a sporting jurisdiction.

Department of Culture

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, "Make a Space." In the 2023 Throne Speech initiative, Make a Space is a place where artists can create artwork, bands can practice, actors can rehearse and creatives can collaborative with each other. Bermudian creatives including musicians, visual artists, actors, poets, dancers have long advocated for a dedicated maker space. And this will provide an environment where creatives can work on projects together, cultural groups can meet, and performing artists who currently do not have an affordable space to practice can work on honing their craft. Some expect offshoots including workshops and master classes to be developed by the cultural community.

Department of Sport

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, 2024 is an Olympic year. And both Summer Olympics and Paralympics will be held in Paris. The Summer Olympics take place from the 26th of July to the 11th of August, and the Paralympics from the 28th of August to September 8. Madam Chairman, the Department of Sport and Recreation will be providing additional support to our elite athletes to propel them toward sporting excellence for Bermuda. The enhanced funding will play a pivotal role in covering the crucial aspects such as insurance, recovery, physiotherapy, coaching expenses and other often-overlooked costs associated with representing Bermuda on the international stage. Madam Chairman, we are looking forward to watching our athletes compete and wish them all the best.

Madam Chairman, we are increasing the funding for our very popular Summer Day Camp, allowing for the expansion of available spaces for our young people. This initiative aims to eliminate the wait list, alleviating the stress for parents who seek safe and affordable spaces for their children during the summer months.

Madam Chairman, the National Sports Policy, which was launched in 2022, outlines key goals including increasing participation, achieving sport excellence and enhancing coach education. In the upcoming fiscal year, 24 out of our 25 National Sport Governing Bodies (NSGBs) have applied for funding through the Sports Investment programme. Given the heightened demand for funding, the department will address gaps in funding to ensure alignment with the objectives outlined in the National Sports Policy. This additional funding will

facilitate increased athlete exposure to sports and opportunities for international excellence.

Bermuda Tourism Authority

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Tourism Authority (the BTA) operates as the destination marketing organisation for the Island's crucial tourism sector. The BTA was created to focus on enhancing Bermuda's industry through strategic sales and marketing efforts. By prioritising sales and marketing, the BTA aims to drive visitor numbers, stimulate economic growth and ensure the sustainability of Bermuda's tourism sector. Madam Chairman, in 2023 Bermuda was able to capitalise on a year of unrestricted travel to move Bermuda's tourism industry further toward full recovery. The tourism sector not only overcame some of the challenges posed by the global pandemic, but also laid the foundation for a vibrant and sustainable tourism ecosystem. To that end, Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Tourism Authority was initially designed to be self-sufficient with the initial plan for the organisation to be self-sustaining within three to five years of their establishment in 2014.

The Chairman of the BTA, the Honourable Wayne Caines, is establishing a committee to evaluate the path to sustainability and self-sufficiency for the organisation. Madam Chairman, the Island saw significant year-over-year growth in 2023 as compared with 2022 across key industry measures including air capacity, leisure visitors and cruise visitors. Though significant increases were seen in 2023, year-end statistics underscore that more work remains to be done. Madam Chairman, in 2023 total visitors (and that is air, cruise and yacht) increased 29.1 per cent over 2022, with air visitors increasing 27.1 per cent and cruise visitors increasing 30.5 per cent.

Madam Chairman, air capacity seats grew by 21.6 per cent year over year and had recovered to 75.0 per cent of 2019 levels by December of 2023. Certainly the highlight of 2023 was the introduction of BermudAir serving the East Coast cities. The year 2024 looks promising in terms of further growth in air capacity with existing carriers, including BermudAir, having confirmed additional routes and expanded schedules. Madam Chairman, hotel inventory of 2023, open and bookable, remained at approximately 75.0 per cent of 2019 levels. While hotel inventory remains a challenge particularly in the summer months, hotel occupancy increased by 15.5 per cent in 2023. Additionally, the average daily (ADR) experienced a 6.0 per cent boost, and revenue per available room increased 22.6 per cent year over year, surpassing 2019 levels.

Madam Chairman, the average spend per air visitor decreased slightly from $1,852 per person in 2022 to $1,841 per person in 2023 due to the shorter average length of stay. However, this remains up 24.0 per cent over 2019. Air visitor spending reached an estimated $341.3 million in 2023, up 26.4 per cent from 2022. The average spend per cruise visitor rose to an estimated $287 per person, which is up 12.5 per cent over 2022. Total estimated cruise visitor spending reached $150 million in 2023, up 46.8 per cent over 2022, exceeding all historical amounts.

Mr. Chairman, the vacation rentals sector managed by a cross section of Island homeowners also saw increases in 2023 with the occupancy increasing 7.9 per cent in 2022. A full 10.0 per cent of air visitors in 2023 chose this type of accommodation. Vacation rental inventory has also not yet recovered from the pre-pandemic level of available listings in 2023, down when compared to 2019.

Mr. Chairman, a key element of tourism's recovery is the growth of the air arrivals, as highlighted previously. We are certainly moving in the right direction with increasing air capacity. However, hotel inventory remains a challenge. With approximately 1,763 rooms available to book at the end of 2023, the Island is at just 41.5 per cent of the 1990 volumes and 75.0 per cent of the 2019 volumes. The reduction in available hotel rooms and meeting space hinders the ability to build demand for group business and limits vital on Island spending, impacting businesses directly and is indirectly connected to tourism in Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, later this year we will see the opening of the Bermudiana Beach Resort, bringing much-needed additional hotel inventory to the Island by adding 110 rooms. Madam Chairman, the commencement of the Fairmont Southampton redevelopment project is imminent. The future reopening of that property will not only bring the total number of hotel rooms to 2,500, but it will also provide meeting and function space needed for attracting large groups to Bermuda, which is particularly important to supplement visitation in the summer months.

Madam Chairman, airlift and hotel inventory are interrelated and codependent. Bermuda's reduced hotel inventory has for the past few years had a negative impact on the demand and consequently Bermuda's airlift. The BTA continues to work closely with its partners at the Bermuda Airport Authority, Skyport and the Ministry of Transport to shape and execute Bermuda's development strategy. The BTA gathers and shares vital data on Bermuda's visitors and works to build demand and fill seats. The BTA are focused on partnership with the airlines and developing co-op marketing programmes to fill existing flights and fuel demand to necessitate an expansion of the schedule.

Madam Chairman, for the 2024 calendar year the Government will invest $17.2 million into the Bermuda Tourism Authority to support the activities of the Tourism Authority. The BTA operates in a calendar year, and the $17.2 million represents three months of the 2023/24 grant of $19 million and nine months of the 2024/25 grant of $16.54 million.

Madam Chairman, total income for the BTA is forecast to be $33.3 million. The remaining $16.1 million is forecast to come from fees paid by visitors

staying in hotels, vacation rentals and cruise ship passengers. The vast majority of BTA funds are spent on selling and marketing the destination. When adjustments are made, funds allocated for sales and marketing will be protected as much as possible.

Madam Chairman, the estimated income for 2024 will be allocated as follows:

- Sales will be allocated $12,691,050, representing 34.7 per cent of the total investment;
- Marketing will be allocated $14.683 million, representing 40.2 per cent of the total investment.
- The Research and Intelligence Division will be allocated $886,000, representing 2.4 per cent of the total investment,
- The Experiences Division will be allocated $1,264,000, representing 35.0 per cent of the total investment,
- The Operations Division will be allocated $7.02 million, representing 19.2 per cent of the total investment.

Madam Chairman, to fulfil contractual obligations for some major events in 2024 whilst maintaining as far as possible the key sales and marketing programmes, the BTA has planned an operating deficit in 2024, which will be financed from existing funds.

Madam Chairman, each year the BTA sets out a corporate objective to keep momentum toward achieving the long-term National Tourism Plan objectives while addressing the immediate needs of the tourism industry. The 2024 objectives set out for the BTA are geared toward achieving a growing and balanced tourism business, a growing tourism sector that has a balanced seasonality, balanced price/value perceptions, balanced cruise versus air visitors and balanced benefits for all.

Madam Chairman, the primary objective of the sales team is to drive Bermuda's presence and awareness through targeted sales calls and strategic activations in our core and feeder markets with a particular focus on the corporate and incentive market. The team targets both domestic and international customers, reaching out to current and potential partners such as tour operators, meeting planners and large corporate association clients.

Madam Chairman, the primary function of the group sales is to work to promote Bermuda as an enticing destination for the customer base as they nurture and cultivate to secure new and returning business to the Island. The sales team has a key focus toward driving revenue and creating a consistent visitor presence throughout the summer months and with smaller groups that can be accommodated in existing facilities. With over 12,000 room nights booked in 2023, that equates to an estimated economic impact of $18.5 million.

Madam Chairman, new travel industry partners and consortia have been identified to drive engagement and increase room nights and revenue in specific travel windows and markets. With the support of the new brand launch and defined marketing efforts, the BTA continues to re-educate trade through all sales channels to establish a preferred partnership with select US, Canadian and European tour operators.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda had a strong showing at the IMEX America, which is the largest trade show in North America, to raise awareness of the Island to a global audience. This influential event brought together travel trade, media and tourism officials offering the opportunity to meet new clients, generate new leads and forge long-lasting relationships in collaboration with hotel partners such as Grotto Bay Beach Resort and Spa, Newstead Belmont Hills, Fairmont Southampton, Hamilton Princess Beach Club and Cambridge Beaches.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda also marked a return to the UK market by having a significant presence at the World Travel Market, which is the home of the world's most influential travel and tourism buyers. Efforts included organising high-calibre media interviews, engaging in trade and media meetings and demonstrating Bermuda's renewed commitment and unified approach in promoting our Island. Hotel collaboration continued with the attendance of Grotto Bay Beach Resort and Spa, Cambridge Beaches and St. Regis Bermuda resort. BermudAir also made their debut at this event.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda's participation at the ILTM Collection, Cannes, yielded substantial benefits with over 2,000 qualified luxury buyers in attendance. Bermuda capitalised on this platform to highlight our unique offerings and positioned ourselves as a premiere luxury travel destination. Noteworthy partnerships were forged, including two media deals with Hertz and *Travel and Leisure* magazine, along with commitments from two luxury operators to re-introduce Bermuda into their offerings after years of absence.

Madam Chairman, additionally the finalisation of the New York and Co. and the JetBlue partnership further enhanced Bermuda's accessibility and appeal. These discussions with industry leaders underscore Bermuda's commitment to revitalising its tourism sector and establishing ourselves as a top destination for luxury travellers worldwide.

Madam Chairman, the BTA continues to see positive inroads in sports, business development and partnerships. The goal for the 2024 strategy is to attract international visitors and drive revenue within sports, maritime and sponsorship verticals. This is achieved by identifying profitable business relationships and strengthening the overall client portfolio. Madam Chairman, the Island eagerly anticipates hosting world athletes for the third time at the USATF Bermuda Grand Prix April 28. In addition to the live NBC prime time broadcast on April 28, the partnership has placed Bermuda's commercials in preceding *Journey to Gold* series podcasts, peaking at 1.7 million viewers.

The BTA will continue to leverage large partnerships, develop local and national sporting body

relationships and highlight Bermuda as a destination that can deliver high-profile sporting events. Madam Chairman, the team is focusing on the creation and execution of signature events that aim to attract new visitors and ensure that those already on Island are entertained year-round. The Bermuda Triangle Challenge kicked off 2024 setting the stage for a busy year of events including the return of SailGP, season four, and on May 4 and 5. This year's maritime strategy will continue to focus on the areas of superyachts, sports fishing, international regattas and leisure yachting. Each of these segments demonstrates the potential to drive economic impact for the Island.

Madam Chairman, groundbreaking concepts in golf have truly come to life under the BTA's strategic initiatives in business development and partnerships. Our North East golf business strategy has enabled us to grow the golf business portfolio by attracting golf groups, sponsors and events to the Island. The Celebrity Golf Invitational took place during a long weekend at the end of April of 2023. BTA hosted 75 overseas guests including A-list celebrities with many events and two golf tournaments all over the Island.

In addition, the Butterfield Bermuda Championship continues to be a success. And we are confident the economic impact will continue to grow beyond the $17 million impact realised in 2022. Madam Chairman, the BTA's *Lost yet Found* campaign has now been in the market for more than a year and continues to gain traction as well as industry awards. The campaign displayed the authentic Bermuda experience, asking our visitors to dive in and discover a new layer of the Island. The campaign video highlights locations that have not been displayed before and have started real conversations about Bermuda and what the Island has to offer. The BTA also continues to promote the proximity message, our world-class beaches, golf and safety. But they include all parts of the Island in sharing the full Bermuda experience.

[Pause]

The Chairman: While the Junior Minister just takes a little break, I wanted to remind the listening audience that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. And we are now debating or listening to the brief from the Junior Minister on Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Junior Minister, you may proceed.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And thank you. I continue on with Head 71, Madam Chairman.

In 2024, the marketing, PR and communications team will remain focused on generating increased press and public awareness of Bermuda as a top travel brand in targeted local and international markets. The team will seek to increase the number of destination-specific stories and A-list travel, lifestyle and niche publications and share compelling reasons for shoulder season, extended stays and mid-week travel.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda's global communications team will increase FaceTime with target media and journalists to build and strengthen relationships to further enhance destination and brand awareness. Earned media display the range of vacation experiences available from luxury to adventure while highlighting Bermuda's heritage and culture. The team works directly with all trade partners hosting familiarisation trips, or Fam [Trips], for our tour operators and travel media to provide first-hand personalised experiences in and education of the Island.

Madam Chairman, social media and the content strategy will focus on our select audiences to drive awareness and engagement. The BTA will reinforce Bermuda's brand image via aligning with influences and media that reflect our brand as well as provide ideas and inspiration for would-be travellers to highlight all that Bermuda has to offer.

The BTA will also take a proactive approach to seek to develop relevant out-of-market brand partnerships that match with our brand and appeal to our target audiences. A strong focus will remain on diversity to ensure that we reach the consumers as dictated by the National Tourism Plan.

Madam Chairman, the BTA are also committed to local community engagement with the objective to cultivate brand advocacy and serve as a resource for the Bermuda hospitality industry and local community, including encouraging career opportunities in tourism. The BTA will develop fresh, engaging content and improve website functionality to attract and retain visitors. Madam Chairman, Bermuda continues to position itself as a year-round destination. It is imperative that there are on Island offerings, signature events and experiences throughout the year that appeal to our target groups.

One example is Restaurant Week, which attracted 50 participating restaurants this year. Since 2014, the BTA has invested in 200-plus ideas and businesses and has financially supported $14-plus million to support local entrepreneurs. Madam Chairman, the Tourism Standards and Training team is responsible for raising awareness through local involvement. Its primary focus is on making our local community of various tourism-related workforce and training opportunities both at the entry and leadership levels. And where no such opportunities exist, to assist in creating pathways for industry partnerships and collaboration.

Madam Chairman, this year expects to see a greater focus on enhancing service expectations through the launch of many innovative programmes such as Bermuda Hospitality Service Standards Awards and Anchor Bermuda, AnchorBDA. This accredited tourism-specific programme, Anchor BDA, will launch imminently and will empower residents to become tourism investors and enhance visitor

experiences. Visitor feedback will be used to assess the programme's impact on visitor satisfaction.

Madam Chairman, the BTA continues to look for mechanisms to raise the standards on the Island and in 2023 launched BTA-plus, a learning management system for the hospitality and tourism industry. And [the BTA] recently added an interactive hospitality career guide on the platform with a goal of providing resources for individuals considering careers in tourism and hospitality.

Madam Chairman, the team also redesigned BTAConnect, a customer service relationship management platform that grants industry partners the ability to manage contact information, add amenity options, build online listings, add photographs, manage social media links on Bermuda's destination website, gotobermuda.com, as well as get access to industry data and reports. Madam Chairman, Bermuda's membership with the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) was also re-established through a joint effort between the Bermuda Government and the BTA. This reaffirms Bermuda's commitment to regional collaboration and its alignment with broader Caribbean tourism initiatives.

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport Senator, the Honourable Owen K. Darrell, attended the CTO meeting in St. Martin last month, along with other Caribbean tourism ministers offering network opportunities and sharing of best practices. The meeting also served as a platform for attracting investment, fostering partnerships and promoting cultural exchange through tourism. Bermuda's presence at the forum allowed for contributions to global decision-making processes affecting the Island's tourism industry.

Madam Chairman, the BTA's Research and Business Intelligence team is responsible for tracking progress toward national tourism goals and corporate objectives, as well as monitoring ROIs [returns on investment] on sales and marketing initiatives, group and events. In-depth research is completed with visitors to estimate visitor spending and gain valuable feedback on their experiences on Island. Visitor and arrival statistics are analysed monthly, and economic impact of events and groups are tracked throughout the year.

Madam Chairman, the theme of 2023's Tourism Summit was *Building a Better Bermuda Tourism Ecosystem.* To that end, in 2024 the BTA will

- build ongoing awareness of Bermuda as a unique and desirable destination;
- focus on targeted sales events via travel, trade, sports and maritime;
- improve the visitor experience to build perceptions of value-for-money; and
- partner with the local stakeholders to address Island-wide issues that affect tourism.

The BTA will achieve these objectives through building stronger partnerships that extend their reach, deal with foundational issues that hamper tourism's development and focusing efforts to strategically move the needle.

Madam Chairman, in summary, for 2024 the Bermuda Tourism Authority will

- continue to drive visitation to the Island and increase visitor spending;
- increase visitor spending directly influenced by the BTA, which includes group, sales and leisure promotions that can be directly tied to the BTA activities;
- increase the number of leisure visitors coming from the UK and Europe;
- increase yacht economic impact;
- continue to build stronger partnerships in the tourism ecosystem;
- increase awareness of Bermuda as a unique, desirable destination;
- target sales efforts through a continued re-engagement of travel and trade partnerships; and
- continue the forward momentum in sports and maritime.

Madam Chairman, 2024 promises to be full of activities and events that will excite people of all ages and entice visitors to the Island with all activities and events listed on the BTA website. The BTA have shown that they are focused on establishing Bermuda as a top destination, improving the visitor experience, supporting local stakeholders and introducing or re-introducing our beautiful Island home to new and returning visitors from our key nurture cities. The success of a thriving tourism industry is important for the social and economic success of Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, the National Tourism Plan underpins the focus and priorities, and they are executed with thoughtful and strategic intention.

Madam Chairman, I would like to thank the Chairman of the Bermuda Tourism Authority, the Honourable Wayne Caines, MP, for his great work as Chairman, and his team led by Ms. Tracy Berkeley, the CEO, and all of those affiliated with the Bermuda Tourism Authority. Thank you.

I now move on to the report of the Estimates Book.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister.

I just want to remind the listening audience that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. This morning we are listening to the brief on Tourism, Culture and Sport.

The Junior Minister may proceed when he is ready.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you for that intermission, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I would like to draw attention to page B-242 of the [Budget] Book, where you will note that the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport budget for the financial year is $29,690,000. This is an increase of $15,901,000, or 116 per cent, from fiscal year 2023/24 and is due to the transfer of the Bermuda

Tourism Authority grant, the Hotel Regulatory and Policy unit and the Cultural and Entertainment support fund to the Ministry. Madam Chairman, page B-242 shows a revenue estimate for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport of $641,000. This is inclusive of $438,000 from vacation rental fees and hotel licensing fees, and $203,000 from summer day camps.

Madam Chairman, page B-242 also details the current expenditure of the department that makes up the overall budget for the Ministry. Madam Chairman, the summary shows for the upcoming year Ministry Headquarters and the Department of Culture see an increase in their budgets, and the Department of Sport and Recreation sees a decrease. Ministry Headquarters' budget is increased by $17,893,000, and the Culture Department's budget by $332,000. And the Department of Sport and Recreation sees a decrease of $2,324,000 primarily due to the transfer of the Youth section to the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Madam Chairman, as seen on page C-20, the Grants and Contributions budget across the Ministry is $21,661,000. The grants and contributions to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport are as follows:

Head 71, Ministry Headquarters, grants total

- $17,480,000, which includes $16,540,000 for the Bermuda Tourism Authority grant, a reduction of $2,460,000 from the $19 million in fiscal year 2023/24;
- $840,000 for the Cultural and Entertainment support fund to increase interactions between local entrepreneurs and tourists;
- $50,000 to support the annual Cup Match Classic going to St. George's; and
- $40,000 to support the Parish Councils commitment.

Madam Chairman, as a result of the reduction of the BTA's grant, funds are allocated as follows:

- $300,000 to the Department of Culture with the establishment of Maker Spaces, a 2023 Throne Speech initiative;
- $860,000 to the Department of Sport and Recreation to provide additional funds for the elite athletes, given that it is an Olympic year;
- additional funds for Summer Day Camp and an increase in contributions to the development; and
- $300,000 to boost funding within the Ministry Headquarters so that further support can be provided to local curators of tourism experiences.

Head 20, the Department of Sport and Recreation, grant totalled $3,854,000. This includes

- $350,000 for elite and high-performing athletes, as it is an Olympic year;
- $1,350,000 for the National Sports Centre; and—

The Chairman: Excuse me. Junior Minister, where are you? At the last we were on page C-20.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. What it is, Madam Chairman, it is the recap of the Headquarters head. And under the Headquarters head, you will see that there are different areas. So I am going through those different areas, and it is a highlight of those areas.

The Chairman: Could you just begin at that paragraph again? And just let us know, are we back on page B-242?

[Pause]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. Yes.

The Chairman: Yes. Okay. So what page are we on, Junior Minister?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We are still on page B-242. And under page B-242, you will see Head 71, Head 20 and Head 52. So, it is a summary of those particular heads that are listed on page B-242. All right?

The Chairman: Okay. Could you just start from the beginning of that paragraph again, please?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I will be glad to.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: The grants and contributions for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport are as follows:

Head 71—you will see that at the top of page B-242 right there, Head 71. And I am providing a summary of that, and then I will go to Head 20, which is the next line, which I will provide a summary of that.

So Head 71, the Ministry Headquarters grants total

- $17,480,000. This includes $16,540,000 for the Bermuda Tourism Authority grant, a reduction of $2,460,000 from the $19 million in fiscal year 2023/24;
- $840,000 for the Cultural and Entertainment support fund to increase interactions between local entrepreneurs and tourists;
- $50,000 to support the annual Cup Match Classic; and
- $40,000 to support the Parish Council commitments.

Madam Chairman, as a result of the reduction of the BTA's grant, funds have been allocated as follows:

- $300,000 to the Department of Culture to assist with the establishment of Maker Spaces, a 2023 Throne Speech initiative;

- $860,000 to the Department of Sport and Recreation to provide additional funds for the elite athletes, given that it is an Olympic year;
- additional funds for Summer Day Camp and an increase in contribution to sports development; and
- $300,000 to boost funding within Ministry Headquarters so that further support can be provided to local curators of tourism experiences.

Head 20, that is the next line.

Are you following me, Madam Chairman?

The Chairman: I am following. But I see that that list of grants is not necessarily all published in the Budget Book. So are we just to take note of those extra expenditures?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. But the Ministry is providing an outline. And during questions, persons could actually clarify what those numbers actually meant. And I am sure that we will be able to provide that clarification at that particular time.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes.

The Chairman: So we just have to manually take note of those particular items?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Well, yes. Because the Budget Book does list like $19 million. And it does not expound on how that $19 million is broken down. What I am doing is providing a summary. And then you can question at that particular time. We will have plenty of time for questions.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister. You may proceed.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Head 20, and we are still on page B-242.

The Sport and Recreation Department's grants totalled $3,840,000 *[sic]*. This includes

- $350,000 for elite and high-performing athletes, as it is an Olympic year;
- $1,350,000 for the National Sports Centre; and
- $2,150,000 for sports development.

Head 52 on page B-242, the Culture Department's grant totalled $321,000. This includes

- $117,000 for the Arts Council;
- $48,000 for the Bermuda National Gallery; and
- $156,000 for cultural activity which includes Heritage Grants for Gombey troupes, and museums and cultural preservation.

Madam Chairman, these grants to the community align with our mission to develop and celebrate our people. Madam Chairman, as seen on page C-7, the capital budget for the Ministry is $850,000. This is inclusive of $500,000 for the development and establishment of Maker Spaces, a 2023 Throne Speech initiative, and $350,000 for capital works of the National Sports Centre.

Current Account Expenditure

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, I turn to the current account expenditure for Head 71 for the Ministry. Madam Chairman, the financial year 2024/25 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 71, the Ministry Headquarters, is found on pages B-243 and B-244. Page B-243 shows the budget estimate for the Ministry Headquarters for the year 2024/25 is $19,061,000. This is $17,890,000 higher than the original budget for the prior year due to the transfer of the Bermuda Tourism Authority grant, the Hotel Regulatory and Policy section and the Cultural and Entertainment support fund.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry Headquarters comprises two business units, 81000, Administration; and 81065, Hotel Regulatory and Policy, on page B-244, which support the Minister's office, the Ministry's centralised compliance and accounts functions, and the Hotel Regulatory and Policy section. This consists of 12 full-time salaries and provides these services essential to a ministry operation. Madam Chairman, the Ministry Headquarters directs the development and implementation of policy and legislation and has overall responsibility for management of the Ministry's budget and departments within the Ministry. Through its centralised section, the Ministry Headquarters provides accounting and financial management services to all departments under its responsibility.

Madam Chairman, the Hotel Regulatory Policy unit regulates the tourism accommodation inventory which includes hotel and vacation rental property whose ARV (annual rental value) is above $22,800. As of January 24, there are 43 hotels which are operating as licensed properties. These properties provide 2,541 units which equates to a bed count of 6,222. This means on any given night, Bermuda can accommodate 6,222 guests.

Madam Chairman, this unit jointly administers the Vacation Rentals Act 2018 with Consumer Affairs in conjunction with the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Vacation rental proprietors provide sleeping accommodations to nine or fewer guests. In addition to accepting or securing guests, vacation rental property owners who operate vacation rental property with ARVs greater than $22,800 are required to secure a Vacation Rental Certificate issued by the union. Madam Chairman, as of January 2024, a full 100 Vacation Rental Certificates have been issued. These certificates are valid for one year and expire on 31 August 2024.

Madam Chairman, the Hotel Regulatory and Policy unit also administers the Tourism Investment Act 2017 (the successor to the Hotels Concession Act

2000), which became operative on the 10th of November 2017. Madam Chairman, the Tourism Investment Act 2017 was amended in 2023 to provide relief depending on the level of investment in the property. Dependent on the qualification criteria, the type of relief can include hotel occupancy tax, the employer's share of payroll tax, customs duty relief, and land tax and deferral on landholding charges.

Subjective Analysis

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, I now turn to the subjective analysis of the current account estimates found on page B-244. I would like to highlight the line items in this section, Madam Chairman.

Salaries. The amount budgeted for salaries for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $1,215,000, which represents an increase of $384,000, or 46 per cent, due primarily to the transfer of four staff of the Hotel Regulatory and Policy sections and the salary uplift.

Professional services. The amount budgeted for professional services for the year 2024/25 is $194,000, which represents an increase of $77,000, or 66 per cent. The increase reflects the funding to assist with the transition of Tourism into the Ministry, Madam Chairman.

Performance Measures

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the Ministry Headquarters performance measures are listed on page B-245. Our annual indicators reflect the administrative nature of the Headquarters function. We were able to complete the one compliance review intended for the year, two of the three training sessions and 100 per cent of ministerial policy priorities this fiscal year, namely, in the form of the 2023 Anti-Doping in Sport Act.

Madam Chairman, before closing I would like to take this opportunity to thank the small, dedicated team at the Ministry Headquarters for the work they do in ensuring the Ministry meets these mandates. It is headed by Permanent Secretary, Ms. Marva-Jean O'Brien, and supported by the Comptroller, Ms. Wendy Hunt (Pond); Policy Analyst, Ms. Jane Brett; and Senior Manager, Hotel Regulatory Unit, Ms. Rhonda Woods-Smith. The Ministry Headquarters is technically supported by the Director of Culture, Dr. Kim Dismont-Robinson, and the Director of Sport and Recreation, Ms. Kimberly Charryse Bean.

Madam Chairman, as we look to the year ahead, we have much to look forward to. Our Ministry will continue to ensure that our cultural and sports communities are celebrated, supported and uplifted and that the focus on creating visitors is sustained. Madam Chairman, this Ministry has a great role to play in the fabric of Bermuda society and our national identity. And we will continue to develop and celebrate our people in every way.

Madam Chairman, on behalf of the Minister, Senator the Honourable Owen Darrell, this concludes my presentation on financial year 2024/25 budgetary allocation for Head 71, Ministry Headquarters.

And I will now move to Head 20, Youth, Sport and Recreation, followed by Head 52, Culture, with your permission (and a bit of water).

The Chairman: Yes, Junior Minister, you have permission.

While we are just giving you a little rest, I will let the listening audience know that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. And we are currently—we just finished listening to the Junior Minister's brief on Tourism. And he will now be proceeding to give us a briefing on the overview of the [Department] of Culture and Sport.

Junior Minister, you may proceed.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I will now move to Head 52. And I will align my Budget Book up with page B-253 while I am at it.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Head 52, the Department of Culture. Department of Culture.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Head 52, page B-253.

The Chairman: And so [the Honourable Junior Minister] will do [the Department of] Sport afterward.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay. That is fine.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I just had them in that order in the brief.

The Chairman: That is fine.

So everybody is okay? We are on page B-242 *[sic]*, and we are just about to discuss—

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Page B-253, B-253, Head 52.

The Chairman: Okay, yes. We can do it that way.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

HEAD 52—DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, I now present the fiscal year 2024/25 Estimates of Revenue

and Expenditure for Head 52, the Department of Culture, which can be found on pages B-253 through B-261 of the Estimates Book.

Madam Chairman, the department's mission is *To develop our creatives, preserve our heritage and celebrate our people.* The department's objectives for 2024/25 are

- to support Bermuda's cultural, heritage and artistic communities and institutions through developmental programmes and partnerships;
- to preserve our heritage by promoting an understanding of Bermuda's cultural identity through education, research, publication and enrichment programmes;
- to celebrate our people and the development of our national identity by curating cultural festivals, public discussions and educational programmes; and
- to serve as stewards of Bermuda's cultural heritage.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Culture administers two programmes and 12 business units. A general summary is contained on page B-254 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year of 2024/25. The total estimate is $2,223,000. This represents a decrease of $332,000, or 18 per cent, of the 2023/24 original budget of $1,891,000.

For the 2024/25 budget year, the Department of Culture is focused on delivering opportunities that will enhance the creative output of Bermudian artists. A major new initiative, the establishment of Maker Spaces for creatives, will be discussed later in this brief. The department will use tools including film projects and workshops as a way of encouraging young Bermudians to learn more about our history and culture, and will provide various platforms to showcase the talents and artistry of our dancers, musicians, writers, Gombeys, artists, actors and tradition-bearers, who carry the torch of keeping our culture vibrant and alive.

Madam Chairman, I will now offer highlights of the accomplishments, programmatic plans and changes in estimates for the business units associated with the Department of Culture.

Business Unit 62000, Grants to Organisations

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Under programme 5202, Cultural Affairs, business unit 62000, Grants to Organisations. Madam Chairman, the total amount budgeted under this business unit for fiscal year 2024/25 is $231,000. This amount reflects a change of $1,000 as compared to the original budget for the financial year 2023/24. The Bermuda Arts Council's grant remains at $117,000 for financial year 2024/25. One of the primary roles of the Bermuda Arts Council is to review applications submitted by individual creatives and organisations for developing artistic projects and further educating themselves about their craft.

In 2023 the Bermuda Arts Council awarded $54,200 in individual and $47,000 in organisational grants. In the 2023/24 financial year, there were 17 recipients of the council's individual grants, including Rory Wilson to assist with film production; Wayne Raynor for his video "One Blood"; Neil Jhay Morris to assist with funding his first art showcase; Helen Zoellner for production of her film, *Sun, Rosé and Romance;* Sinead Simmons for videography of her storytelling project; and support for a number of other creatives. There were also nine organisations that received funding from the council, including Bermuda Donquili, Troika, SJD World, Noire Youth Theatre Company and others.

In addition to the individual and organisational grants that were awarded in the 2023/24 fiscal year, the Bermuda Arts Council also awarded four student scholarships for a total of $20,000. Two students accepted their awards. Daelyn Saint Surin is pursuing a degree at St. Lawrence University in Graphic Design; and Tiko Caines is studying Art and Design at the Bermuda College. The Bermuda Arts Council Awards, set to take place in May, will honour six recipients. Lifetime achievement awards are presented to artists who have created a significant body of original work that is representative of the Bermudian spirit. The Founder Award is presented to those persons who have been pioneers in their respective art form and have been role models for their fellows. The Patron Award is given to those who have been benefactors to the Bermuda arts community.

The department would like to acknowledge the hard work of the Bermuda Arts Council, particularly the new Arts Council Chair, visual artist and graphic designer, Ms. Shanna Hollis.

Madam Chairman, in addition to the fine work of the Bermuda Arts Council, the department recognises the importance of supporting our tangible cultural heritage. Government plays a pivotal role in assisting Bermuda's museums and cultural institutions. In the 2023/24 financial year, the department awarded Heritage grants to the St. David's Islanders and Native Community, and the Bermuda Historical Society regime; the St. George's Historical Society regime; the National Museum of Bermuda; the St. George's Foundation; and the Bermuda Gombey Troupes. The Department of Culture also provided a grant to the Bermuda National Gallery in part for their stewardship of the Watlington Collection of art owned by the Government of Bermuda. The Bermuda National Trust is to assist with the annual Christmas Walkabout, and an additional grant to Warwick Gombeys to assist with the development of a book project being co-written by Mr. Irwin Trott, *Exploring the Gombey Traditions from a Historical and Contemporary Perspective.*

Business Unit 62001, Administration

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the function of this business unit is to provide for the administration and operation of the Department of Culture, which is located on the 3rd floor of the Bermuda Government Administration Building.

Madam Chairman, the allocated budget for the fiscal year of 2024/25 for this business unit is $885,000, as shown on page B-254. This amount reflects an increase of $22,000, or 3 per cent, as compared to the original budget of $863,000 for the fiscal year 2023/24.

Madam Chairman, the allocated budget sustains both programmes for operation, including salaries and wages. The remainder of the budget provides for office supplies, board fees, website maintenance and telephone services. This budget also provides funding for department-wide promotions, specifically social media engagement. The increase in this year's budget can be attributed primarily to salary uplift.

Business Unit 62010, Emancipation and Cultural Festivals

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the total amount for this business unit in financial year 2024/25 is $45,000. This represents an increase of $5,000, or 13 per cent, compared to the original budget of $40,000 allocated in the 2023/24 financial year.

Madam Chairman, this business unit focuses on highlighting the contributions of our African, Caribbean, Azorean, British and St. David's Island Native Community core cultures in alignment with our National Cultural Heritage Policy.

Emancipation Programme: The Department of Culture also offers an annual commemoration of Bermuda's Emancipation through programming that explores and researches the history of enslavement and segregation experienced by Bermudians of African descent. Beyond commemoration, the initiatives of this programme also celebrate our African and Black Bermudians' excellence. The 2023 commemoration signature event featured a documentary entitled "Cup Match: Legacy of Honour" by filmmaker Dr. Dana Selassie of Zyhon International. The film features interviews with those who have been intimately involved with the Cup Match for many years, including Cleveland Foggo, Neil Paynter, Dawn Simmons, Clay Smith, Myra Bristol and Mr. Erwyn Bean.

The theme for the 2023 commemoration was taken from the subtitle of the film, "Legacy of Honour." The calendar of events and lectures, sponsored by the Department of Culture, featured programming by stakeholders including CURB, Titan Express and the Department of Libraries and Archives. The 2024 Emancipation commemoration will feature a film tentatively entitled "Heart of the City" highlighting the cultural and historical importance of Court Street. This film is being developed in collaboration with 14 participants in the Family Centre's Youth Leadership Academy and will satisfy one of the Government's 2023 Throne Speech initiatives.

As a way of enhancing access to our cultural heritage in 2024, the department is also producing a series of audio recordings of Bermuda's literary work with *The History of Mary Prince.* Mary Prince's freedom narrative is recognised as a key historical and literary work, but the world has never heard a Bermudian voice read her words. Working with Bermudian actors and producers, the department will launch this recording both as a serialised podcast and an audio book, meeting the department's publishing and performance measures.

Funding from this business unit will also provide some support toward the 175th anniversary celebration of Portuguese presence in Bermuda.

Business Unit 62020, Heritage Celebrations

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the total amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2024/25 is $273,000. This represents a small increase of $4,000, or 1 per cent, compared to the original budget of $269,000 allocated in 2023/24.

Madam Chairman, the business unit covers the cost of both Heritage Celebrations and the Bermuda Day Parade. Heritage Month 2023 began with the third annual Cultural Conference engaging cultural heritage and art stakeholders and reviewing two years of progress on the department's National Cultural Heritage Policy. This was held at the legendary Spinning Wheel entertainment complex and engaged cultural stakeholders as well as vendors and community members from the North East Hamilton economic empowerment zone.

Bermuda Day participants truly showed their resilience in 2023, choosing to continue to dance, float and march despite torrential (that is putting it mildly) rain, as we celebrated the theme *A Bermuda Renaissance.* Our true Bermudian spirit shone despite the downpour where we saw Gombeys in T-shirts using umbrellas as hatchets and primary school [children] pulling box-carts, creating a conjunction with the Department of Culture and the Department of Works.

The Department of Culture partnered with the Bermuda Foundation in 2023 to create the Bermuda Day Fund, a way for the corporate sector and private individuals to donate to groups and participants in the Bermuda Day Parade. This fund helped to offset the significant cost of parade participation such as trucking, costumes and float supplies. The support from several corporate and individual donors, including Skyport, the Bermuda Foundation, Egham, Bermuda Limited, Mosaic Insurance Holdings Ltd., provided the means for as many members of the community to be integrated into the Bermuda Day Parade as possible.

There were 50 enrolled participants in the Bermuda Day Parade, although not all were able to go out in the rain. Those who persevered attracted a vibrant

crowd of enthusiastic spectators who remained camped in their spots despite the weather. The high spirits of spectators and participants alike made this parade one they will never, ever, *ever* forget!

The theme for Heritage Month and the Bermuda Day 2024 is *Culture Equals Energy.* The department also is excited for the increased community participation with the Bermuda Day Parade and is presently actively reaching out to stakeholders for sign-ups as well as corporate sectors for their support of the Bermuda Day fund. The department has launched a media campaign, *100 Days of Energy*, which showcases behind-the-scenes footage of various groups and organisations as they prepare for the upcoming parade.

Business Unit 62030, Cultural Education

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2024/25 is $37,000. This represents an increase of $33,000, or 825 per cent, when compared to the original budget for the financial year 2023/24 of $4,000. The increase in this business unit can be attributed to the costs relating to the coordinating of the department's annual Cultural Conference and the stakeholders engaged in the event that had been added to the business unit.

Madam Chairman, for the fiscal year 2023/24, the department re-introduced the Tradition Bearer in Public Schools programme with a new focus on middle school students. Our department worked along with the Department of Education and the tradition bearer Milton Hill in the construction of a full-sized Bermuda fitted dinghy with M3 students at Whitney. In past years the programme has been popular with the educating of our students on the traditions of woodcraft with Milton Hill, banana-doll making with Ronnie Chameau, Bermuda Gombey regalia with Janice Warner and Bermuda kite-building with Eugene O'Connor. Funding has been allocated in the 2024/25 budget to continue this programme with the focus on the primary schools.

Madam Chairman, in 2024/25 we have transformed the department's annual Cultural Conference "Eggnog and Dialogue" events to this business unit from business unit 62010, Emancipation and Cultural Festivals. This is in recognition that both events are focused on the education, support and promotion of Bermuda's cultural stakeholders.

Scheduled for May 5, 2024, the fourth annual Cultural Conference is an event that will fortify and strengthen connections between Bermuda's cultural champions featuring panel speakers, small group discussions and performances from our brightest talent. The Cultural Conference will mark the start of Heritage Month and our celebration of *Culture Equals Energy.* This is also an occasion for the department to report on its progress of the National Cultural Heritage Policy 2021–2026 and unveil plans for the upcoming year. Finally, the department will showcase the diverse projects supported by its Heritage grant and Art Council grants.

(Madam Chairman, I am just taking a little water at this time.)

The Chairman: And so I will take this time to remind the listening audience that we are here in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Today we are listening to the heads for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Right now the Junior Minister is reading the brief on the Department of Culture. And we have remaining the Department of Sport and Recreation.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am moving on.

Business Unit 62050, National Heroes Day

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, this is on page B-254. Madam Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2024/25 is $26,000. This represents a decrease of $4,000, or 13 per cent, when compared to the original budget in financial year 2023/24 of $30,000. The decrease in this business unit is based on minor cost savings achieved through different forms of advertising and air service providers.

Madam Chairman, funds associated with this business unit are used to formally honour and commemorate a new National Hero when one is named and to celebrate our existing National Heroes on an annual basis. In financial year 2023/24, in addition to the public awareness campaign, the department organised a series of musical tribute showcases for our heroes also aligned with our Premier's Concert. Celebrating our National Heroes, the concert featured performances and presentations from Stephan Johnstone and Marq Rodriguez, the Bermuda Philharmonic Society, Shayla Gift, Janita Burke and Abimbola Bademosi, Hana Bushara, Layla Williams, the Royal Bermuda Regiment Band and Dakari Love.

In financial year 2024/25 the department will again host a tribute concert celebrating our National Heroes.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Excuse me, Junior Minister, if I may just interrupt.

I would like to acknowledge that the former Opposition Leader, MP Cole Simons, is in the room. And I just wanted to acknowledge and say hello.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I join in. In the words of the Honourable Deputy Speaker, Mr. Cole Hadley Simons.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Business Unit 62060, Promotion of the Arts

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2024/25 is $74,000. This represents a decrease of $24,000, or 24 per cent, when compared to the original budget for financial year 2023/24 of $98,000. The decrease in this business unit can be attributed to costs of coordinating and hosting the 2023 Literary Awards Ceremony in the financial year 2023/24.

Bermuda Literary Awards. In February 2024 the department celebrated six Bermuda Literary Awards which recognised the literary accomplishments of Bermudians who published works between 2018 and 2023. The Bermuda Literary Awards were inaugurated by the Bermuda Government in 1999 to honour literary achievements by Bermuda's writers and are administered by the Department of Culture once every five years. After an open call for the public to nominate works, the department worked with a committee of esteemed readers who selected the winners from a list of over 30 nominated books.

The winners include the following:

- Dr. Quito Swan, who won the Dr. Eva Hodgson Prize for Non-Fiction for *Pauulu's Diaspora: Black Internationalism and Environmental Justice*. In 2024, the Award was named to honour activist, union leader and educator Dr. Eva Hodgson, who passed away in 2020. The department recognises that Dr. Hodgson's writings including the books *Second Class Citizens, First Class Men* and *A Storm in a Teacup* forever changed Bermuda's cultural landscape.
- Lucinda Spurling won the prize for Drama and Screenwriting for *Journey of the Shaman.*
- Jonathan Land Evans won the prize for Cultural Merit for *Bermuda in Painted Representation*.
- Dr. Paul Maddern won the Cecile N. Musson Prize for Poetry for "The Tipping Line." This marks the third time that Dr. Maddern has won the prize for poetry.
- The judges recognised Andra Simons's book *Turtlemen* with an Honourable Mention for Poetry.
- Elizabeth Jones won the prize for Children's and Young Adult Fiction for her young adult novel *A Dark Iris*.
- Dr. Angela Barry won the Brian Burland Prize for Fiction for her novel *The Drowned Forest.* This marks the third time that Dr. Barry has won the prize for fiction.

A Founder's Award is also granted to recognise seminal works of the Bermuda literary canon. This year the Bermuda Literary Awards Committee recognised National Hero Mary Prince's *A History of Mary Prince* with the Founder's prize.

At the end of that road, the department hosted a ceremony to honour recipients and to honour their accomplishments with readings from their written work and a musical performance by a young, talented violinist.

Writer in residence. Madam Chairman, the Department of Culture supports programming to assist in the development of our literary arts. With that aim in mind, the department hosts an annual Writer in Residence Workshop focusing on a variety of genres. Madam Chairman, in September and October of 2023, the department held a mini-workshop, "Did I Scare You? Spooky Story Telling Workshop"—

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I am just making sure you are listening. I might be auditioning, Madam Chairman, you never know.

[This workshop was] for the local writers and actors, led by accomplished storyteller Rajai Denbrook. This workshop guided writers of all skill levels in a journey from blank page to stage. The participants explored what makes a story suspenseful and how to keep their audience on the edge of their seats through their writing, as well as using stagecraft and theatrical techniques. One of the original stories crafted in the workshop was performed by the Culture Department's Bermudian Heartbeats event, "Gather 'Round the Fire: Spooky Tales for the Whole Family" in October.

In financial year 2024/25 the department will build on the success—

The Chairman: Excuse me, Junior Minister.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, ma'am.

The Chairman: May I just interrupt, please? I apologise.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: I would like to recognise that the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, the Senator Owen Darrell, is in the House as well. And I would like to acknowledge his presence. Thank you.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you for that, Madam Chairman. And we certainly make mention and recognise the presence of the Honourable Minister.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I will continue on with the "Spooky Tales for the Whole Family" in October. In financial year 2024/25 the department will build on the success of the programme by hosting an award-winning author from overseas conducting an extensive workshop series for local writers, as well as two mini-workshops.

Business Unit 62070, Folklife Bermuda

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2024/25 is $64,000. This represents an increase of $1,000, or 2 per cent, when compared to the original budget of $63,000 for financial year 2023/24. This increase can be attributed to the increase in cost of goods and services required to carry out these programmes. Activities that come under this business unit include the Bermudian Heartbeats Lecture Series and the Cultural Apprenticeship Programme.

Madam Chairman, the Bermudian Heartbeats Lecture Series celebrated its 20th anniversary. This dynamic series of lectures and events was founded by a visionary group of people, including Bermuda National Hero Dr. Pauulu Kamarakafego, to focus on Bermudian history. Originally the Historical Heartbeats, evolved under the stewardship of the Bermuda Heartbeats Committee into a series of events that explores all facets of Bermudian culture and history. Using non-traditional locations and varied methods of presentation, this series creates experiences that are both educational and memorable.

Financial year 2023/24 was a robust year for the lecture series with a total of 12 events held in June 2023 through to February 2024. In June we drove deep into the history of the Black families in St. George's with a lecture from Dr. Michael Jarvis at St. George's Cricket Club. In July and August the exploration of Black Bermudian history continued with two panel discussions, one comprising historians and one comprising Bermudian creatives. The panellists discussed questions of how Bermuda can honour the lives of Black Bermudians whose stories may have been lost and memorialise the sites of their trauma and resistance. In October the department celebrated the spooky season with its annual family storytelling events in the atmosphere of the Aquarium Hall of the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo.

The Bermudian Heartbeats also spread musical joy through the holiday with the brand-new concert series, Carolling Through the Parishes, partnering with the Bermuda Regiment Band and the Corps of Drums of the Salvation Army. And Bermudian Heartbeats held six holiday music concerts across the Island, including on the grounds of the Cabinet Building at Town Square, St. George's and Death Valley, and other very notable locations. In keeping with the mission of the department, the new season has already commenced, and it follows the calendar year rather than the budget year.

In February the department held its second panel discussion on the history and future of Bermuda's social clubs, this year focusing on central parishes including the historic Leopard's Club and Devonshire Recreation Club. Madam Chairman, as part of this programme, the Department of Culture will feature events such as boat tours exploring four centuries in the Great Sound, a celebration of St. David's history and culture in partnership with St. David's Islanders and Native community, and the expansion of the Carolling Through the Parishes programme.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Culture offers the Cultural Apprenticeship programme to support the preservation of cultural knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. The principal objective of the programme is to foster the growth of a younger generation of tradition bearers in Bermuda. The programme pairs a tradition bearer with interested apprentices. The department was delighted to coordinate two cultural apprenticeships in financial year 2023/24. BioQuest, powered by CariGenetics, partnered with tradition bearer Myles Darrell, who had been working with apprentice Sierra Pacheco to train her in researching and producing the first high-quality referenced genome of Bermuda's national tree, the Bermuda Cedar. Following Sierra's training, she will in turn train Bermuda College students in identifying pure from hybrid trees to collect and process samples.

The department also partnered with Friends of St. Peter's Church to offer apprenticeship training to help shift the repair and maintenance of the iconic St. George's structure into Bermudian hands. Tradition bearer Melvyn Lee of clockmakers Thwaites and Reed Clockmakers worked on St. Peter's Church clock preservation and restoration project with apprentices Ian Birch and Phillip Anderson, Jr. The department looks forward to connecting more apprentices with the master cultural artisans in the upcoming financial year.

Business Unit 62080, Research and Publication

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: The amount budgeted for this business unit for the financial year 2024/25 is $73,000. This represents a decrease of $2,000, or 3 per cent, when compared to the original budget for the 2023/24 year of $75,000. This decrease in this business unit can be attributed to the savings in the cost of promotion for these programmes.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Culture prides itself in developing our creatives, preserving our heritage and celebrating our people. We feel that the "Gold Bermudians" film series represents a fusion of all three arms of the department's mission. Madam Chairman, in 2023 the department launched a documentary titled "Gold Bermudians: Profiles in Excellence" which captured stories of Bermudians who have excelled on the international stage. Part 1 of the series featured history-making Olympic diver Katura Horton-Perinchief; musician Lance Hayward; Olympic boxing bronze

medallist Clarence Hill; and Fraggle Rock creator Michael Frith. The Department of Culture will continue to celebrate the outstanding achievements of Bermudians in the 2024/25 financial year by continuing with the series.

Business Unit 62180, Special Projects

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2024/25 is $300,000. There were no funds allocated for this business unit during the financial year 2023/24. Typically, the funds allocated for this business unit are used to support special cultural projects. In alignment with the 2023 Throne Speech, the Department of Culture will develop Maker Spaces, a place where artists can paint, musicians can practice, actors can rehearse and creatives can collaborate with each other. This will provide a hub where creatives can work on projects together, and those who currently do not have an affordable place to practice can work on honing their craft.

Programme 5203, Community Services

Business Unit 62100, Uncover the Arts Programme

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the allocated funds for the financial year 2024/25 for this business unit are $91,000. This amount represents a decrease of $15,000, or 14 per cent, when compared to the original budget estimate of $106,000.

Madam Chairman, the funds in financial year 2023/24 associated with this business unit were used to support musicians' public performances known as "Creatives Live!" The programme provides the benefit of giving our artists the opportunity to perform. Some of the performances included

- Working Title at the Warwick Workman's Club;
- the WallStreet Band at the St. George's Cricket Club;
- Arijahknow Live Wires and the Kings Band at the Devonshire Recreation Club;
- the Tino Martinez Quartet down there at Harrington Workmen's Club; and
- the department supported the Chewstick Foundation with open mic events at the Blue Waters Anglers Club.

Madam Chairman, in financial year 2024/25 the department will continue to build upon the success of the Creatives Live! programme by again hosting our Creatives Live! evening concert series at sports and social clubs and will continue sponsoring open mic events with our cultural partners.

Madam Chairman, in the financial year 2023/24 the department hosted their second creative cultural lab professional development workshops geared toward artists and creatives. In these creatives cultural lab workshops creatives were given tangible tools to further develop their artistry and cultural industries. Workshops covered details such as

- how to best print and frame visual artworks, from Loris Toppan and Nzingha Ming of the Bermuda Society of Arts;
- how to start a podcast, Keamon Woolaston and Kevina Lorae;
- how to build your creative portfolios and résumés, with Gavin "Djata" Smith; and
- how to host an event, with Patrina "Powergirl" Paynter.

There were also information sessions that covered details on applying for Bermuda Arts Council funding; ideas on budgeting for large-scale events and tips for using free graphic design software. Hands-on creative sessions included

- tackling writers block, with Matthew Johnston;
- acting on camera, with Chardonne Paynter;
- mixing board basics, with Eugene Dean; and
- "Seeing Life Cinematically," with Dion "the Creative" Easton.

From these workshops Bermudian creatives will be able to connect with their peers, improve their skills and crafts, and even learn things that could help them monetise their passion for the arts. Funding has been in the 2024/25 budget to continue to develop these worthwhile programmes to support our creatives and partner them with industry mentors through their growth.

Business Unit 62210, Gombey Festival

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the amount allocated for this business unit in 2024/25 is $124,000. This represents an increase of $11,000, or 10 per cent, when compared to the original budget estimate of $113,000 for financial year 2023/24. This difference is due to the increasing cost year-over-year in infrastructure that had not been accounted for since the pandemic.

The Bermuda Gombey Festival. Madam Chairman, in 2023 the Bermuda Gombey Festival *regrettably* had to cancel after being postponed due to bad weather on four separate occasions. Alternate indoor venues were explored, but it was determined in conjunction with the captains of the respective Gombey troupes that the indoor spaces would not accommodate the same number of people or give the same festival atmosphere. This otherwise annual tradition has been held to provide exposure and education to the folk art and traditions of the Bermuda Gombey and the wider influences from across the Diaspora.

Madam Chairman, as part of the Gombey Festival budget, the Department of Culture has created a short film directed by Bermudian filmmaker Qian Dickinson ["Not a Generic Gombey: Art, Consumption, and Intellectual Property"], highlighting the work of the Bermuda Gombey Council toward the Gombey unit. This is part of the ongoing work that the department is

undertaking with the Bermuda Gombeys to support the evolution and preservation of their cultural identity.

Although the festival did not take place, the Chewstick Foundation continued their "Gombey in the Gardens" mural on the Jack King Building in the Botanical Gardens with a tribute to Gombey Evolution, marking the fifth troupe depicted in this ongoing series sponsored by the Bermuda Department of Culture.

Madam Chairman, the allocated budget for financial year 2024/25 will finance the cost of event infrastructure, financial awards to participating Gombey troupes, other participating local dance groups and other weekend events related to the Gombey art form. Madam Chairman, there is no change to employee numbers, with the full-time equivalents remaining at eight as found on page B-256.

Madam Chairman, this concludes my presentation on the budgetary allocation for financial year 2024/25 for Head 52, the Department of Culture.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister.

And while the Junior Minister takes a break, I would like to just let our listening audience know that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. This morning we have been listening to Junior Minister MP Kim Swan, and he has given an overview of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. He has given his brief on Tourism, he has given his brief on Culture, and now he will be beginning his brief on Head 20, Sport and Recreation.

And I would also like to acknowledge that the Minister is also in the Chamber, Senator Owen Darrell.

Junior Minister, you may proceed when you are ready.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam Chairman. And I am on my final head, having done Headquarters [Head 71] as well.

HEAD 20—SPORT AND RECREATION

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, I will now present the financial year 2024/25 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 20, the Department of Sport and Recreation, which can be found on pages B-246 to B-252 of the Estimates Book. The mission of the Department of Sport and Recreation is *To develop Sport and Recreation through our services and to celebrate the accomplishments of our people*. Madam Chairman, the objectives are as follows:

- Provide funding/support for National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs).
- Manage and maintain government sports and recreation facilities.
- Provide recreation programmes for school-aged children.
- Prepare and manage the budget to ensure intended deadlines are met.
- Meet and fulfil the objective of the department's National Sports Policy.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Sport and Recreation administers six programmes and 15 business units for which a general summary can be found on pages B-247 and B-248 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2024/25. The budget allocation for the Department of Sport and Recreation in fiscal year 2023/24 is $8,334,648, a decrease of $2,024,116, or 22 per cent, as shown on page B-248.

Madam Chairman, I will now discuss the individual programmes under Head 20.

Programme 2001, Administration

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the budget allocation for business unit 30045, General Administration, is $865,806. The allocated funds provide for the administration and operations of the Sport and Recreation Department's Headquarters, which is located in Craig Appin House situated on 8 Wesley Street in the City of Hamilton. In addition, the administrative section provides administrative support for five programmes within the department and is responsible for monitoring departmental spending to ensure that policies and procedures are adhered to in achieving efficiency and effectiveness.

Programme 2002, Sports Development

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Madam Chairman, the Sports Programmes are operated through business unit 30055. The budget allocation is $452,261, an increase of $24,286, or a 6 per cent increase. This increase represents funding allocated for the development of a foundation programme to assist children in the improvement of their motor and functional skills in preparation for sports participation. The initiative is goal 1.2 of the National Sports Policy. The residual funds in business unit 30055, Sports Programmes, include salaries, $282,261 for salaries, and training, recreational supplies and other funds to ensure the efficient and effective administration of the Sports Programmes unit of the department.

Madam Chairman, business unit 30065 . . .

Madam Chairman, I saw you transitioning to a new Chairman. Did you want to do that at this time?

The Chairman: Yes. Since you have taken a break, we will.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[Pause]

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon to the listening audience and Honourable Members in the Chamber.

We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Honourable Kim Swan, Junior Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport is giving his brief.

[Honourable Junior Minister], you may proceed.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, on programme 2002, Sports Development. Mr. Chairman, the Sports Programmes unit is operated through business unit 30055. The budget allocation is $452,261, an increase of $24,286, or 6 per cent. The increase represents the funding allocation for the development of a foundation programme to assist children in the improvement of their motor and functional skills in preparation for sports participation. The initiative is goal 1.2 of the National Sports Policy. The residual funds in business unit 30055, Sports Programmes, include $282,261 in salaries for training, recreational supplies and other funds to ensure the efficient and effective administration of the Sports Programmes unit of the department.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30065, Sports Investments, is dedicated to highlighting how the Bermuda Government invests in the community through sport. In 2022 the National Sports Policy was updated with a five-year promise to raise the value of sport with a new vision that "Sport Matters." To assist with the National Sports Policy, business unit 30065 has been allocated a total of $2,094,000. Funds, Mr. Chairman, in this business unit are allocated to investment to National Sports Governing Bodies to develop sports. The increased funding also offers additional assistance to elite athletes through special grants and provides increased free access to the National Sports Centre for national athletes and teams in advance of international competition.

Allocating extra funding to sports programmes will broaden the exposure of more Bermudians to sports, foster an increased participation and contribute to the overall health of our Island. Additionally, funding has been provided for the Bermuda Olympic Association and the Bermuda Sport Anti-Doping Authority (BSADA) which is a statutory authority mandated to enable Bermuda's athletes to compete internationally.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year 2024/25, the Department of Sport and Recreation, in partnership with our recognised National Sports Governing Bodies, intends to continue focusing on all aspects of sports development and to ensure National Sports Policy goals and objectives are met.

Programme 2003, Sports Incentives and Awards

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: The estimate for business unit 30030, Athletic Awards, is $410,000, an increase of $100,000. This represents the allocated funding for the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme. The increase in funding provides additional assistance to elite athletes whose special grants from the Department of Sports and Outstanding Performance Incentive Programme and the Bermuda Olympic Association also received funding from the Athletic Awards business unit for their Elite Athlete programme which they manage. With 2024 being an Olympic year, we must support those elite athletes in their pursuit of qualification.

Mr. Chairman, the business unit also provides funding for the National Junior Athlete Sponsorship Programme [NJASP]. The NJASP provides encouragement and development opportunities for Bermudian junior athletes between the ages of 15 and 19 who clearly show commitment, promise and achievement in their respective sport. The funding will support our junior athletes with immediate training and competitions that will assist in their development to become future elite athletes, representing Bermuda at major festivals.

Programme 2004, Sports Facilities Management

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: The budget estimate for business unit 30060, Sports Facilities Administration, is $1,572,910. There is an increase of $259,841, or 20 per cent, over 2023/24. Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for the business unit 30060 supports salaries for the Property Manager and wages for the groundsperson, as well as vehicle repairs and maintenance. This unit also supports the National Sports Centre.

The National Sports Centre provides internationally certified facilities for sports training and competitions, as well as a venue for recreation and entertainment. The National Sports Centre stands as a cornerstone of our country's sporting infrastructure, playing a pivotal role in fostering athletic development and promoting healthy lifestyles among our citizenry. The designated funding allocated to support the operation underscores the Government's unwavering commitment to the advancement of sports and recreational activity.

Mr. Chairman, the National Sports Centre's renewable energy project is nearing completion. As previously reported, the renewable energy project is a high priority for the National Sports Centre, as it remains a viable option for the sustainability of the facility. There have been delays in the activation of the micro-grid system due to challenges in sourcing a remaining component and associated effects on the shipping to the Island. And we can now confirm that these components have been sourced and are being shipped to Bermuda. The tentative arrival date of the shipment is March 2024.

Mr. Chairman, I can confirm that in addition to the various materials being placed on the back order and impacting the completion of this project, costs have risen for certain items. The rise in cost is not unique to the project and is centred around factors that have impacted on the global cost of building supplies. A

sustained global rise in the cost of certain materials coincides with the commencement of this project.

On a positive note, Mr. Chairman, the lighting programme, which is part of the renewable energy project, has been completed. The National Sports Centre has successfully replaced and reset all light poles at the stadium with cost-efficient LED lights. Additionally, I am pleased to report that the one part of the power grid that operates in the north field of the pavilion and its storage building is now operational.

Mr. Chairman, the remaining budget for this Sports Facility Management programme is 30060, Operating Expenses, which will provide the unit with materials, tools and supplies to operate efficiently.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30075, the WMC Preece Softball Park, is allocated $143,240. This allocation reflects the wage for two industrial staff and funding to maintain and operate the softball park.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30080, W. E. R. Joell Tennis Stadium, is allocated $446,461, an increase of $24,984, or 6 per cent [over the 2023/24 budget]. This business unit provides funding for salaries and wages totalling $350,072. The residual funds will be used to maintain and operate the facility that houses six tennis courts and eight pickleball courts.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30090, the [Bermuda] Motorsport Park is allocated $8,000. There is no change in [the allocation for] this business unit from 2023/24. The funds are used for insurance, maintenance and water at the Motorsport Park.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30390, Sports Community Fields, is allocated $47,000. There is no change from 2023/24. The funds for this business unit are allocated for the maintenance and operation of the community fields under the department's remit.

Programme 2007, Camping

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for the department's Camping Programme is $971,369, an increase of $30,988. This increase represents the salary uplift. Business unit 30150, [Camping at] Darrell's Island, has been allocated $390,226, an increase of $7,907, or 2.5 per cent. Business unit 30160, Paget Island, has been allocated $269,676, an increase of $80,033, or 3 per cent. Business unit 30165, Ports Island, has been allocated $109,400, an increase of $1,853, or 3 per cent. Business unit 30170, White's Island, has been allocated $91,791, an increase of $2,565, or 2 per cent increase. The allocated budget for Camping provides for the staffing operations and administration and includes 10 full-time staff who maintain the facilities and marine equipment.

Programme 2008, Recreational Programmes

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for the Recreational Programmes is $1,323,600, an increase of $500,000. This increase aims to assist working-class parents by addressing the wait list and alleviating the stress of finding safe and affordable summer services for their children. The department will expand availability at public summer camps and collaborate with private camp operators to secure additional spaces. The funding will see an increase in the number of obtainable places for students in the Summer Day Camp programme.

Mr. Chairman, this programme supports approximately 1,700 school-age children and is provided in various schools throughout the Island. Approximately 150 part-time workers deliver this programme, supervised by qualified educators. There is also a special needs programme that provides care for children with exceptionalities. The camps in programme, 2008, are for preschool-, primary school- and middle school-age children.

Performance Measures

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Chairman, the performance measures for the Department of Sport and Recreation can be found on pages B-250 to B-252. For business unit 30030, Athletic Awards, 17 junior athletes and six NSGBs received awards. An average of $2,939 was awarded to each participant. This year saw Nicholas Pilgrim become the second recipient of the Flora Duffy Award and was awarded $10,000 toward his pursuit of excellence in the sport of Triathlon.

Mr. Chairman, the department requires all National Sports Governing Bodies to be certified. To date, 25 are registered with the department. Eighteen of the registered National Sports Governing Bodies have received funds to assist with the development of their sports which include junior programmes, coaching and administrative development, and high-level performances.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30075, WMC Preece Softball Park, we exceeded our target of 220 persons. This increase is directly attributed to the recent revamp and overhaul of the facility, making it safer and more appealing to all. We recommend the friendly staff of the softball diamond and Softball Bermuda for their hard work in revitalising softball as a sport of choice in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30080, the W. E. R. Joell Tennis Stadium, the average monthly use has increased up to 275 persons using the facility each month. This increase was due to the installation of new lights for the facility and the addition of four pickleball courts.

Mr. Chairman, business units 30150, 30160, 30165 and 30170, Camping Facilities, continue to see a rise in the number of campers. The programme exceeded its performance target of 2,100. The camping section received increased requests for camping facilities, often having some facilities sold out during the first week of application. The department is very pleased to be able to serve the country all year round by providing

safe, fun local recreation areas, especially during the holidays.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 30180, Recreational Programmes, there was an increase in the camping participants from 1,600 to 1,900. This increase was due to the rise in demand for affordable, safe camps for students. The user satisfaction rate was 87 per cent, with 86 per cent of the users willing to use the programme again.

From the evidence of our performance measures, Mr. Chairman, the Department of Sport and Recreation was able to have a successful year, delivering valuable and very well-received programmes to the community.

Year in Review

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the year past has been exceptionally positive for Sport and Recreation. We have consistently met and even exceeded our target goals outlined in the National Sports Policy. Our significant achievement was the increase in funding which has enabled us to make substantial investments in our athletes and teams. Through the Elite Athlete funding, we have awarded over $90,000 to 16 student athletes and an additional $20,000 to three teams. This direct support has provided invaluable resources to our elite athletes and teams, empowering them to pursue excellence in their respective sport.

Mr. Chairman, these investments not only recognise the dedication and talent of our athletes, but also reflect our commitment to nurturing sporting excellence and promoting a culture of achievement within Bermuda. By providing financial support and resources, we are equipping our athletes and teams with tools that they can [use to] compete at the highest level on the international stage.

Mr. Chairman, this year we are proud to announce that eight athletes have been recognised and awarded a total of $40,000 through the Outstanding Athlete Performance Awards. This marks the largest number of athletes. Among these exceptional athletes, notable are the following:

- Jessica Lewis, remarkable Gold Medal performance in the Parapan Games;
- Madelyn Moore, impressive Silver Medal at the CAC Games; and
- Conor White's outstanding achievements of medalling in both the Pan Am [Pan American] Games and CAC [Central American and Caribbean] Games.

These athletes have not only demonstrated exceptional skill and dedication, but also brought immense pride to our nation through their extended performances on the international stage. Achievements well served as a shining example of the remarkable talent and potential of the Bermuda sporting community.

Mr. Chairman, furthermore, this success underscores the importance of the effectiveness of investing in our athletes. It exemplifies the tangible return on investment, highlighting the impact of supporting and nurturing talent within our sporting community to prepare for international competition, which can be extremely expensive.

In recognition of this, funding was allocated to ensure that National Sports Governing Bodies have free access to government facilities. Mr. Chairman, the department met with the National Sports Centre's team and created a term of [use] agreement to allow National Sports Governing Bodies two months of free access before recognised international events. The National Sports Governing Bodies of sanshou, triathlon, athletics, rugby, football, cricket and hockey all took advantage of this initiative and benefited from having this availability they would have not been able to afford.

In October 2023, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Owen K. Darrell, Senator Owen K. Darrell, the Minister, joined Kimale Evans, President of the Bermuda Netball Association, and Tahkeisha Welch, Secretary of the Bermuda Netball Association, to re-open the Bernard Park Netball Courts after the closure for over nine months. This decision—

The Chairman: Honourable Member. Honourable Member.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: We are going to break here for lunch, please.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: If you give me three minutes, I will be finished . . . Okay. Thank you.

The Chairman: It is 12:35.

Deputy, take us to lunch, please.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Chairman, I do move that we adjourn for lunch until 2:05.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Well, we have lost a few minutes. I do not want to deny Members their lunch. So 2:05 pm.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:35 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:05 pm

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

MINISTRY OF TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT

HEAD 20—SPORT AND RECREATION

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: For the listening public and the Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Honourable Kim Swan, Junior Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, is concluding his brief.

Honourable Member, please continue.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, as I conclude, let me go to the W. E. R. Joell Tennis Stadium upgrade and maintenance plan, which was initiated for health and safety reasons due to increased use at the stadium. Tennis courts 1 to 3 were resurfaced, as the surfaces had exceeded their lifespan, closing games with the players. Additional lights were installed on these tennis courts to enhance visibility. Furthermore, new lights were added to courts 4 and 5, enabling both tennis and pickleball to be played at night as these courts previously lacked lighting and relied on daylight for play. The practice wall area was repurposed into pickleball courts, transforming these low-usage areas into one of high demand.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Sport and Recreation remains committed to pursuing and achieving the target goals outlined in the National Sports Policy. We are guided by the principle that *Sport Matters.* As we look forward to the next budget cycle, we are excited about the future of sports.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of the dedicated staff of the Department of Sport and Recreation for their tireless efforts in advancing amateur sport and recreation for all residents in Bermuda. Their commitment and passion contribute significantly to enhancing the quality of life for our community. Additionally, I want to acknowledge the remarkable contribution of our sportsmen and sportswomen. Their dedication, perseverance and achievements serve as a source of inspiration for others, motivating individuals of all ages to pursue their true potential and strive to excellence in their chosen endeavours.

Mr. Chairman, together through the collective efforts of the department staff, the National Sports Governing Bodies, athlete stakeholders and most importantly the supporters, we will continue to forge a culture of health, wellness and sportsmanship in Bermuda. I am deeply appreciative for their ongoing commitment and commendable contributions to our community.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the presentation for the fiscal year 2024/25 budgetary allocations for Head 22, Department of Sport and Recreation, and concludes the presentation under these heads of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Kim Swan, Junior Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport has finished his briefs. And now I open the floor for any other Members who would like to ask questions.

The Chair recognises Honourable Member from constituency 12, Craig Cannonier.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And good afternoon to colleagues and to the public.

Just as sort of housekeeping, I would like to say that because the Ministry has been moved and consolidated with Culture and Sport, still being Shadow of Tourism, I will just lead off with the tourism aspect here and allow the more substantive Shadow Minister for Sport and Culture to follow up. So that is why I am leading off here.

Let me first say to the Tourism team, thank you so much to Tracy Berkeley and to her whole team on the fantastic work that they have been doing. I have in the past talked about the speed of things, and they have been diligently at work. I remember when Tracy took over, some controversy there. But I must say I am glad that she is there.

I will get into my question period as we look over to page B-242 and through to B-246. Mr. Chairman, it was a bit difficult at first to follow because Tourism has not been highlighted in this way in the Budget Book for the last two years. So when I was looking at Headquarters, it was a bit confusing at first. Because in those numbers are also included Culture and Sport. But yet when you look at the employee numbers, I am going to be asking some questions about that because I am still not quite sure how the separation is under Headquarters and how it includes Tourism.

I will go over first of all to page B-243, Mr. Chairman, under the Department Objectives, and you will see right there the two highlighted objectives really pertain to Culture and Sport. However, Tourism falls under that. So I was just curious as to exactly then what is the Minister's role? And what are the objectives that would fit under here that would apply to the Ministry of Tourism in and of itself? Being that we do have Culture and Sport represented, I am sure that there must be some department objectives that would have been outlined under Tourism as well. So hopefully, the [Junior] Minister can outline those and the role that he plays in conjunction with or in correlation to Tourism itself as an Authority.

So if I were to lead off from there, there were two main highlights that I heard from the Junior

Minister, but two things did stand out of importance. If we look at what the Premier said in his Statement, he said that [the grant to the Tourism Authority] "has been reduced and funding has been redirected towards increased funding in other priority areas." That was on page 23 of his general Budget Statement. And then when I look at the numbers for Tourism, I also recognise that, since the 2020/21 budget for Tourism, it has declined now to a grant of $16,540,000, which you will find over in page C-20, which is a whopping $6 million less of a grant.

And so I was wondering whether or not the Junior Minister felt that this was ample in order for Tourism to get us to where we need to be. Understanding the numbers here, I also recognise that our cousins down to the south are outpacing us when it comes to their contributions to Tourism. But in fact, we are declining more and more and more. So the question in there is, for the Junior Minister, as a board member of the Tourism Authority, does he believe that this decline of $16 million is adequate enough for the Ministry to really do its job to get us back on our feet?

Mr. Chairman, you have seen already—Sorry?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: The grant. No, I said on page C-20 the grant is $16 million, and that has been reduced since 2020/21. That is, $16 million less than. And I also recognise that I am trying to answer them, Mr. Chairman.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

So just to be clear for the Junior Minister, if he turns over to page C-20, he will see at the very top there, Tourism Authority Grant is programme 6835. It is $16,540,000. And my question to him, as a Tourism Board member, does he believe that this is adequate enough for us to get back to pre-pandemic numbers?

Now, we did hear cruise ships got back to pre-pandemic numbers. They are in fact doing fine. But air arrivals are still lagging, and we will get to that part as well. So does he believe? I mean, he is the Junior Tourism Minister.

I think the other question would be, to me, Does he think that that is a bit of a conflict of interest? Because he is not only the Junior Tourism Minister, but he is also on the board. So when there is a conflict, who is he speaking on behalf of? Is it the Tourism [Authority] board? Or it the Tourism [Ministry]? So if he could answer that.

Now, the other thing is, Does the Minister believe that this is a setback for the Tourism Authority of this less-$6 million grant?

One of the other questions I have is with the fees. I believe that they have increased their fees, especially because they have got so many more cruise ship passengers. But when you look at air arrivals, the uptick when you look at the other quarters of the past years, the uptick seems to be about a 25 per cent uptick, which is good. I mean, we are getting somewhere. It is pointing in the right direction. My concern is that with the fees that they have gained, the new fees that they have gained, can they compare the new fees that they gained from this past year, and can they tell us what they anticipate for the new fees coming up for this new fiscal budget year? What is the difference?

If I do some quick calculation, the Tourism Authority is still not going to be in a position that I believe . . . having talked to the Authority a couple of years ago and coming forward they are still struggling when it comes to financing to be able to do what they want to do.

The next question that I have in mind, on page B-244, this is under Headquarters, of course. But the employee numbers at the very bottom. Because this is under Headquarters, I am assuming that the 12 has to do with Tourism. Just Tourism alone? Because this is under Headquarters. And typically under Headquarters it will be a total value for all of them, Tourism, Culture and Sport. But if you could answer me whether or not that is the actual case that the 12 on page B-244 actually is solely for Tourism. I know that unit number 81065 certainly would be, because it is under regulatory and policy. And we heard a little from the Junior Minister about that. But I am still not sure about administration.

I thought that the Tourism Authority had more numbers, far more employees than the eight for administration and four who handle the regulatory policy. Can you clarify that for me? What are the total numbers for the Tourism Authority, and how does that reflect with these numbers that I see on page B-244?

I am going to flip back to page B-242 and at the very top, current expenditure, Head 71, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport Headquarters. The Junior Minister actually did outline the $19 million that you see in the 2024/25 estimate. But what I was not really clear about was . . . I know that we were coming out of COVID-19. The 2022/23 number is $990,000. And because this includes Culture and Sport, is that $990,000 just Culture and Sport? Or is it Tourism including Culture and Sport? Because if you look at the original numbers for 2023/24 and the revised amount of 2022/23, it is $1 million. And now we are at $19 million in the current estimate for 2024/25. So if they could explain that disparity, it would help clear up some of the confusion that I was having with this here.

In Head 71 under Revenue, I missed the explanation here for Revenue, 438. Did that have to do with the after-school programme? I just was not quite sure when he was reading through. But there is an allocation under the 2024/25. The only thing that I know that is new is the after-school fees. So I am assuming that that is the case here and that it actually does not have anything to do with Tourism, but actually has to do with Culture and Sport. So here you can see what I am

trying to highlight. It was difficult to pull the numbers out as to what was Tourism and what was Culture and Sport.

It was aptly said that this is an Olympic year, Mr. Chairman. This summer we will be having the Olympics. And I was curious as to whether or not Tourism will be participating in this year's Olympics. It is a great opportunity. The Junior Minister said that the Tourism Authority was concentrating on premium and luxury customers to Bermuda in his speech to us this afternoon. So I am curious as to whether or not they will likely be attending, because it is a great opportunity there, combining sports and tourism together, which we have seen has been successful here in Bermuda. And will the Minister also be attending? Are they getting plans? I mean, that is not going to be too far from now. Are they planning on a team attending the actual Olympics of itself?

If we go over to page B-243, and I am going back and forth because I was trying to follow the Junior Minister. Forgive me if I have to go back and forth because I am following the trend that he has taken. So it may be a bit confusing going back and forth here.

I want to go over to page B-243. And we are still talking about the Tourism Authority and a lot of what the Junior Minister had to say there. Now, I recognise that under [programme] 7101, General Administration, there is an allocation there of $18 million. And again that goes back to the question that I asked earlier about (on page B-242) that $990,000 for the actual of 2023. If we can get some correlation between that, the 2023/24 original, we know nothing changed in the revised amount, and I recognise that the grant has been put into here, but that does not substantiate the whole amount of the $18.659 million. Can they separate out what that difference is, Mr. Chairman?

So when you are talking about Tourism, immediately what comes to mind is that it is the second pillar of the economy here in Bermuda, which is why I was a bit concerned—and hopefully the Junior Minister will allay those concerns—that we were cutting back on the Tourism Authority's grant. You know, my question is really, With all of what [the Junior Minister] had to say, what are we actually doing different locally here? I know that they are flying away. But when you talk about entertainment, we still do not even have a nightclub here in Bermuda that you can go to and have a little dance and whatever the case. I think the most popular place right now is the Pickled Onion.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: You know, on the weekend that place is packed because they have live entertainment, per se. But we still do not . . . What are we doing about that? I mean, we have a whole tourism product here, beautiful beaches. But what are we doing in the entertainment area as far as looking at what we can do when people get here? There is nowhere to go. Not too many people are going to the beach at night, Mr. Chairman, especially when some of the beaches, you cannot even get a drink of water, right? So what are they doing as far as the local entertainment is concerned to help bolster that? Certainly entertainment took a hit during COVID-19. So we have had a couple of years now. And we still do not have a nightclub here. What are we doing about entertainment?

And I certainly do not mean entertainment in relation to the kind of entertainment that we thought was going to work for us, like Savvy, and we wound up losing money. I am just curious as to what we are doing when it comes to entertainment? What exactly are we doing? Because we are hurting right now. Right? We spent some time investing that money, and we did not get anything in return. So that did not seem to be a highlight for Bermuda.

Also, next question, still on page B-243, trying to understand some of what we are doing in Tourism. Just curious, where are we with Elbow Beach? You know, it has taken a little while to get Southampton, South P, up and going. Where are we with Elbow Beach? Is it in receivership? Is someone managing it until we find a buyer? There was no real mention about that. And what is Tourism doing in relationship with these hotels in assisting in getting them back up and going? As the Junior Minister aptly said, *We need more beds.* And in order to get more beds, we have got to get that investment here. South P is taking too long, quite frankly. So we have got Elbow Beach. We have got Bermudiana Beach Resort. We will get to that when we start talking about grants as well. Where are we heading in this next year with that?

Also, looking at the age demographic, as the Junior Minister was talking about going after premium and luxury customers, I looked at the stats, and he did say go to the website today. So I just went to the website, and I looked at the stats there. The demographic coming, Mr. Chairman, to Bermuda is *old.* Like the ones who are flying here, not on cruise ships, that is all mixed up. But the actual air travel? Man, those dudes are older than me. And I am 60!

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: So, what are we doing to attract the younger demographic to come here? The new world has millionaires and billionaires who are in their 20s and 30s. What are we doing to attract that demographic? Those numbers are low if you look at them in the air arrivals. And we have got to figure out what to do. We can get them certainly. So we need to know what the plan is. What is the plan to increase that demographic? Who is more likely to spend more money? But you look at the 55 and over, that is where we are thriving. They are flying here. But we need to get the younger people. Can the Minister tell us exactly how the Tourism Authority, with these numbers it has, is trying to target, actually target that demographic? Maybe

we need ziplines or something; I do not know. Skydiving, something adventurous. I do not know. But it is not working right now with the numbers that we do have.

Also, under programme 7101 on page B-243, if I look at the unit number 81065, Regulatory and Policy, and the Junior Minister mentioned it was compliance. So I guess what I was trying to understand a little better is that process. So how does that process work? When they go out and they grant these licences, what does that process look like? Do they call and say, *Listen. As of this date, we're coming to do compliance checks* (or whatever the case may be) to ensure that licences are kept up? And additionally, we recognise that the numbers that we are seeing from the Authority, Airbnbs are decreasing. So do they have an idea of why people are pulling out? You know, I do not know. I do not want to guess here. I have thoughts, but I will keep them to myself. But why are they pulling out? Because this is right now putting a stress on the hotel beds that we do have.

The Junior Minister said that there were 43 hotels, 2,541 units, and that accounted for 6,222 beds. And understanding, as he said, we need more beds so that we can get more uplift. And I want to take a second just to thank BermudAir. (I think I am saying that right.) It is not *Bermuda Air,* is it? It is BermudAir?

An Hon. Member: BermudAir, yes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: BermudAir.

Fantastic job! So I give kudos to the Government and everybody involved there. I mean, I have flown it several times. It is a bit short for me. I have to bend over. But it is okay! I get on, and I got a whole row to myself. So kudos to the flight and to its expansion, actually. Can the Junior Minister also tell us a little more about where they plan on expanding in this upcoming year? As he mentioned BermudAir, where are they planning to expand with this particular area?

Now also, under this unit number, I was just curious as to exactly how do we collect the occupancy data? And are we hitting all hotels and Airbnbs? I am not quite sure about that. But in order for us to really understand what we are up against, it would be nice to know whether or not we are getting real good data (or however you want to put it) from the Regulatory and Policy unit, which I believe they said was four people and whether or not they are able to get to all 43 of these hotels to be able to inspect and get good occupancy numbers? So again, process—how does it work and are we hitting all hotels and Airbnbs?

Okay. I am going to go over to page B-244. On page B-244, again I go back to trying to understand the separation between Culture and Sport, and Tourism. Now, under salaries the Junior Minister did explain that that was a transfer for staff. I am assuming that this is the regulatory body that we just spoke of. If you look at the 2024/25 allocation of $1.2 million, which includes the four staff that the Junior Minister mentioned, and looking at the fact that it is a $384,000 increase for the upcoming year, is all of that $384,000 for that four staff that he mentioned under salaries? And what else would be the difference outside of the four staff? I think he may have mentioned salaries uplift, but I did not hear that. But as you know, Mr. Chairman, sometimes when you are taking notes it is not always easy to get everything.

Now, Advertising and Promotion. You only see there $8,000. And then underneath there, that seems like an extremely low amount. I do not know that that has to do with Tourism or not. Advertising and Promotion, just $8,000? It seems extremely low. Maybe I am missing something here, because I know that the Minister spoke about marketing and the like. But that is an extremely low number. And what are we getting for $8,000?

Right below that on the same page, B-244, Mr. Chairman, Professional Services. Just curious, who are they? Who are these professional services? And what exactly are they doing? That is $194,000. And if you take a look, that is quite an increase, which quite frankly is a good thing. Probably, most likely it is a good thing. As I mentioned before, just as long as it is not one of those Savvy deals, this is a good thing to have, professional services of $194,000. Because we need to get moving. It probably needs to be more because these guys are pricey, you know? They do not make the salaries we make, Mr. Chairman. They make good money when it comes to professional services. Who are they? And what exactly are they doing for us?

Because again I go back to the fact that I just think that this thing is so completely underfunded, the Tourism Authority, if we are to really compete. We are competing with our cousins, Cousin Chairman. We are literally competing. And we have got to catch up, man. We have got to catch up. So, you know, if we can inject another $10 million in there, I think that the Authority would be happy and maybe we could get something done. The Minister would be happy because they probably will not be chasing him for money all the time, right? So it would be good to see.

I will continue down. Grants and Contributions, well, we know that $16-plus million constitutes that. Again, I am not sure . . . And I am sorry; I am at the very bottom of page B-244 under the Expenditure, Grants and Contributions. We have an amount of $17,486,000. And I know that has mostly to do with the encouragement of tourism into this particular Ministry. How much of that is for Culture and Sport, and what are we doing with that amount if it is in fact actually for Culture and Sport?

The other thing that was mentioned by the Junior Minister was—

The Chairman: Pause for a minute, Honourable Member.

For the benefit of the listening public and Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply

for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Honourable Member Kim Swan, Junior Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport gave his brief. And now the Honourable Member from constituency 12, Craig Cannonier, is giving a robust amount of preambles and questions.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Context! It is all about context. Making sure everyone understands when I ask a question.

The Chairman: In context.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Minister also, with his speech and preamble (whatever you want to call what he said) . . . I want to ask questions on some of that as well as to what he was saying. But if you go over to page B-245, and I was looking over the performance measures, I did not really have much of a question. But when you go down to business unit 81065, Regulatory and Policy, the fifth one down, it says "Vacation rental properties inspected and licensed by the annual deadline of 31 August."

Just curious as to this last August past, for the budget year gone past, what challenges did they find while they were out there with the regulatory and policy schedules, and what they were doing? What exactly did they find? And with those findings, the second question to that would be, Then how and what are we going to do for this upcoming budget period for 31 August, which is not too far around the corner? Exactly how are we managing that? You know, I understand there are some rumblings . . . within the Airbnbs and fees. So just curious as to what they learned from August 31, and how are they adjusting to be even more efficient?

And these are new categories within this area, Mr. Chairman. So I understand that this is the first time that we have actually had this kind of robust (as you said) preamble and questions for Tourism because it has not been in the book for the last two, three years.

The Junior Minister mentioned about the USA Track and Field [TF] Grand Prix when he was speaking to us. So I wanted to find out a little more about big events. (Give me a second. I want to just go over to . . .) Now, this would obviously fall under page B-242 under Head 71, Ministry of Tourism, and the grant that has been given and the past monies in the last years. But with these big events, the Minister mentioned the USA TF. And I know it was a success. My grandkids were all wanting to go out and see these athletes.

Are there any other big events coming up that we can look forward to? We certainly had a good spell with $100 million investment into America's Cup and a return of $300 million to the economy. We have seen Flora Duffy when we had the Triathlon—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: World Traveller come to Bermuda. Huge success for Bermudians and visitors.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: PGA. I was going to talk about the golf as well, right. The LGP, the PGA, all of these are big events. What is the next big event that we are looking at? And have they considered potentially . . . I mean, Bermudians, men and women here in Bermuda are *big*—Spanish, German, Berkeley's league—football fans. Maybe that is something that we want to entertain. If we are looking at luxury customers who are looking for a more refined destination, are we looking at something like that?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: No. That is why we want to get young people because the young people will come out for that, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Are we looking at something like investing some money so that we can get these people of high net worth here for a week, just a week? It would be millions that we probably would garner from such type of event. I know he said go to the website, but not everybody is going to go to the Tourism Authority's website. So can the Junior Minister give us an idea of any big events outside of the ones that we just named that are coming to Bermuda? And have they considered something like a football—

The Chairman: All about the budget.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. All about the budget. Yes. Borrow the money, man. You guys are giving grants all over the place. We are up to a billion in grants. Just get a grant, man. Get a grant.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Mr. Chairman, just curious about that. And also, for big events have we considered professional women's sports? I mean, that is a big thing right now. Down in the islands they do the NBA pregame. Maybe we can get the women here to do some of their pre-games here in Bermuda. I do not know. But I know women's sport and professional sports are taking off like wildfire, you know. Maybe that could happen. I do not know. But we certainly have the infrastructure for it. We have the infrastructure to handle it. So maybe we could entertain that.

I am going to go over to page C-20. Understanding that under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture we are looking at grants and contributions, programme 6835 for the Authority. We recognise that. And quite

frankly, we have got two board members here who happen to be MPs. I would suggest that they talk to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. This is *not enough!* Period!

What is the programme number here, 6869, Grants to External Bodies? If you look at the numbers here, we actually in 2022/23 spent $124,000. I am not sure what that pertains to, whether that was Cup Match advertising or something like that. Well, Cup Match is down below. But maybe they used that. But maybe they used that, I do not know. But it is woefully low in the estimates for 2023/24 of $10,000. The revised amount is $5,000. So, I am sure this time around they are not waiting for any more receipts. But we are now estimating $8,000. It does not make any sense. So I am just trying to get some clarity and hopefully we can find a bit more consistency unless the $5,000 and $8,000 is going to be the new consistency in this area. What exactly was this to do with . . . to external bodies?

Now, that may not have to do with Tourism. I do not know, the way it is kind of convoluting here. I do not know if it has to do with Tourism or not, quite frankly. But if I go down further to page C-20, Grants and Contributions, programme 7099, Culture and Entertainment Support. Now, Culture and Entertainment Support is at $840,000. Does that have anything to do with Tourism at all? Understanding that we are intertwining this stuff, culture and sport and tourism, which is a good match. But does this have anything to do with—the $840,000, with Tourism in and of itself?

On page C-14 under Capital Acquisitions, there is not really much here. But I assume the $90,000 is probably to fix a few things under business unit 76802 for the Joell Tennis Stadium. I am assuming that that has nothing to do necessarily with Tourism. But do we have also any big tennis events coming up? Maybe we can get some celebrities here for tourism and entertain them at our stadium? Maybe that is what the improvement is for. Maybe we can get clarification as far as that is concerned?

Now, I want to go back over to some of the comments that were made by the Junior Minister if I could. The Junior Minister mentioned the BTA [Bermuda Tourism Authority] plus. And I was not quite sure if that had to do with . . . (where is it now? It is another head he mentioned. Let me see if I can find it here.)

[Pause]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Over on page C-7 under Tourism Maker Spaces for Creatives for the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. I was not quite sure if that is what he was talking about when he said the BTA-plus, that this was part of a programme that fitted under business unit number 75368 on page C-7, Maker Spaces for Creatives?

I did hear some of what he was saying, but then when he mentioned the BTA-plus, this is about local investment and getting money and creative ideas. Is this part and parcel of the same thing, the Maker Spaces for creatives? Because he did mention about poets and that kind of thing. And I am sure that that would probably fit under there. But this $500,000, which is a healthy amount, what exactly is it doing for $500,000 in that particular area? And does it pertain to the BTA-plus programme?

Also, with the BTA-plus programme, if the Junior Minister could tell us what their process is so that . . . you know, the challenge as politicians is that we say something. And you go out and invariably, Mr. Chairman, people say, *I didn't hear that.* You say it again the following week, and people say, *Well, I didn't hear that.* So what is the process here when it comes to the Tourism Authority with the BTA-plus and with these Maker Spaces for creatives? And how can people hear about it now? Because we do have a captive audience during the budget time. People probably listen more at this time than any other time. What is the process? How does it exactly work? And if we can start talking about maybe getting a nightclub or two together under that area, it would be very helpful, I am sure.

(Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I am just going through my notes here.)

The Junior Minister also mentioned the Bermuda Tourism Authority, exactly what it is doing is just making it sustainable. And we understand that it was designed to pay for itself. We are not at that point as yet. And he mentioned laying foundational things. If the Junior Minister could go back into some more detail about some of those foundational things that the Tourism Authority has found are working well, and areas that we are missing like entertainment, and what exactly are we doing to fill that gap?

And when it comes to the Tourism Authority, we also understand that the Bermudiana Beach Resort will be up by the end of this year, which will be an excellent thing, especially since it is taking so long to get South P and somebody interested in Elbow Beach. Is the end of this year a realistic time frame according to the Tourism Authority? Because I know that they are speaking to those guys on a regular basis. Do they believe that by the end of this year it will be up and running with all of the contracts that have to be done?

And I must indulge the Junior Minister as he was going through on page B-242. We were talking about fees and the likes. And under the Head 71, the Minister also spoke of fees and sales and marketing and the likes, operating costs at 7.02, sales at $12 million. Can the Minister tell the public, what exactly does sales look like? Like, what exactly is that? Is that advertising? What does it actually involve? Because they are going throughout the European market and the likes. Can they explain a little more? And can he give that allocation again? Because I did not get quite all of the numbers, which are not on page B-242. But he was breaking down the total numbers in the estimate. If he could just give that one more time so the public would understand exactly what we are spending there.

The Junior Minister also mentioned driving revenues through . . . and if you take a look at the revenues here under Tourism Authority, I think this may be just a glitch, quite frankly. Maybe we will change it next budget period. But you have got $438,000 here. But he did mention about revenues. What are some of those other ticket items that they believe will continue to drive? We have got the Staples PGA and the likes, and the USATF, travel lawns and the like. But outside of cruise ships in and of itself . . . I mean, if we bring more cruise ships here, we are not going to have too many places for them to anchor. Getting new air arrivals up, how do they plan on driving the idea of business and sports through travel? . . .

(I asked that question already.)

[Pause]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I think, Mr. Chairman, that may be my part. Now, let me just make sure I did not miss any questions.

Ah. I am hoping that we will get the objectives. When it comes to tourism outside of . . . are we looking at any other areas outside of the European market and the US market? Because when I do look at the figures from the Tourism Authority, we have got a large number of people coming here, flying here from Canada, which is probably a good market for us to look at. And since we seem to be having quite a few of our Ministers travelling to the East, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, are we looking at attracting them as well?

I know that when we were Government, one of the things they said that they were looking for was just natural beauty. Because they have to build the beauty that we have naturally. Are we seeking to go out to the Eastern Arabic countries to get them here to fly to Bermuda as opposed to other destinations? I think we have got enough Ministers now who can speak well to Abu Dhabi and Dubai whether or not we will be targeting that market as well.

With that in mind, it looks like those are all of my . . . that is it. That is it, Chairman, for the Tourism part. Thank you very much. We will see. We will see. We will see.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening public, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

Honourable Craig Cannonier, from C-12, has finished his preambles, post-ambles and questions.

And now the Chair recognises the Honourable Ben Smith from constituency 8, Smith's South, the Shadow Minister for Tourism, Sport and Culture.

You have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon.

I think I will start off with what I think a lot of us would have learned today, which is that Tourism needs to have its own head when it comes to future budget debates. Just because it is such an important part, second pillar of our economy. And when I look at the $16 million that is allocated for the BTA, I know that there are a lot of people within Sport, Recreation and Culture who would wish for $16 million to actually be in that portion of the budget. Really, that would show the real belief in what sports is and what it can mean for our country. So what has happened is by putting them side by side, it highlights that difference.

In the same way I would say that the people who are involved with Tourism presently would say that they would need more money than the $16 million that is available, considering it is the second pillar of the economy. And really, when you are looking at what they are trying to do is revitalise an industry, we need to get our young people attracted to tourism again. We need to get our country to realise that tourism is important. Tourism built most of the homes in this country. A lot of people would have found a way to educate their children through tourism. So that is a big task that has to happen. And yes, the goal would be for the Tourism Authority to at some point be able to finance itself, but considering we have major hotels that are not online at the moment, we have to supplement them until they are able to reach that stage.

So, Mr. Chairman, I am going to ask a couple of questions under Head 71 for the cross-over from Tourism, just wondering if the Tourism Authority has had some engagement and found out whether there is interest in having small cruise boats dock in Hamilton and in St. George's. I know it has been something that has been discussed for many years. But the impact of having those boats in those areas automatically increases the level of entertainment that is happening in both St. George's and Hamilton. And I know that both of those areas would be excited to know that they had consistent cruise boats which would bring tourists into restaurants and then, as my Honourable Member mentioned, that would give the ability for somebody, for an entrepreneur to step in and say that opening up a nightclub is a venture that makes sense.

From a sports tourism perspective, could the Junior Minister provide us with all of the sports tourism events that happened in 2023? We mostly highlight the big-number events, so the big-ticket items. But I would know that there would be other sports tourism events that would have been attracted by conversations with the Tourism Authority. I think it would be important for us to highlight that and to highlight the cost of attracting those kinds of events into Bermuda so that we can see that those green shoots that are created by bringing sporting events to Bermuda show the value for money.

Following on, continuing with that connection between sports and tourism events, I know that the Government is keen to connect the dots between sports and tourism. That is why they have been put

together this way. Is there an incentive programme being put in place to engage with National Sports Governing Bodies for them to create sporting events that would potentially bring in what I would consider more of the age group traveller? Because an age group traveller is going to bring their parents along with them. That becomes a real tourism product. Because now in the future, potentially they come back for a non-sporting event, and those children who would have come here as youngsters would then want to return maybe when they graduated from university and on their anniversaries and honeymoons.

Because that is what would have happened in the past when we had college weeks and Bermuda was booming in that side of the industry. This is a great opportunity for us to connect those two pieces together, and it would be great if there was an incentive for National Sports Governing Bodies to create that kind of event and to attract young people and their parents to come to Bermuda.

My honourable colleague would have mentioned the specific point when it comes to the growth in women's sports specifically. You would note that we have a Women in Sports Expo. There are quite a few major stars from Bermuda who sit on that committee who have been working hard to grow women's sport in Bermuda. But worldwide you are seeing that attention to women's sport. Can the Junior Minister let us know whether there is a specific initiative to bring in women's sporting events at the international level, and even from a local level bringing in teams that are going to encourage our young women to get involved with sport?

But really what you want to know is that a lot of times women are the ones who determine who is going to go on vacation and where they are going to go to. So when you target the women and what they might be interested in, that is a win-win for us. And obviously from a sporting perspective, I think it would be an exciting attraction for our young people.

So, Mr. Chairman, I am just going to touch on one thing under Head 71 that comes for the non-tourism sector. And it is from page C-20. Programme 7099, Cup Match Grant, which I know our Chairman would be really excited to talk about, Cup Match being the highlight for most people in the country. If the Junior Minister can just give us an idea of what the grant is used for each year? Obviously we support it as a major event. But it would be great for us to have an understanding of what the grant is used for, considering that last year was budgeted, the estimate was for $45,000 and the revised was $70,000. And this year the budget for it is $50,000. So if the Junior Minister can explain to us exactly what that grant is used for, I think it would be helpful for everybody who are big fans of the annual Classic.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to now move to Head 20, Sport and Recreation, page B-247. I am going to start under programme 2003, Sports Incentives and Awards. I believe the Junior Minister started to explain it, but there was a significant difference from what was originally budgeted to what we ended up spending. And I believe that this was so that we could support some of the major highlighted awards that happened because we had athletes who really surpassed what normally would be a great year for Bermuda—this was an outstanding year with the number of medals at major games. So if that was the support that was given to those athletes, which would be an incentive for them, do we have an idea whether we would be looking to progress that kind of incentive on a go-forward basis, so that we are prepared the best we can be to get our athletes to be incentivised to reach the highest heights?

So now under business unit 30065, Sports Investments, this would be the investment programme that goes out to all of the National Sports Governing Bodies. It is a change that has happened in the last couple of years, because it was more of a grant and now it is sports investment, which I think has been a really good progress by the Government to engage with sports about investing in young people and how we can progress them. My question is, How many sports were provided sports investments in 2023/24? And how many sports have requested funding for 2024/25? And then, have the participating sports requested less money for the upcoming year compared to 2023/24? Or has it been more money?

The reason I ask that question is because . . . and I have said this in the past, and I will continue to say it. There is a certain amount of money that is provided to sports, but it actually does not match the amount of money that is requested for sports. And it is important that we start to highlight what is actually necessary as opposed to the amount of money that is given. I go back to what I said in the beginning, where $16 million looks more like the number that sports would actually want to see invested. The amount has improved, but it has been successive Governments that have not been able to provide the actual number of investment in sports that would really see the difference that I think that everybody would want to see, the support from our country for what the expectation is for our sports results.

So under programme 2004, Sports Facilities, can the Junior Minister please provide a breakdown of what facilities received the $1,312,000 in 2023/24? And what was provided using the money? So what is important from my standpoint is that we say that there is an overall amount of money that we are giving toward facilities, but we need to have a breakdown of how that money is being used from one year to the next so that we know whether (1) it is enough money; or (2) it is being used in a way that is actually going to move that facility forward, which will attract more athletes to utilise the facilities.

Business unit 30075, the softball park. Is the NSGB [National Sports Governing Body] for softball responsible for the softball park? That is just one question just to see if there is a connection between a softball

NSGB and the actual park that is being utilised. And do they have to rent the park? Or is there a specific kind of grant that allows them to utilise it without having that extra cost? I bring that up because one of the major factors now for cost of sport is the cost of facilities. So the National Sports Centre as an example is working to try to reduce the costs when it comes to the solar project. But there are multiple sports that are using facilities where the cost has continued to increase.

There is less money that is available from what I would call our community donors who have been able to support Bermuda and our Bermuda sports significantly over several years. But because there are so many needs in our community, including food and clothing and other essentials, sometimes the sport number is now starting to go down, when for me personally I am going to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that sports could have a significant impact on our community. It can have a significant positive impact on our young people. We can see changes in educational results. We can see changes in the number of people who are dealing with drugs and alcohol. We can see changes in the social behaviour of our young people.

For that reason, the investment in sport is a significant one that can change multiple things quickly. And we will actually have the ability to reduce the cost that we are putting in areas of reform because we are putting it in the preventive side. The same way we want prevention from a health perspective, sport is a perfect connection for that. You have the opportunity to have our young people start off in a physically active lifestyle which hopefully will continue on throughout their life. That helps us overall as a country from our health perspective which then could lower costs in other areas.

Mr. Chairman, there has been some conversation about the tennis stadium and the upgrades that have happened to the facility. I am just looking at the fact that there have been the changes including adding pickleball courts. I have asked this question before. It was my understanding that there was the need for a couple of extra tennis courts which would allow them to have international competitions at the tennis stadium. Considering that we did not add the extra court, but we have changed to pickleball, do we see that we will now be able to attract maybe international pickleball, which will be an offset? Is it possible for us to know what the projected increase . . . because when you look at the measures it looks like the number is not going to move much for how many people we are going to bring into the tennis stadium. So the investment does not seem to match what our target goal is—to bring people to the tennis stadium.

Mr. Chairman, those comments are really because I want to see the growth in tennis. I want to see more people using that facility. And I believe that this is the goal that the Minister has had and the administration has had, why they wanted to make those improvements. But what we want to know is, is there a plan for the next step of how we can attract more people into that sport and more people to use that facility?

So, Mr. Chairman, on pages C-23 and 24, you have the Grants and Contributions for 2022/23. Can the Minister please provide a breakdown of the grants and contributions for 2023/24? Because this is the year prior. If we could be provided with the actual contributions and grants that would have happened last year?

So, Mr. Chairman, there is always a point that is brought up when it comes to BSADA [Bermuda Sports Anti-Doping Authority] and the grant that is given to BSADA. I am going to be very specific here. I believe that this is a number that we automatically have to pay. It is the entry into international sport. So if I move that number to the side, the grant overall for sports should not really take that into consideration. That is a bill that will be a bill. So what we actually look at is the number that is left behind which allows us to actually have support for our athletes. So, Mr. Chairman, if we do this, we are able to see that $1,151,000 is the actual amount invested in sport.

So back to my beginning point, there is no way that this number makes sense. If we understand how important sport is, that number has to be increased. It is the number-one subject for me because I know the impact that sport can have on our young people. I know that any person who is involved with sports, involved with youth development knows that they need significant support.

I want to thank everybody out there who is officiating, who is coaching, who is volunteering their time to make sure that our young people are in safe environments that are drug-free, who are helping our young people to be developed to have a positive future. But what we have to do is now make sure that we are supporting them in a financial way that allows them to progress that forward.

So on page B-250, Mr. Chairman, business unit 30030, Athletic Awards. It says that there is a target of 16. The reason I bring that up is because there is also a target later on that says the number of NSGBs would be 26. So what are we going to do to encourage the 26 to be involved in getting to these athletic awards? And the reason I bring that up is because the number for that award needs to go up as you increase the number of sports that are participating. Because what normally happens is—it is just a reality—there is a fixed number that is given, and the number is going to be based off of a certain number of sports. If more sports are involved, more athletes are involved, what you are doing is dividing the pie up further.

I will follow that line by the Elite Athlete programme funding. So it had a target of 10 elite athletes for 2023/24 with a revised forecast of 23. The Elite Athlete funding programme was for $250,000. So that is $250,000 to support the 10 athletes. So I know it does not work this way, but let us look at it as if it were as basic as 10 athletes, $250,000, with $25,000 per athlete. In actual fact it is going to be divided up in different

ways because you are going to have some athletes at a higher level, so some will get more, some will get less. But for argument's sake, $25,000 per athlete. But when you actually added 13 more athletes, the $250,000 stayed the same, which then meant that this number was $11,000 per athlete. So you fast-forward to this budget, where yes, there has been an increase to $350,000, which I applaud. But when we are now talking about 25 athletes, that means it is $14,000 per athlete.

When I say that we have to do more and do better in supporting our athletes in order for them to reach the point of excellence, this is what I am referring to. Yes, the $350,000 seems like a big number. But as you encourage more people to be involved and we have more athletes taking from that pot, the pot gets smaller.

The same thing happens when you are talking about the awards process for our junior athletes. It used to be that this number was very significant because there were fewer National Sports Governing Bodies that had organised themselves in order to apply for the money. Now that you have multiple sports doing that process, there is a lot less money going per athlete.

None of this is to knock on the hard-working people in Youth and Sport. It is pointing out that they need more help and they need more money.

Mr. Chairman, I am just going to move to page C-20, where I want to have some discussion points on the National Sports Centre. So the National Sports Centre trustees receive a grant in order for them to pay for the facility. Yes, there is going to be some income that comes from fees from rentals. But it does not support the entire facility. So this grant would be for that. But, Mr. Chairman, can the Junior Minister provide us whether there is an ongoing maintenance plan with a cost breakdown of what it will take to replace all of the different facilities that are needed to be replaced at the National Sports Centre?

I will point out that in last year's budget it was brought forward that the changing facilities that were supposed to be temporary are significantly passed their sell-by date. There are pieces within that floor that are breaking down. This becomes an issue if we are not giving the funding in order to maintain these facilities at the level that is necessary for us to continue to have a world-class facility. Mr. Chairman, can the Junior Minister let us know whether there is a maintenance plan costed out and whether the money that is being provided is actually going to be enough for us to not only maintain, but improve those facilities so that we can continue to attract more sporting events, more athletes into those facilities?

Mr. Chairman, could the Junior Minister please let us know how many National Sports Governing Bodies presently are using the National Sports Centre? How many National Sports Governing Bodies are having to use part of their sport investment funding in order to pay the fees at the National Sports Centre?

The Chairman: Honourable Member, please hold for a minute.

For the listening public, this debate—we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Shadow Minister Honourable Ben Smith is asking questions. This debate is due to end at 3:40.

So you may continue. If you want answers, I would suggest . . .

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am just going to ask a few more questions before I take my seat.

There obviously have been a lot of questions and conversations around the solar project at the National Sports Centre. I think it would be important for me to ask some questions regarding that at this time.

So if the Junior Minister could let us know, does Atlantic Energy Solutions Group have a maintenance contract with the National Sports Centre once the solar project is completed? If so, what is the cost of this annual maintenance contract?

It was stated that part of the solar facility had been turned on in one section. Could the Junior Minister give us an update on the details of what that means that part of the facility was turned on? And can the Junior Minister give us a level of energy that was produced?

Does the National Sports Centre have a specific contract with BELCO for the resale of energy that is produced by this? And if so, can the Junior Minister give us some details of that?

What is the total cost of running the entire National Sports Centre facility? So including the revenue that comes in from the National Sports Centre and the grant, what is the total cost for running that facility?

Are there any issues with the interest payments that would have to be made by the loan that was taken out for the solar panel project? Can the Junior Minister give us details of whether the Government has had to make interest payments while there has been a delay in getting this facility up and running?

Can the Junior Minister give us details on what the potential savings will be from a power/cost perspective? And if the Junior Minister can tell us what the monthly electricity bill was for the National Sports Centre over the last 12 months? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: We have just heard from Shadow Minister, Honourable Ben Smith.

Is there anyone else who would like to ask any questions?

No. If not, the Chair recognises Junior Minister of Tourism, Sport and Culture, Honourable Kim Swan from constituency 2, St. George's West.

You now have the floor, sir.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the extensive questions that have come

forward. I just wanted to get the time that this debate goes until?

The Chairman: This debate will end at 3:40 pm.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: At 3:40 pm. Okay. Thank you. All right.

I will just start where the Shadow Minister left off. Question: Does the National Sports Centre have a contract with BELCO for sale of power? (Hang on.)

[Pause]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: What are the Minister's role and the objectives of the Ministry of Tourism? The Bermuda Tourism Authority [Act] as it states currently outlines the roles of the BTA as a sales and marketing destination management [organisation]. The BTA excels in their role with sales and marketing. The Minister appoints the BTA Board and directs tourism policy but does not oversee the operations of the BTA including their staffing. Ministry oversees the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport Headquarters, which is 12 staff including the four at the Tourism Regulatory unit under the direction of Ms. Rhonda Woods[-Smith].

The Tourism Regulatory unit is responsible for the inspection of hotels, acting as a concierge between them and the Planning Department and maintaining the vacation [rentals] register. We would not include the number of staff at the BTA in this brief, as we do not influence oversight.

Question on page C-20: The BTA grant applies—

The Chairman: Honourable Member, the Opposition said they did not hear you. Can you repeat that slowly for them?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I am sorry. I apologise.

The question that was asked was, What are the Minister's role and the objectives for the Ministry of Tourism? The Bermuda Tourism Authority Act as it states currently outlines the roles of the BTA as a sales and marketing destination management organisation. The BTA excels in their role with sales and marketing. The Minister appoints the Bermuda Tourism Authority Board and directs tourism policy, but does not oversee the operations of the Bermuda Tourism Authority including their staffing. The Ministry oversees the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport Headquarters, which is twelve [staff] including the four staff of the Tourism Regulatory unit under the direction of Ms. Rhonda Woods-Smith. The Tourism Regulatory unit is responsible for the inspection of hotels, acting as a concierge between them and the Planning Department and maintaining the vacation rentals register. We would not include the number of staff at the BTA in this brief, as we do not have influence oversight on the BTA operations.

That was better?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Okay.

The next question was on page C-20 in the Budget Book. The BTA grant declined to $16 million. Does the Junior Minister believe this is ample and adequate for Tourism to get us back to pre-pandemic tourism numbers? Absolutely. Under the direction of the hard-working CEO, Ms. Tracy Berkeley, and the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Wayne Caines, along with board members Mr. Best, Ms. Blaser, Mr. Bushara, Ms. Phillips, Mr. Simmons, myself and Ms. Turini, the BTA is sharpening their pencils and leading their mainly Bermudian team to deliver strong sales results for our Island.

The question was, the Junior Minister is also on the BTA. Is this a conflict of interest? No.

Question: Do the budget cuts affect the strategy of Tourism? Focus more on sales and marketing and activities in these areas that are more targeted and have the highest return on investment. As noted in the brief, the Minister and the BTA will collaborate on promoting on Island offerings, signature events and experiences through the year that appeal to our target groups. A $2.6 million reduction in government grant results in net increase in the annual budget of $1.27 million due to the anticipated increase in visitor fees of approximately $873,000. The rest of the BTA's funding comes from visitor fees paid directly by hotel guests, cruise passengers and vacation rentals guests.

What are the tourism fees projected for 2024? Tourism fees projected are as follows:

- hotel guests, $8,208,621;
- cruise passenger visitors, $7,250,367; and
- vacation rentals, $656,637.

The BTA has not increased fees since cruise passenger fees were introduced in 2018.

Employee numbers, question from page B-244 with employees, 12 persons: Is this solely for Tourism? And what are the numbers for employees for the BTA? Twelve staff are from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Eight are from the Ministry Headquarters, four are from the Tourism Regulatory unit. None of these are from the Bermuda Tourism Authority. The Bermuda Tourism Authority has 40 employees total. That is not captured in the employee numbers, as they are not government employees.

I am going to try to give some answers from the Ministry of Culture and Sport if I can, Mr. Chairman, and sort of balance it out a little bit.

The Chairman: You have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Well, the opportunity in another place will present itself.

Does the BTA have engagement with small cruise boats that dock in Hamilton and cruise ships under the remit of the Ministry of Transport [that] would support all avenues to increase visitation?

FYI, cruise ships question by Shadow Minister Ben [Smith]: Visitor dissatisfaction in St. George's has caused major concerns from boutique cruise ships. And the Chamber of Commerce is working to address this problem. I thought that was important as well.

Are we looking at areas outside of Europe and the US for tourism? Are we looking at Dubai, Abu Dhabi and other Arabic countries to come to Bermuda? Our primary markets are the US, UK and Canada. Our main market cities are New York, Boston, Charlotte, Atlanta, Philadelphia and Washington.

The BTA grant declined to $16 million. Does the Junior Minister believe this is ample and adequate to Tourism to get us back to pre-pandemic levels? Answer: Absolutely, under the direction of the CEO . . . I believe I answered that one already.

Head 71, is the $990,000 just Culture and Sport? Or is it Tourism, Culture and Sport? The Authority has not included [funds] in the Ministry except for the grant.

Question: Is revenue after-school care? After-school care is no longer in this Ministry. The Youth section was transferred to the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. The reduction in the Ministry Headquarters is in relation to the regulatory Airbnb tax projections [that] were revised based on the approved rates which were not established [until] after the publication of the financial year 2023/24.

Question: Is the Ministry attending the Olympics? We will support our athletes. Closer to the confirmation of who will be competing for Bermuda, the dates will be confirmed and arrangements will be made in the best interest of the public purse. We cannot have the debacle and overspend that was seen previously by the OBA when they spent over $30,000 to go to Brazil.

Concerns over cutting back on the BTA grant. What were we doing differently locally? What are we doing in the entertainment area locally? *New nightclubs* was a comment that I believe the Shadow Minister had made. Although the MP referenced Pickled Onion, the City of Hamilton also has Karma, The Front Yard, the Spinning Wheel entertainment complex, as well as several smaller bars and nightclubs. The Department of Culture is directly contributing to the live entertainment offerings in Bermuda with the Creatives Live! series which focuses on hosting live Bermudian bands on Saturday nights in venues throughout the Island, including some of the social clubs. Additionally, local live acts have been featured at several local businesses including Tino Martinez Quartet at the Lido complex at Elbow Beach, as well as The Birdcage Live Vibes and White Horse. So, live music events.

Where are we with Elbow Beach? Is it in receivership? The Elbow Beach is definitely in the process of receivership, where there are interested parties. We will definitely invite them to avail themselves of the tourism investment benefits under the Tourism Investment Act.

Demographic coming to Bermuda via air is old, 55 and older. What are we doing to attract a younger demographic? Are we targeting the younger people? We aim to entice a younger audience to Bermuda. Our National Tourism Plan is strategically tailored to four distinct target personas, each with unique references and aspirations. For the experience enthusiast, 22 to 44, we spotlight Bermuda's rich cultural heritage, culinary delights and immersive activities. Catering to the adventure seeker, 18 to 34, we emphasise adrenaline-fuelled escapades. Meanwhile, for the affluent jetsetters aged 30-plus with a household income of $250,000-plus, we offer luxurious accommodations, private yacht charters and VIP experiences. Lastly, for the active families aged 35 to 54, we highlight family-friendly adventures such as snorkelling, kayaking and ecotourism.

Our marketing strategy employs digital targeting and personalisation to engage these personas across various online platforms while fostering collaborative partnerships and influencer-making to amplify our reach and authenticity. With our efforts with the unique desires of each persona, we aim to create unforgettable experiences that resonate with a diverse range of younger travellers to Bermuda.

[Pause]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Can the Junior Minister let us know where BermudAir is planning to expand? BermudAir has shared publicly their plans to expand to Baltimore and Orlando in 2024.

How do we collect occupancy data? Are we getting good data? Are we hitting all of the hotels and Airbnbs? The answer is hotels report their occupancy and revenue data to the STR [Smith Travel Research] confidentially. And the BTA receives a monthly aggregated report for the Island. Seventy per cent of rooms in Bermuda currently participate. Using occupancy ADR [average daily rate] and RevPAR [revenue per available room] data from the STR report is industry best practice for tourism destinations globally. The BTA uses AirDNA reports for vacation rental occupancy, which receives data from Airbnb and VRBO [Vacation Rental By Owner]. Occupancy data is not available for every vacation rental in Bermuda, but this gives a large sample of properties to track trends over time. Using this type of data is best practice for DMOs [destination management organisations] measuring vacation rental performance in the destination.

Salaries, $384,000. This is on page B-244, a $384,000 increase. Is all of that for four hotels and

regulatory staff? This is for salaries and operating expenses for the regulatory.

Question: Advertising and promotion was $8,000. It seems low. What are we getting for the $8,000? And this is for the Regulatory to advertise any changes regarding hotel regulations. The Tourism budget is independent. So it is coming from the Regulatory section.

Question: Professional services, who are they and what are they doing? It was $194,000 in question. These funds are set aside to hire professionals to assist the Ministry with strategic initiatives that assist with the alignment of the Tourism Authority and the Regulatory section within the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

So, question about grants and contribution: Of $17 million, how much of that is for Culture and Sport? Approximately $106,000 of the $17 million is related to Culture. However, it should be noted that the majority of the Ministry's grant is distributed via the relevant departments. There is $106,000. For Cup Match, $50,000; Parish Councils, $40,000 and the remaining amount is for general grant, one-time grants that are sports- and culture-related. That may fall outside of the department's matrix, but the Minister is inclined to support.

Performance Measures. What challenges did the hotel and policy staff find when they were out doing re-licensing? There were some minor issues in regard to fire inspection. They received a provisional licence until inspections have been completed.

Question regarding the USA Track and Field big events, [USA TF]. Are there any other big events that are coming up? SailGP 2024, last year of contract. 2022 PwC Economic Impact Report, economic impact equals $7 million. Media value, $11.4 million. Total value equalled $18.4 million. And the BTA return on investment equalled 4.6 to 1 on the economic impact. Butterfield Bermuda Championship contracted for two more years, 2024 and 2025. And the 2022 KPMB Economic Impact Report—2023 still remains in progress. Economic impact for that event was $17 million. The media value was $9.2 million. Total value, $26.2. BTA return on investment 4 to 1 on economic impact.

Question: Have we considered professional women's sport? Could we get those teams here? The BTA sports portfolio currently includes several female signature sports events. And we have been analysing opportunities for professional sport events and meetings which reach female athletes and leaders in the global sports space.

Question: Page C-20, Grants to External Bodies—what is this? General one-time grants that are sports- and culture-related that may fall outside of the department's metric, but the Minister is inclined to support.

The capital acquisitions are $90,000. What is this for?

Are there any big tennis events coming up? This is for the continued infrastructure of the W. E. R. Joell Tennis Stadium.

Question on page C-7 regarding Maker Spaces and creatives. Does this have to do with the BTA-plus? No. The BTA-plus is a subsidiary online learning platform launched by the Bermuda Tourism Authority that delivers industry-related training and educational lessons to inspire individuals, businesses and partners with the purpose of strengthening the Island's reputation as a destination of choice. There is a BTA website. You can get to it by going to training.gotobermuda.com/learn.

Question: More detail needed for foundation items that are working within the BTA as it relates to becoming self-funding. The BTA are in the preliminary stages of working through a comprehensive analysis toward self-sustainability.

Page B-242, Head 71, Fees, Sales and Marketing. What exactly do the sales look like? Explain sales further, please. The primary function of the group sales work to promote Bermuda as an enticing destination for various customer bases as they nurture, cultivate and secure new and returning businesses to the Island. The Sales team has set a key focus toward driving revenues and creating consistent visitor presence throughout the non-summer months and with smaller groups that can be accommodated in existing facilities.

Question: Are we looking at areas outside of Europe and the United States? I think I answered that one . . . I think I answered that one already.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, there were some technical challenges earlier. The House is back on 105.1 FM.

We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport briefs were given by the Honourable Kim Swan, Junior Minister. Robust questions and preambles were given specifically in Tourism by the Honourable Member from constituency 12, Craig Cannonier. And then followed up by his batting partner, the Honourable Shadow Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, from constituency 8, Ben Smith.

Answers were given in gross detail by—

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thanks, Famous.

The Chairman: "Gross" does not mean bad. "Gross" means a net.

[Answers were given] in detail by the Junior Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Honourable Kim Swan from constituency 2. Now we are moving on.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: We are moving on to the Junior Minister moving his heads.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. Thank you.

Before I move my heads, I would like to thank the staff of the Ministry. And the BTA for being here and doing their work. And the Minister for being present, Senator the Honourable Owen Darrell.

I move that Heads 71, 20 and 52 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: Any objections?

No objections.

Approved.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport Heads 71, 20 and 52 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.]

The Chairman: Once again, for the benefit of the listening audience, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

We are now beginning the debate for the Ministry of Finance. The Premier, the Honourable David Burt, will be giving his brief. And I now change chairs with the Honourable Member from constituency 20, MP Susan Jackson.

[Ms. Susan E. Jackson, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon. Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

And this afternoon we will have the Premier deliver his brief on Finance, Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58.

Premier, you may proceed.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move the following heads: Head 10, the Ministry of Finance Headquarters; Head 11, Accountant General; Head 12, Customs; Head 28, Social Insurance; Head 38, Office of the Tax Commissioner; Head 39, Registrar of Companies; and Head 58, Debt and Loan Guarantees be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: You may proceed.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the 2024/25 budget estimates for the Ministry of Finance are found in section B of the Estimates Book on pages B-108 through B-131, and in section C on pages C-4, Capital Development; C-11, Capital Acquisitions; and C-18, Grants. The Finance Ministry comprises six departments, led by the Ministry of Finance Headquarters, and includes the Accountant General, Customs in relation to revenue, the Department of Social Insurance, the Office of the Tax Commissioner and the Registrar of Companies. Allocations to cover the interest on government debt, guarantee management, the Public Accountability Board and the Gaming Commission are also in the Finance Ministry's budget.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry has a total staffing establishment of 165 posts and an aggregate current account budget of $246.46 million and is responsible for collecting $1.1 billion, or about 90 per cent of all government revenue. Of the $246.46 million in expenditure, $127.1 million, or 53 per cent, of that is for interest charges; $83.4 million, or 35 per cent, is for costs associated with pension and health care for all government workers and war veterans; leaving $30 million, or 12 per cent, for operational spend.

A snapshot of key information for the Ministry of Finance is shown on page B-103 of the Estimates Book. The Department Current Account allocations are as follows:

- Head 10—Ministry of Finance Headquarters, $7.2 million, an increase of $389,000, or 6 per cent, is all operational spend.
- Head 11—Accountant General, $86.4 million, an increase of $4.2 million, or 5 per cent, of which $5.97 million is operational.
- Head 12—Customs. The Customs expenditure budget sits under the Ministry of National Security, although the Ministry of Finance maintains responsibility for the customs tariff and revenue collections.
- Head 28—Social Insurance, $3 million, a decrease of $532,000, or 15 per cent, all mandated costs for war veterans.
- Head 38—Office of the Tax Commissioner, $4.05 million, an increase of $150,000, or 3.85 per cent, all for operational overheads.
- Head 39—Registrar of Companies, $12.04 million, an increase of $2.5 million, or 26 per cent. And these are all operational overhead funds.
- Head 58—Debt and Loan Guarantees, $127.8 million, a decrease of $2.6 million, or 2 per cent, of which $127.1 million is mandated interest payments.

Madam Chairman, the Finance Ministry plays a pivotal role in the work undertaken to ensure the ongoing stability and prosperity of Bermuda, particularly given the serious local and global economic uncertainty currently faced by our country and others around the world. Over the past seven years since this Government has taken office, you would have noted a

recurring theme—that is, the Government's resolve to develop and implement a consistent and considered strategy to diversify and strengthen Bermuda's economy and support its people while executing a sound and prudent fiscal management strategy.

It is noteworthy that after many years of deficit budgets, this year a balanced budget is presented, and the Ministry of Finance has been a key player in overseeing the execution of this Government's fiscal strategy. Key areas of focus in this strategy are as follows:

- targeted investment and tax policy to enhance economic growth by attracting investment that creates jobs;
- making Bermuda's tax system fairer while reducing the tax burden for the working class;
- modernising Bermuda's regulatory regime; and
- maintaining fiscal discipline by meeting and in many cases, Madam Chairman, as you well note, exceeding budget targets.

Madam Chairman, we have a responsibility to the people of this country to provide the best fiscal and economic management possible. And to this end we will continue to make the necessary decisions, often tough decisions that are not politically expedient, required to sustainably grow Bermuda's economy in the long term. And Madam Chairman, when I say "tough decisions," tough decisions—for example, last year when we decided not to balance the budget to make sure there was sufficient money for investment.

Difficult decisions are always required because you cannot deal with these things in just the short term; you have to take a long-term view of items. And *short-termism* will land you with a $40 million island and a one-year economic boost, whereas long-term investments land you with long-term economic growth. [We will] reduce the tax burden on workers and provide the necessary support in services to make this a quality place to live and work.

Madam Chairman, following an extended global pandemic, Bermuda continues to be faced with significant challenges which if not appropriately managed can damage our economic security and stability. To that end, the Finance Ministry's budget has been carefully constructed to ensure that the Ministry's in-house team supported by various external stakeholders and consultants (more on that later, Madam Chairman) are able to lead the Government's fiscal and economic policies aptly and responsibly.

Given the ever-increasing threats and expanding obligations which Bermuda must address, ensuring that the Ministry is appropriately resourced instructions continue to be a priority. To this end, during the past year, reviews of resources in key areas were undertaken, and active steps have already been taken to address identified gaps. The additional funding required has therefore been included in the cost estimates for the relevant units and departments contributing to notable increases in some areas, with appropriate reductions in others.

Key initiatives which have to be progressed include banking, tax and pension reform, more targeted debt collection, expanded compliance and regulatory oversight, and enhanced adherence to international requirements. The Ministry will also continue with its internal structural reform for more effective collaboration, operation and management. These structural changes include the formal establishment of two divisions in the Ministry Headquarters, each headed by a Deputy Financial Secretary, one of which is focussed on domestic and economic matters, the other on international and regulatory matters. The various units and departments of the Ministry will fall under one of these divisions. These divisions are supported by a central unit which assists with finance, administration and policy support for the Minister and Financial Secretary.

Mission Statement, Key Goals and Objectives

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the Finance Ministry's mission statement can be found on page B-109 and reads as follows: *The achievement of economic prosperity to ensure the financial security of Bermuda*. In line with this, I highlight some of the Ministry's key objectives as follows:

1. Formulate and adhere to sound and prudent fiscal policies to achieve financial stability and promote stable and sustainable economic growth.
2. Provide strategic direction and an overall framework for effective financial management and control of government activities, and provide an appropriate framework for effective compliance.
3. Prepare, implement and closely monitor the national budget to arrange all government borrowing requirements at the most competitive rates.
4. Maintain effective relations with credit rating agencies.
5. Report on the country's economic performance to the public.
6. Oversee and prudently manage the public pension funds.
7. Ensure and support the fair, coherent and predictable development of public services and other relevant legislation, and appropriately monitor its implementation consistent with international standards.
8. Monitor the agreed tax standards, seek to influence changes thereto, adhere to its compliance requirements and be proactive in treaty negotiations regarding tax information exchange agreements and the exchange of tax information.
9. Advance the government's anti-money laundering [AML] and anti-terrorist financing [ATF] policy initiatives and monitor for changes in

international standards and for other relevant global developments that will affect Bermuda.

10. Support legislative and policy developments to address such changes and coordinate measures to enhance Bermuda's AML/ATF regime.
11. Play an effective role in advancing Bermuda's national ESG [environmental, social and governance] strategy.

During the past year we were able to move forward in a number of key areas. In this brief, I will highlight the key accomplishments. These include the improvement of tax collection and pension arrears, the repayment of $50 million in outstanding debt, the development and implementation of landmark corporate income tax legislation and the provision of additional relief to workers and businesses in Bermuda. And as a reminder for the listening audience and for you, Madam Chairman, last year we reduced payroll taxes for 86 per cent of workers in the country and 86 per cent of businesses in the country—meaning every single local business operating in Bermuda received a reduction in their tax burden. A reminder, of course, Madam Chairman, the tax changes that the Opposition branded "irresponsible." (We will get to that later as well.)

Continued compliance with the international requirements, maintenance of a strong credit rating and continued successful implementation of a sound and prudent fiscal management policy resulting in the presentation this year of a balanced budget, one that we fully expect to achieve. As we go forward in this coming year, we will continue to build on the strong foundation that has been established, with a focus on economic growth, maintaining Bermuda's positive reputation as a reputable financial centre, executing a prudent fiscal strategy balanced by our commitment to appropriately meeting the needs of the people of Bermuda while seeking to build a fairer and more just society.

I will now speak to the various units and departments that [make up] the Ministry of Finance, starting with Head 10, which is the Ministry of Finance Headquarters.

HEAD 10—MINISTRY OF FINANCE HEADQUARTERS

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the Finance Ministry Headquarters' core functions are conducted under Head 10, which can be found on page B-110. The work is undertaken in the following units: Policy Planning and Management; Fiscal Planning and Control; International Affairs and Regulatory; Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy; Treaty Management and Administration; and the Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee, [better known as NAMLC]. In addition, grants are being given to the Bermuda Public Accountability Board and the Bermuda Gaming Commission, and funding has been provided for the work of the Tax Reform Commission, as well as the continued development of the corporate income tax framework.

The Finance Ministry Headquarters' mission is as follows: *The achievement of economic prosperity and to ensure the financial security of Bermuda*. In discharging its functions under the overall policy direction of the Minister of Finance, the Ministry of Finance Headquarters seeks to achieve the following outcomes: a Bermuda that maintains its position as a domicile of choice for international business; a Bermuda where citizens have confidence in the Government's stewardship of the public purse; a Bermuda where funding and resources are available for key programmes and initiatives; and a Bermuda where citizens regard Government's policy responses to economic and financial challenges as appropriate and in the national interest.

Madam Chairman, in seeking to fulfil this mandate, the Ministry of Finance HQ has a staff establishment of 18 permanent full-time posts, and its total budget for the fiscal year is $7.2 million split between operational costs of $5.1 million and grants of $2.1 million. The total cost has risen by $389,000, or 6 per cent, with operational costs increasing by $1.1 million and grants increasing by $1.5 million. The decrease in operational funding is primarily due to the Treaty unit being merged with the Registrar of Companies. Excluding this reorganisation, costs have increased by $460,000 due largely to the funding allocated for the Tax Reform Commission, $225,000, and additional funding of $100,000 to support the work plan of the Bermuda Public Accountability Board.

Grants have increased with financial support being given to the Gaming Commission and the allocations related to the Corporate Income Tax programme. However, the Pension Commission grant has been reduced.

Policy Planning and Management

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to cost centre 20000, Policy Planning and Management, $2.7 million, for an increase of $374,000, or 16 per cent. Madam Chairman, the budget estimate for the Policy Planning and Management Unit is $2.677 million, an increase of $374,000 over the previous year. This unit, under the leadership of the Acting Financial Secretary, provides advice and support to me, as the Minister of Finance, as well as overall strategic direction, oversight and management of Ministry Headquarters and the departments that [make up] the Ministry of Finance.

In addition, this unit manages the administration of other activities associated with the daily operation of the Ministry of Finance Headquarters. It plays a key role in financial accountability of various quangos, as well as overseeing the general financial and fiscal oversight and accountability throughout the Government. Total staff in this unit is seven persons. The $374,000 proposed increase in expenditure is primarily

related to the change in allocation of costs to the Bermuda Public Accountability Board and funding for the Tax Reform Commission. The increase in allocation for the Bermuda Public Accountability Board from $300,000 to $400,000 allows for an additional staff member to reduce key man risk and to ensure that the board can more effectively deal with reviews and investigations.

The primary objective of the Bermuda Public Accountability Board is to oversee the supervision and enforcement of auditors who carry on business in Europe and the United Kingdom in accordance with the Bermuda Public Accountability Act 2011. The Tax Reform Commission has a diverse membership with participants from both political parties, trade unions, the business community and the third sector. Its work in the upcoming year will be key to achieving the goals of a fairer, better Bermuda which is able to effectively compete in the global marketplace.

Highlights of the Past Fiscal Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to the highlights for the last fiscal year. Those included

- coordinating the activities of the International Tax Working Group, culminating in the introduction of corporate income tax legislation;
- oversight of financial matters to ensure appropriate financial management and accountability during the period when government's email system was compromised;
- working with teams to ensure enhanced debt collection;
- establishment and support of the Tax Reform Commission;
- ensuring more effective administration and coordination of financial administrative matters in the Ministry; and
- working to ensure even more effective quango and guarantee oversights.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the team who supported the Acting Financial Secretary, including the new Chief Operations Officer, Mr. Hadleigh Farrer, who has in particular worked with the teams to assist in the debt collection efforts throughout the Ministry, of which we see, Madam Chairman, have made great progress in particular working with the teams to assist in the debt collection efforts throughout the Ministry of which we see, Madam Chairman, have made great progress.

For the upcoming year key projects will include work on tax reform, including the continued development and implementation of the Corporate Income Tax [CIT] regime; implementation of PIPA in the Ministry; working with quangos to further strengthen financial accountability in governance; and work with other teams to assist the analysis and cost to assess financing options for major projects including health care reform, education reform and the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy facility.

Fiscal Planning and Control Unit: Cost Centre 20010

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the budget for the Fiscal Planning and Control [Unit] is $568,000, which is $19,000 higher than the previous year. A salary provision of $448,370 accounts for 79 per cent of the Budget Team's allocation. It provides for a four-person team led by the Budget Director.

Madam Chairman, significant work has been done over the past few years to manage cost and grow revenues. This occurred in a climate where substantial funding was required to effectively deal with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and provide relief in various areas to combat supply chain related price increases and price hikes as a result of war and natural disasters. Notwithstanding, we have been able to maintain or exceed our targets as we have moved toward achieving a balanced budget.

Madam Chairman, the budget statement details performance in the past fiscal year against the previous year's forecast and provides detail on the national budget estimates for 2024/25. A consistent theme is better-than-expected performance in each year with generally declining budget deficits and revenue projections exceeding forecast while current account expenditures remain relatively consistent with estimates. These results were achieved against a backdrop of the provision of additional relief in a number of key areas. The Budget Office team played a key role in developing revenue expenditure estimates and monitoring performance.

Madam Chairman, controlling government expenditure has been and still remains a significant commitment of the Government. In order to determine high priority policy programmes, the Budget Office has continued to utilise the zero-based budgeting methodology to assist in the development of this years' budget estimates. Policy prioritisation at the start of the budget process facilitates better alignment of the allocation of limited resources with Government's overall policy objectives and initiatives. Based upon the estimates of revenue and expenditure, the Government has successfully balanced Bermuda's budget for 2024/25 with a projected surplus of $210,000. Madam Chairman, do you know the reason why $210,000 was chosen?

The Chairman: Why?

Hon. E. David Burt: Because that was a balanced budget that was presented in 1990 and the figure was listed as $210,000. When we were doing our research, we were looking at the last balanced budget that was presented that was able to be achieved and we found that figure. So, we figured if we use that figure then we would not of course have to talk about why is it not higher or lower. Just make it simple.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem, Madam Chairman. I am making sure you know. And this is only the second budgeted surplus in 35 years.

Madam Chairman, the last time Bermuda achieved a balanced budget was in 2002/03, some 21 years ago and following the turmoil of the great recession after being battered by a once-in-a-century pandemic, we will return this country back to a balanced budget. And my sincere thanks go to the Budget Team led by Ms. Tina Tucker for their work in achieving this significant milestone.

For the upcoming fiscal year the unit has set the objectives to provide support for the open budget process, enhanced budget monitoring control reporting, continue development of budget preparation methodology and website and a restructure of the Fiscal Planning and Control Unit.

The Chairman: Members and listening audience, I just want to remind you that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. We are listening to the Premier and Minister of Finance. He is debating the heads for the Finance Ministry.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you so much, Madam Chairman.

International Affairs and Regulatory Unit:
Cost Centre 20020

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to cost centre 20020. The budget estimate for the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit is found in section B of the Estimates Book on page B-110. Accordingly, the budget estimate for this unit is $682,560, an increase of $214,560, or 46 per cent over the previous fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit is the lead policy and oversight unit within the Ministry of Finance Headquarters in relation to Bermuda's financial services sector. This unit is accountable to the Financial Secretary for the effective discharge of the unit's functions and through the Premier/Minister of Finance to Cabinet and Parliament. The head of the unit, the Deputy Financial Secretary, International Affairs and Regulations carries out the financial services policies primary through the Ministry of Finance, Bermuda Monetary Authority [BMA], the Attorney General's Chambers, the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee, the Bermuda Public Accountability Board, the Chartered Professional Accountants of Bermuda, the Registrar of Companies, and specialists domestic and global partners. In this way the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit works to strengthen the financial services supervisory framework and key institutions that enable access to the domestic economy and the global economy.

The Deputy Financial Secretary, Pamela Burrows, took on an expanded role in September 2023 as the Deputy Financial Secretary for international regulatory matters with operational responsibility for the Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee and the Registrar of Companies as well as management of her support team and her work with the relevant supervisory and financial services bodies. These agencies now include the Bermuda Monetary Authority, Public Accountability Board, the Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation [BDIC] and the Bermuda Gaming Commission. I wish to recognise DFS Burrows for her excellent work and leadership which has resulted in this promotion.

Madam Chairman, the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit operates in response to a broad range of opportunities and risks, which allow the Ministry to contribute actively to a continuous flow of information on ever-changing potential threats and opportunities to Bermuda and its reputation. The International Affairs and Regulatory Unit plans to respond to these challenges through various goals [and] is focused on advancing the unit's priorities and reflecting the outcomes the people of Bermuda deserve. These goals are as follows, Madam Chairman:

1. Ensure and support the fair, impartial, efficient and transparent development of regulation at the national and international levels.
2. Strengthen capacity to secure regulatory solutions to economic security issues.
3. Strengthen the public diplomacy and support bilateral and multi-lateral engagement.

Madam Chairman, the unit is involved in a variety of policy and management areas from regulatory reform in financial ability to anti-money laundering and market access issues at home and abroad. In general, the scope of information requirements is broad, but in some cases the scope is narrow. Either way the unit is committed to meeting these goals through example and expert assistance.

The scope of the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit is as follows:

- To support the Minister of Finance and the Financial Secretary in coordinating the financial services regulatory policy initiatives of the government.
- To oversee the Ministry of Finance component of the financial services legislative programme, together with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and the Ministry of Legal Affairs.
- To provide policy and strategic advice to the Minister of Finance and the Financial Secretary on anti-money laundering policy initiatives together with the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee, pursuant to section 49 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1997.
- To provide policy and strategic advice to the Minister [of Finance] and the Financial Secretary on matters related to transparency,

together with financial services and related directives issued by the European Union [working] together with the Cabinet Office, the Brussels Office, the London Office and European Union specialists.

- To provide policy and strategic advice to the Financial Policy Council together with other domestic agencies and/or committees regarding matters related to financial services.
- To provide policy and strategic advice to the Gaming Commission, the Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Bermuda Public Accountability Board on certain aspects of their mandates.

In the past fiscal year, Madam Chairman, the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit was primarily focused on technical and strategic assistance regarding the financial services sector at home and abroad. Specific milestones achieved by the International [Affairs and] Regulatory Unit in the last year are as follows:

- Maintained regulatory stability by ensuring completion of the Ministry of Finance component of 10 financial service sectors Bills and/or statutory instruments including but not limited to digital asset business, insurance and investment funds and investment business proposals submitted by the Bermuda Monetary Authority.
- In collaboration with the Ministry of Finance colleagues this unit provided technical and strategic advice on supervisory assessments, sovereignty rating meetings in matters related to financial stability. This includes participation in technical meetings with rating agencies, government-to-government meetings with other Overseas Territories together with participation of meetings with the Financial Policy Council.
- As appropriate, the unit provided input on relevant United Kingdom, United States and European Union matters, as well as assisted in advocacy in domestic and external engagement activities. This includes participation in monthly executive and technical meetings with the Bermuda Monetary Authority, quarterly meetings with the Financial Policy Council and annual meetings with the Fiscal Responsibility Panel.
- Completed integration of the Registrar of Companies, the Treaty Unit and certain aspects of the National Anti-Money Laundering Unit into the International Affairs division of the Ministry of Finance Headquarters.

Madam Chairman, in order to achieve these priorities and pursuant to the Ministry of Finance's business plan, the unit will undertake the following key strategic goals in the upcoming fiscal year:

In relation to the European Union, the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit will work with the Cabinet Office, the BMA, the Bermuda Public Accountability Board, the Brussels Office and the EU Council to coordinate Bermuda's compliance with the various and never-ending European Union directives. These will include provision of technical and strategic advice on legislative policy matters. This work also includes preparation for regular visits by the Minister of Finance to meet with key European Union stakeholders.

In dealing with matters related to NAMLC and the Financial Action Task Force [FATF] standards on combating money laundering, the unit will contribute to and support the implementation of Bermuda's national anti-money laundering strategy together with the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee. This work includes provision of strategic advice relating to Bermuda's compliance with standards which have been set down by the Financial Action Task Force.

In relation to the United Kingdom, the unit will work with the Cabinet Office on matters related to the financial services sector along with the Bermuda Monetary Authority, the London Office and specialist partners on matters related to equivalence and transparency, including accessible registers of beneficial ownership.

In relation to our affairs with the OECD, this unit will work with other units in the Ministry of Finance, coordinate the Ministry of Finance response to OECD assessments as and when required. This includes providing technical and strategic advice on all aspects of Bermuda's corporate and regulatory framework.

And with the Gaming Commission, the unit will work with the Gaming Commission to further assess the supervisory framework. As for other sectors, this work is expected to include the provision of technical and strategic advice on the relevant aspects of gaming in Bermuda. The same matters will happen with the Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Bermuda Public Accountability Board.

Madam Chairman, in this way the Regulatory Unit helps supervisors and businesses articulate the regulatory market access and related challenges they face to the government and the public. The unit's primary role going forward in the next year will be to continue to work with the relevant finance teams and relevant government departments to meet Bermuda's domestic and international commitment to continue to implement the structural adjustments to the International Affairs [and] Regulatory Unit.

The salary provision of $414,560.39 accounts for 61 per cent of the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit's allocation which covers three posts. The $214,560 increase in expenditure is primarily necessary to support the cost of external specialists required in order to assist the Ministry in accomplishing its financial services mandate.

Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy:
Cost Centre 20030

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to cost centre 20030, Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy. The budget

allocation for this unit is $294,000. This is a significant drop from the prior year of $137,000, or 32 per cent.

As part of the restructuring, this unit will be led by the Deputy Financial Secretary (Domestic and [Economic]) in order to provide leadership and oversight to the Accountant General's Department, the Department of Social Insurance, the Office of Tax Commissioner, and Customs as it relates to revenue matters. The team will also provide research and analysis and economic and financial conditions to help facilitate sound decisions on public policy, fiscal debt and guarantee management. The unit also manages the relationship with credit rating agencies.

Madam Chairman, I am pleased that this unit has supported the assessment of several rating agencies through the [2023/24] and has resulted in positive ratings being given and awarded to the Government of Bermuda by S&P, Moody's and KBRA.

In the upcoming year it is expected to fill the position of Deputy Financial Secretary (Domestic and [Economic]). Once filled, this unit will be able to play an enhanced role in the coordination and oversight of all domestic and economic matters. It will assist tax reform work and enhance financial reporting.

Other initiatives include continuing to

- improve the sustainability of the government's funds, mainly the PSSF [Public Service Superannuation Fund] and the CPF [Contributory Pension Fund] in an updated framework that allows for progressive contributions. In addition to the proposed change in the contribution structure, adjustments will also have to be made to other levers, mainly, retirement age and benefits;
- work with the leading auditing firm who is giving a draft of scope of work to assist the Accountant General's Department in bringing the outstanding audits of the Pension Fund up to date. We recognise the importance of these efforts as part of wider work on pension reform sustainability and take the decision to enlist additional resources to address both challenges within the current fiscal year.
- continue to work on the development of economic models for the forecasting of key economic indicators in government medium-term fiscal data (amongst other things) to enhance the execution of the Government's fiscal and economic management strategy in consideration of the reform of the tax system.
- work with relevant teams to ensure a more coordinated approach to debt collection in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Works launch of a government-owned captive insurance company to further reduce costs and create efficiencies in relation and provision of insurance for government assets.
- work with the teams in the division to effectively progress system upgrades and digitalisation work to promote more effective provision of tax and pension collections and government services.

Treaty Management and Administration:
Cost Centre 20040

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to cost centre 20040, Treaty Management and Administration. There is one point . . . zero dollars, A decrease from [the revised 2023/24] of [$1.266] million. The Treaty Management and Administration unit has been moved to Head 38, the Registrar of Companies, and as such will be dealt with in this section. This move allows for either more effective and efficient management of external tax affairs, given the overlap in the relevant global requirements.

National Anti-Money Laundering Committee:
Cost Centre 20100

Hon. E. David Burt: Cost centre 20100, Office of National Anti-Money Laundering Committee [NAMLC]. Madam Chairman, the Office of NAMLC budget for fiscal year is $879,304, a decrease of approximately $10,524, or 1.18 per cent, from the current fiscal year.

One hundred per cent of this allocation represents the minimum level of funding required to achieve under the provision of the core Secretariat services of NAMLC including to meet Bermuda's financial obligation to the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force.

Madam Chairman, the purpose of the Office of NAMLC is to provide Secretariat support to NAMLC and to enable the Government to achieve the objectives of

- advancing the Government's anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist policy initiatives;
- monitoring for changes in the international standards and other relevant global developments that will affect Bermuda;
- supporting legislative and policy development to address such changes; and
- coordinating measures to enhance Bermuda's AML/ATF regime.

In addition to its administrative role for NAMLC, the Office is also responsible for the management of all NAMLC's national initiatives such as the assessment of Bermuda's national anti-money laundering and terrorist financing proliferation financing risk, as well as managing the reviews of Bermuda's anti-money laundering and antiterrorist financing regimes by external bodies. Through its established coordination, cooperation and accountability mechanisms, NAMLC ensures that Bermuda has a strong and effective regime to combat money laundering, terrorism financing and the financing of proliferation. The competent authorities within NAMLC assist international counterparts in the effort to address these issues on a global scale.

Highlights of the Last Fiscal Year

Hon. E. David Burt: During the current fiscal year NAMLC has continued critical focus on maintaining and where needed enhancing the effectiveness of Bermuda's AML/ATF framework. This is necessary to sustain the achievements noted in Bermuda's 2020 Mutual Evaluation Report as well as to address recommendations made by the assessors in that report.

Madam Chairman, I must remind that Bermuda has achieved some of the highest ratings in the world. And I think number one in technical standards and top ten in implementation of those standards which is a testament to the Government's work. And I will get to that a little bit later, I guess, but you know, it is important that we prioritise these issues because I know there is some commentary and chatter that the Government has nothing to do with the growth of international business. But I can promise you if we did not meet those requirements, we would have a different story when it comes to growth in international business. But I digress, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, during 2023/24 the need to accelerate the completion of the fourth round of Mutual Evaluation while beginning early preparation for the fifth round, the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force [CFATF] cancelled Bermuda's second follow-up report. This report had been due in November 2023 and instead CFATF notified Bermuda that our fifth round of Mutual Evaluation was scheduled to commence in 2026. This timing represents a change in Bermuda's position in the Mutual Evaluation's line-up bringing us back in line with the third round scheduled and thus giving Bermuda less time to prepare for the fifth round. Therefore, and notwithstanding the cancellation of the follow-up report, NAMLC continued to progress several initiatives that were originally geared toward presentation of progress in the report to CFATF.

The following work has been undertaken in 2023/24 to specifically remediate deficiencies [and] to address recommended actions from Bermuda's 2020 Mutual Evaluation Report. The Office of NAMLC helped implement actions to address new technical requirements imposed by FATF Recommendation 2 dealing with domestic cooperation. To this end, the Office of NAMLC organised a series of consultation meetings between NAMLC agencies and technical personnel from the PATI/PIPA Unit in the Cabinet Office. These meetings enabled discussions on how individual NAMLC agency's coordination and domestic cooperation practices can be brought in line with data protection standards.

They also organised with the Privacy Commissioner for NAMLC cohorts to participate in the Commission's six-month "Road to PIPA" compliance training programme. This training commenced in June and 11 NAMLC agencies successfully completed this programme in December of 2023. During 2023, the Office provided significant support to assist with assessing the identified technical deficiencies, including support in relation to the preparation of drafting instructions for the preparation of required legislation. This work is ongoing and involves progressing the legislative amendments in the upcoming fiscal year.

Additionally, the Office of NAMLC supported the BMA with a conduct of the first sectorial risk assessment for the digital asset business sector. The Office coordinated the involvement of other NAMLC agencies and led relevant parts of the analysis to contribute to this assessment. The sectorial risk assessment started in February 2023 and was completed in September 2023. The final report on the findings is being progressed for Cabinet approval. This risk assessment is part of the technical work required to address substantial new requirements to FATF's Recommendation 15 that were imposed at Bermuda's last onsite. As Bermuda has not yet been assessed against these new requirements, this will be a part of the assessment in the upcoming fifth round Mutual Evaluation.

During fiscal year 2023/24 the Office of NAMLC also prepared and published a report which provided the consolidated inherent risk findings arising from Bermuda's most recent money-laundering terrorist-financing national risk assessment. The publication of Bermuda's risk assessment results is an essential component of Bermuda's fidelity to the international standards which require countries to maintain an updated understanding of their risks and to ensure that both public and private sector stakeholders in the AML/ATF regime are made aware of the results of any national or sectorial risk assessments.

In September 2023, as part of our efforts to enhance AML/CFT [anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism] knowledge, technical offices of NAMLC agencies facilitated a customised three-day AML/CFT cryptocurrency training for all NAMLC agencies. Training was provided by the Basel Institute in Switzerland and was hosted online. The training provided practical guidance on key aspects of cryptocurrency and blockchain and most importantly it afforded hands-on experience in understanding the mechanisms that support investigation and evidence-gathering in criminal cases involving digital assets and the blockchain.

Key Initiatives for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, NAMLC focus continues to be to ensure that Bermuda maintains the position as a global leader in the fight to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing to protect the economy and our reputation from the negative impact of international listings or that of enhanced monitoring in relation to AML/CFT. And just as a note, Madam Chairman, because of our stellar results in the last review we, unlike other jurisdictions, were not caught up in an enhanced review or follow-up. And that means less work was required. So, you invest upfront;

you have less to do afterward. If you don't invest upfront, if you don't assign the resources, as the former Government did not assign the resources, you find yourself stuck in a position where you may be like our competitor jurisdictions who have multiple years of follow-up, trying to clean up what they should have done in the first place. This Government took the approach under the esteemed advice of the then NAMLC chair, now the Acting Financial Secretary, to make sure that we exceeded. Unfortunately, it took up a significant part of our early domestic agenda. But we were able to achieve these results which resulted in us not being an enhanced follow-up. A very key point to make.

Over the upcoming year this particular mission will gain mission-critical status as Bermuda begins to prepare for the upcoming fifth round Mutual Evaluation with the first submission being due in early October 2026. Therefore, NAMLC will have to reckon with the recent significant changes made by the Financial Action Task Force, the technical requirements in several recommendation of the FATF standards, the methodology and the universal procedures for the assessment and follow-up review processes which were approved in just October of 2023.

The new methodology and universal procedures renew FATF's emphasis on effectiveness in our regime while simultaneously focusing on compliance with technical requirements only in areas where countries have already demonstrated weaknesses and in areas where technical requirements are new. Therefore, the major priorities for Bermuda in the upcoming year will be to ensure that our legal and operational frameworks are appropriately aligned with FATF's revised AML/CFT and CPF's standards; continue to address shortcomings and weaknesses identified by the assessors in our 2020 Mutual Evaluation Report; and ensure that any changes that are made to our AML/CFT and CPF regime do not undermine our compliance with other FATF requirements thus undoing previous achievements.

Madam Chairman, certain key national initiatives will be undertaken in the upcoming year for which the Office of NAMLC will provide critical support to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee. As these are national initiatives related to preparations for the next Mutual Evaluation consistent with the approach taken in the fourth round, funding will be provided from a grant from the Confiscated Assets Fund [CAF]. The work of the Office of NAMLC in relation to these matters will include the following:

- Coordinate and manage and provide technical leadership in the money-laundering and terrorist financing national risk assessment in accordance with Bermuda's national AML/ATF and CPF policy.
- Updated national risk assessments for all money-laundering and terrorist financing, respectively, are required to be conducted every three years. This joint risk assessment is expected to start in March 2024 and all NAMLC working groups will be assessing both money laundering and terrorist financing risk simultaneously for the first time. This national risk assessment is expected to continue to the end of 2024.
- Additionally, we want to plan for, coordinate and manage and provide technical leadership in Bermuda's first proliferation financing national risk assessment which is to commence by January 2025.

Madam Chairman, to facilitate the effect of processing all of these initiatives, the chair and the Office team will continue to work closely with the national anti-money laundering Cabinet committee, NAMLC member agencies and other stakeholders.

Salaries

Hon. E. David Burt: The salary provision for the Office of NAMLC in 2024/25 is $367,746, representing allocations for two of the three full-time employee posts with the Office of NAMLC's establishment as these two posts are filled. The salary provision represents a third unfilled full-time employee post is allocated for a local consultant to allow for the review of the role and then subsequent recruitment. The increase in salary provision, approximately . . . for all three posts is due to the recent salary uplift for all public officers.

The allocation of $200,000 for local consultants will fund the fee for the Chair of NAMLC and has been increased by approximately $15,000 to recognise a significant increase in time commitment required of the Chair to advance the next Mutual Evaluation. Again, Madam Chairman, a necessary expense paid for out of a consulting vote to ensure that Bermuda maintains its stellar record in AML evaluations, as I know there are lots of questions, *Where is all this money for consultants going?* But no one questions the results of our wonderful reviews from international agencies. But yet they are . . . you know, . . . anyhow let me try to remain focused, Madam Chairman.

Training and Overseas Travel

Hon. E. David Burt: Funding is also allocated for expense related to training and overseas travel and CFATF meetings. Provision is also made for Bermuda's annual membership contribution to CFATF which has increased for 2024 from $68,360 to $100,000.

Recognition

Hon. E. David Burt: I would like to thank Ms. Paula Tyndale who has continued to lead the work of the Office of NAMLC and also welcome Ms. Kozelle Crease who has recently started as NAMLC Coordinator to manage the Office of NAMLC team.

Pension Commission: Cost Centre 20070

Hon. E. David Burt: A grant of zero dollars [which is] a decrease of 100 per cent over the previous year. Madam Chairman, as a result of significant cash reserves held by the Commission which has grown over the last few years due to the increase in regulatory fees, no grant was allocated to the Pension Commission for this upcoming year. The Pension Commission is a corporate body established under the National Pension Scheme (Occupational Pensions) Act 1998. And also has responsibility for the administration of Pension Trust Funds Act 1966 and pension trust established and administered under this Act.

Madam Chairman, one of the main priorities of the Commission following the pandemic has been the administration of Government's economic relief programmes via the provision of refunds for plan members from their private occupational pension plans. As we know, these refunds provide timely and necessary financial support for Bermudians and up to the 31st of December the amount of refunds under this pandemic programme came to a grand total of $234.4 million.

Madam Chairman, in relation to other activities and responsibilities of the Commission, I am also pleased to advise the following:

- During 2023, the Commission wound up 69 plans, compared to 31 in the previous year.
- Registered 157 plan amendments, compared to 91 in the previous year.
- Approved 15 plan trustees in comparison to just one in the prior year.
- Initiated zero civil actions against . . . employees and officers compared to two in the prior year.
- Conducted 176 compliance meetings with employers and plan members compared to 21 in the prior year.
- Held 10 compliance meetings with plan administrators compared to eight in the prior year.
- Participated in nine public and/or advisory committee meetings compared to two in the prior year.
- Completed 16 transactions under the Pension Trust Funds Act 1966 compared to 19 in the prior year.

Giving statistics on pension plans as the most recently available data which is at the end of 31 December 2022. In the preparation of the brief I had asked—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: In the preparation of the brief leading up to this I was asked if there was more recent data. We do not get the data from panel administrators until June, so this is the most recent data. So as to the Opposition Leader referring to the notes from last year, I am assuming that says the 31 of December 2021. Yes, Opposition Leader? So this goes to 2022.

The National Pension Scheme contained 51,111 plan members or former members. There was a total of 3,293 employer plans. The vast majority of these 3,280 were defined contribution plans and there were only 13 defined benefit plans. The total value of assets under the National Pension Scheme at that point in time was $36.5 billion *[sic]*. I can only imagine what the recent run-up of the stock market that it is a lot higher. What? Did I read the wrong number, Minister? It is $3.65 billion. Did I say $35 billion? That is a whole lot of money. It is $3.65 billion—to correct the record. But with the recent run-up of the stock market, I am sure that figure has swelled substantially.

There were 535 self-employed plans. There were US$364,910 of plan assets that were transferred to overseas retirement vehicles compared to just $266,564 in the prior year.

Madam Chairman, the National Pension Scheme (Financial Hardship) Regulations 2010 also allowed Bermudians with a demonstrated financial need to get access to a portion of their private sector pension funds based on prescribed criteria for hardship. The summary of financial hardship statistics provided by the Commission for the 2023 financial year, and also I will provide the figures up to inception, are as follows (for 2023):

- total applications received—137;
- approved applications—113;
- declined applications—19;
- applications pending or withdrawn—5;
- total amount of money approved for withdrawal is—$2,515,285.

And just to go on the type of those applications, the vast majority of them were for eligible education expenses, which was 61; followed by imminent loss of principal residence, 21; imminent eviction from home for rents in arrears, 18; eligible medical expenses, 9; and funeral expenses, 4.

And just to give an idea of the success of this programme since its inception in 2010, another advancement of the Progressive Labour Party Government:

- total applications, 3,965;
- approved applications, 3,202;
- and the total amount of funds that were approved for withdrawal, $40,420,000.

Applications by type:

- eligible education expenses, 1,276;
- imminent threat of loss of principal residence, 507;
- imminent eviction from home from rents in arrears, 1,200;
- eligible medical expenses, 208; and
- funeral expenses, 11.

Pension Commission Goals

Hon. E. David Burt: Looking ahead, Madam Chairman, the upcoming year the Commission has a number of goals. And I will cover these in detail because they are important.

1. Undertake a series of reviews on critical issues and challenges facing the Occupational Pension Plan Sector and to make recommendations to the Minister of Finance on necessary legislative and policy adjustments.
2. Introduce a financial awareness campaign on the importance of saving for retirement and the significant role occupational pension plans play in achieving significant outcomes.
3. Complete the work to advance the reduction of pension administrator fees that remain to be completed. It is something that as Minister of Finance I am reasonably frustrated that it is not done; however, the Acting Financial Secretary has assured me that this will be done this year. So I sincerely hope that the Pension Commission will complete this particular work.
4. Support the enactment of more options for domestic investment of pension funds to boost the local economy which, Madam Chairman, Honourable Members will hear more about later in this budget session.
5. Continue to strengthen its corporate governance both at the board level and operationally.
6. Complete outstanding audits.

Projected Revenue and Expenditure Items

Hon. E. David Burt: The Commission's projected total revenue this year is $1.31 million which consists primarily of regulatory fees received. The Commission's projected total expenses for the year is $1.961 million, consisting of $1.5 million for salaries related to benefits for 10 staff members and the remainder for general office expenses. The resulting projected position is a net deficit of $651,000, although as I said before, there is a significant cash reserve.

I would certainly like to extend my thanks to the staff of the Pension Commissioner for the work of the past year. And I would like to extend a special thanks to Ms. Kelly Hodsoll who served as the Chairman of the Pension Commission for a significant amount of time, who has stepped down after multiple years of service. So, I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to her for her service, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier and Minister of Finance.

For the listening audience, we are presently in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. This afternoon the Minister of Finance/Premier is delivering the brief on the Ministry of Finance. So we have the Ministry of Finance, the Accountant General, Social Insurance, Office of the Tax Commissioner, Registrar of Companies, Debt and Loan Guarantees.

Minister, when you are ready, you may proceed.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you so much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I will move on to cost centre 20110 Gaming Commission, [line item 1002] Grant, of $800,000, which is an $800,000 increase.

Gaming Commission, Cost Centre 20110

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the 2024/25 budget estimate for the grant contribution for the Gaming Commission is $800,000. Since 2018, funding for the Bermuda Gaming Commission [BGC] has been through an overdraft facility supported by a Government guarantee.

On 27 March 2023 Butterfield Bank informed the Gaming Commission that the facility was to have a 90-day extension and then the overdraft was due to be repaid in full. At that point the Bermuda Gaming Commission did not have enough money to repay the loan and over the next 90 days the BGC sought other external funding to mitigate this issue. They were unsuccessful in securing funding against the balance and therefore out of the money that had to be repaid, $9,708,138, the Government as a guarantor paid $9,675,000 and the remaining $33,138 was settled by the Bermuda Gaming Commission. Yes, this was the Butterfield Bank.

The grant of $800,000 only represents partial funding with the remainder of their income being generated by external fees and taxes, primarily through fees imposed on cruise lines who wish to open their casinos in port. The total predicted spend for 2024/25 is $1.9 million. This is a significant reduction from the 2023/24 work plan which had a budget of $3.7 million.

The funding will support six employees in a work plan which will consist of continuing to address the issue providing banking services at the casino, which is critical for a casino to operate in Bermuda, review the licensing and regulation of online gaming and provide support for problem gaming via the help line.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the team of the Gaming Commission who, led by Ms. Charmaine Smith, during this fiscal year have answered the Government's request to streamline their operations significantly until there is an operating casino. Important. And that is what they have done.

Corporate Income Tax, Grant $1.278 million.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, in late 2023, as we all know, the Government following extensive review and analysis of the relevant international requirements passed the Corporate Income Tax Act. This was

a significant achievement representing strong and positive collaboration in consultation with industry and the public. Genesis initiative and subsequent work was in regard to the two-pillar plan of the global agreement reached in 2021 under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] which was signed by over 140 countries. This agreement requires a 15 per cent tax to be levied on a jurisdictional basis to in-scope entities and is commonly referred to as "the global minimum tax agreement."

Madam Chairman, the OECD has issued model rules as part of the framework for implementation of the global minimum tax [GMT] and these rules were the foundation for the development of Bermuda's regime to be considered compliant with these requirements. As we know, this Act will impose the 15 per cent corporate income statutory tax that will be applied to the Bermuda businesses that are part of multinational groups with annual revenue of €750 million or more. In administering this tax, the Government is having an administrative body to do this work with appropriate systems and personnel to effectively address the complexity of the tax collection, compliance and cooperation in this regard.

In the 2023/24 year funding for this project was done through the Policy Unit for the Ministry Headquarters. But for the upcoming year a new cost centre has been established against which future costs will be applied to ensure effective performance of primary objectives and functions.

Madam Chairman, in the coming fiscal year the Ministry of Finance will continue to progress the corporate income tax project with an initial grant of $1.278 million. The Unit will have the primary objective of collaboratively building and implementing an internationally credible Bermuda corporate income tax regime that takes into account the unique characteristics of Bermuda's international business community (spanning multiple sectors), designing organisational structures and recruiting a competent core executive team with experience, internationally credible, and able to put in place the framework to expertly grow the organisation in the future. And building and implementing from scratch processes and information technology systems that are robust and effective to make administration simplified, efficient, user-friendly, scalable, flexible, auditable, and most of all, technology friendly.

Madam Chairman, the primary function of the Unit will include tax preparer services, return filing and processing, audit and compliance, enforcement and collections, dispute resolution, law interpretation and international tax cooperation.

Madam Chairman, following completion of phase one of the corporate income tax project, phase two of the project will focus on development and implementing the key operational aspects of the corporate income tax regime in Bermuda. The primary objective of phase two includes ongoing development of technical tax administrative provisions, the aforementioned development of a corporate income tax collection body, and in addition phase two also includes supporting the Bermuda Tax Reform Commission in the achievement of its strategic policy objectives.

As I close out Head 10, I wish to thank all of the team inside of the Ministry of Finance Headquarters, which has been led by Ms. Cheryl Lister, OBE; our Acting Financial Secretary who has been in post since the untimely passing of the former Financial Secretary, Mr. Anthony Manders. She will be, as mentioned, retiring from the role at the end of this month but will continue to provide strategic advice and support over the next few months to her successor, the new Financial Secretary.

Madam Chairman, this concludes the Estimates for Head 10. I will now move on to Head 11, the Accountant General.

HEAD 11—ACCOUNTANT GENERAL

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I now present the budget for the Accountant General's Department, Head 11, which is found on pages B-113 through B-117, and also page C-11.

The Accountant General's Department was established under section 4 of the Public Treasury (Administration and Payments) Act 1969. It has responsibilities for the administration of the Consolidated Fund. The functions and responsibilities of the Accountant General's Department are critically important in the role of governance. The department is key in helping to undergird the financial controls and processes that are in place with respect to the public purse. Madam Chairman, the department's mission statement is *To develop and maintain quality financial reporting, employee health insurance, treasury function, internal control, and effective use of technology to aid in decision-making*.

Consolidated Fund Administration, 1101

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the department is divided into two programme centres as follows: 1101, Consolidated Fund Administration, which oversees all of the activities of the Consolidated Fund, and this is further out into six sections.

1. Policy Planning and Management, which sets the strategic direction in general administration of the department.
2. Financial Reporting, which handles the accounting and reporting on the Consolidated Fund and other public funds.
3. Compliance and Disbursement, which is the execution of payments for purchased goods and services, revenue receipting and treasury management, collecting and recording of government revenues including fees and taxes, cash management and forecasting.

4. Administration of the investment of the pension funds under management and risk management and insurance. The total pension funds investment under management is $2.76 billion. It is broken out as follows:
    a. $632.8 million for the PSSF [Public Service Superannuation Fund]; and
    b. $2.129 billion for the contributory pension fund.
5. Bank Reconciliation, which is the reconciliation of all of the government's bank accounts.
6. Financial Systems, which is management of the Enterprise system supporting the government's accounting platform.

Fund Administration, 1102

Hon. E. David Burt: The other programme is 1102, which is Fund Administration which represents the Government's share of employee benefits programmes, namely, the Public Service Superannuation Fund, the Contributory Pension Fund (commonly referred to as social insurance), the Government Employee Health Insurance [GEHI] scheme, and administration of the scheme and payment of health claims, and also for us, noted here, the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund (better known as MMLPF).

An important point to note, Madam Chairman. The department continues to operate its staffing levels below its total complement of 40 post-holders with there being 10 current vacancies. The project led by the Department of [Employee and] Organizational Development is to assist in the recruitment of hard-to-fill posts. It is expected to be important to address the issues related to recruitment in this area. Notwithstanding the vacancies, the department persists in efforts to identify efficiencies within its approved organisational structure.

Accomplishments for the Last Fiscal Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the Financial Systems section:

- completed the application upgrade for E1 9.2 which will reduce the number of customised applications facilitating ease of future upgrades.
- completed the prerequisites for the implementation of the vendor self-service deployment which allows persons to register a vendor. So you no longer have to fill out forms. You can just go online, apply as a vendor, and will smooth the payment process as that will now be able to be handled online.
- Updated the E1 access process from paper to digital working with the Forms Team. So again, forms no longer have to be filled out by government departments, they can be completed online. As I say, we complete digital transition and continue to address and progress digital transition within government.
- An additional accomplishment, worked closely with the Office of the Auditor General and ministries to progress the annual audit of the Consolidated Fund and Public Funds.
- The Compliance Disbursement Section continues to make timely vendor payments accurately notwithstanding significant staffing challenges.
- Worked closely with teams throughout the Government to ensure appropriate processing of key payments and continued effective financial oversight during periods when government systems were impacted by the cyberattack in September. And they did a tremendous job to ensure that the economy could continue to function with government payments not being delayed too much.

Madam Chairman, the Accountant General's Department has been allocated a total budget of $86.68 million for fiscal year 2024/25 which is broken out as follows:

- Consolidated Fund Administration estimate $5.97 million.
- Fund Administration estimate, $80,440,000.
- Capital estimate of $280,000.

This budgetary allocation represents an increase of $4.35 million, or 5.3 per cent, above the original estimates for last year, which is mainly due to increased employee overhead as a result of negotiated agreements with employees.

The 2024/25 revenue estimate is $1.99 million, an increase of $1.25 million, or 167 per cent above the 2023/24 original estimate. This revenue primarily relates to interest earned on the investments in the Sinking Fund.

The current account estimates can be found on pages B-113 to B-114.

Significant Programme Expenditure Changes

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, for cost centre 1101, which is found on page B-113, dealing with Consolidated Fund Administration where there is a decrease of $61,000. The current year's request reflects a decrease of $61,000 which is primarily reflective of a decrease in funding level for the vacant post currently existing in the department. With recruitment fees post scheduled to commence in the new fiscal year, it is anticipated that a full year's funding will not be required and the budget has been proportionately adjusted to reflect this. It should be noted that items that drive the department's overall expenditure is salaries, technical support, maintenance fees for the various software systems that are used by the Accountant General and rent.

Hon. E. David Burt: The aforementioned increase of $4.14 million. This programme presents the cost for employee benefits of Government. These costs are a function of the number of government employees and the rates relating to their prospective benefits, employee overheads (for example, contributory pensions, social insurance is directly related to the national contribution pension rates of contribution). As you will note, we did have pay increases and therefore these figures are going up.

As the employer, the government ordinarily matches its employees' contributions to the PSSF, social insurance contributions (the CPF), GHI contributions and premiums, except of course for the lease corrections in the Regiment for which the Government pays both the employer and the employee share. The Ministers and Members of the Legislation Pension Fund (MMLPF) contributions are made as well and matched by the Accountant General's Department.

The increase in 2024/25 estimates for the government's costs is primarily reflected in the uplift in salaries coming from salary negotiations and incremental increases in staffing levels that are expected throughout the service due to the ongoing work to hire full-time employees in hard-to-fill posts.

So here is what happens, Madam Chairman. The consulting bill goes down. The salary bill remains the same. And the overhead bill goes up because full-time posts are more expensive than consultants, in some cases. And I know the Opposition Leader is obsessed with consultants, so I am happy to help him understand the budgetary thing of how these things work out. But if you cannot hire people in posts, and work needs to be done, you need to find the resources or else we will be up here hearing complaints that work is not done. So you cannot have your cake and eat it too.

Let's move on to Capital Estimates, Madam Chairman.

Capital Estimates

Hon. E. David Burt: Page C-11, Capital Funding, $280,000. This is an increase of $180,000. Technical support and ongoing maintenance will be required for the 2024/25 fiscal year as the Oracle E1 system is continually enhanced to improve the business processes and other important service provided. The department's focus remains on leveraging the latest advancements in JD Edwards Enterprise One to optimise financial operations and drive continuous improvements.

The 2024/25 capital allocation will be used to progress the following projects: Completion and deployment of the vendor self-service module.

JD Edwards Enterprise One 9.7 Update

Hon. E. David Burt: This update promises enhanced user experience and performance and expanded cloud capabilities and most importantly, the completion and deployment of an online payment system for the collection and receipting of government services. Which is something that I know is anxiously awaited by many persons but most anxiously awaited by the Minister of Finance.

Key Initiatives for the Accountant General

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the key initiatives plan for the Accountant General for the upcoming fiscal year as well are to

- complete the audited Consolidated Funds no later than 31 October 2024;
- use the Capital Funding to complete the online payment portal (as I just mentioned); and
- work with the PATI/PIPA Unit to develop, assess and implement the model necessary for the department to be compliant with the Personal Information Protection Act 2016.
- continue the work to clear the backlog of outstanding financial statement audits of Public Funds (And again, it is of course a challenge as you heard in the beginning that the department is understaffed because accountants can make more money working in the private sector than they can in the public sector. And as we have had difficulty recruiting for roles, that is part of the reason why there is the delay and that is part of the work which I have mentioned to make sure that there are spaces where we can be competitive so those roles can be filled substantively.)

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Premier, if I can just interrupt.

I would just like to recognise that Senator Douglas De Couto is in the Chamber.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. E. David Burt: I hope he is listening carefully, Madam Chairman.

We will now move on to the other items that are going forward.

- continue to deliver scheduled Financial Instructions training in conjunction with the Department of Employee and Organizational Development.
- timely processing of outgoing vendor payments;
- and 100 per cent of clean health insurance claims paid within 30 days in line with governing legislation.

Madam Chairman, as I move on to the next head, I would like to extend my appreciation to the work

undertaken by the management and staff of the Accountant General's Department under the leadership of the Accountant General, Ms. Dionne Morrison-Shakir, who is an amazing asset to the Government of Bermuda and who has worked under incredibly trying circumstances with reduced staffing in her department. But she is an absolute pleasure to work with.

HEAD 12—BERMUDA CUSTOMS

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I will speak to the Bermuda Customs Department revenue which is included under the Ministry of Finance. Customs expenditures are included within the Ministry of National Security which was debated last week Friday.

Madam Chairman, certainly, as we know with the aftermath of the global pandemic, the increase of uncertainty brought around by conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, these have strongly affected financial markets and impacted Bermuda businesses. In recognition of this, the Ministry of Finance and as executed by the Customs Department, has continued to make available a programme of duty payment deferment for local businesses. This programme has allowed a temporary deferral of duty for up to six months for qualifying businesses. However, in exceptional cases arrangements can be made for even a longer deferment period.

During 2023/24 the Customs Department has operated an online auction of imported goods that have been abandoned or seized in order to recovery the duty owed on them. The website customs.bm provides further details on available items and allows bidders to submit offers for those items.

In addition, the following legislative initiatives were introduced primarily to provide relief to businesses and individuals given the challenges with the cost of living and the cost of doing business in Bermuda. It is a pretty extensive list, Madam Chairman. I am going to go through it for the benefit of the listening public.

1. In keeping with the Government's promise to ensure that the 75 [per cent] sugar tax is focused on sugary sodas, candy and chocolate, provision was made for a lower duty rate of 25 per cent for low sugar drinks and nutrition bars. For dairy creamers containing some added sugar the duty rate was reduced 35 per cent.
2. The duty rate for accompanied personal loose-leaf tobacco was amended from 35 per cent *ad valorem* to $500 per kilogram. This change has harmonised the rate for loose tobacco and how it is imported.
3. Recognising that business investment is key to economic growth, provision was made for 100 per cent end-use duty relief for goods imported for capital investment schemes for the business establishments of personal care providers. Personal care service providers include: non-medical personal care services such as barbershops, beauty salons, fitness centres or gyms, massage parlours and spas.
4. To help reduce the cost of school uniforms for the parents of school-age children, provision was also made for a 100 per cent end-use duty relief for articles of school uniforms imported by local business for resale. This relief covers uniform items such as jackets, blazers, windbreakers, wind jackets, school crest patches, ties, trousers, shorts, dresses, skirts, divided skirts, shirts, sporting T-shirts, vests, jerseys, pullovers, cardigans, and school shoes.
5. Also, 100 per cent duty relief was provided for imports for stone aggregate for use in the local, commercial manufacturers of structural concrete products such as ready-mixed concrete and concrete blocks. This measure has helped to mitigate increasing construction costs arising from the dwindling supply of local limestone aggregate.
6. To encourage more investment in the further development of our Island's international level team athletes, provision was made to provide 100 per cent duty relief for articles of uniform and clothing and equipment for Bermuda's international sporting teams.
7. Provision was made to widen the scope of application for end-use [duty] relief for community sports facilities so that renovation improvements are now eligible for duty relief whether or not the project requires Planning permission.
8. End-use duty relief for personal protective equipment [PPE] and supplies was amended to empower the Minister of Finance to determine the time periods where PPE may be imported duty free. This change allows the suspension of duty relief and swift reinstatement in the event of a resurgence of COVID-19 or a response to any future pandemic which might happen to come upon us. (Hopefully not.)
9. To further assist Bermuda Hospitals Board offsetting increased operating expenses the end-use duty relief for hospital operating supplies was amended by expanding the duty relief period until 31 March 2024.
10. Provision was made to amend end-use CPC 4243 widening the scope of application of end-use duty relief to include asphalt production as well as concrete products to eliminate any competitive advantages that concrete product manufacturing may enjoy over asphalt product manufacturing in respect to driveway installations. This amendment has also permitted duty savings on aggregate imports be passed on to the Department of Works and

Engineering in the repair and construction of public roads.

11. A new end-use CPC was introduced providing 100 per cent duty relief for goods for all licensed day care centres and approved day care provider premises. The duty relief enables licensed day care centres and approved day care providers to enhance the overall quality and safety of the facilities and homes to purchase developmentally appropriate materials and equipment for the classroom and outdoor play spaces.

Total Customs revised revenue (as shown on page B-118 of the Estimates Book) is $231.7 million and the projection for the next year is $238.7 million.

Measures imposed in the previous financial year to cap fuel prices at February 2022 levels were also continued to assist customers when necessary.

Analysis of major revenues are as follows: Customs duty $233 million, an increase of 6.5 million, or 3 per cent. It is expected that duty collection will increase in 2024/25 due to improving economic conditions and consequently the forecast shows an increase of $6.5 million, or 4 per cent from the original 2023/24 forecast.

The duty revenue forecast is based on the expectation that the economic condition of the United States will continue to improve. Our closest major trading partner, the United States, is seeing its economy strengthen as indicated through unemployment rates close to a 50-year low, sustained growth in real GDP. Inflation rates are also falling which is expected to provide the Federal Reserve scope to lower interest rates. Whereas in the recent past global oil prices reached new peaks, they have now returned to lower, more normal levels and the Government will continue to advance legislation which will assist Bermuda's economy such as introducing additional duty rate reductions and duty relief for essential goods.

The Government has tasked the Cost of Living Commission with identifying additional essential commodities to be added to the Schedule of their Act thereby reducing Customs duty that could provide price reductions of those goods to consumers.

Other Revenue Sources

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to other revenue sources, Madam Chairman. Forecast of revenue sources other than Customs duty are expected to contribute a total of $5.43 million during 2024/25, which based on our forecast will equate to 2.3 per cent of the revenue collected by Customs. There is little indication that receipts in these areas will change significantly from the revenue levels received during the 2023/24 fiscal year to date.

Madam Chairman, sincere thanks to the Collector Ms. Lucinda Pearman and the Customs team for their support in Bermuda's economy in this area of Customs revenue which falls under the Ministry of Finance. And with your leave, I am happy to move to Head 28, the Department of Social Insurance.

The Chairman: Yes, Premier. I just want to remind the listening audience that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. We are now debating . . . we have just finished up the Ministry of Finance Headquarters and now we are moving on to the Accountant General and then we will be proceeding to—

Hon. E. David Burt: I have done Accountant General and Customs. I am over to Social Insurance.

The Chairman: —[INAUDIBLE] and Social Insurance.

Premier, you may proceed.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you so much, Madam Chairman, for giving me that break to stretch my legs. I am grateful and appreciative of such.

HEAD 28—DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL INSURANCE

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the Department of Social Insurance, Current Account Estimates are shown on page B-119 of the Budget Book. The estimate for 2024/25 is $3 million which is $532,430, or 15 per cent, less than the original budget. This budget reduction is solely for war pensions and gratuities.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Social Insurance and the staff administers the Government of Bermuda's Contributory Pension Fund and its benefits to Second World War veterans. War pension and gratuities are 100 per cent funded by the Consolidated Fund and the contributory pensions operations within the department are 100 per cent funded by the Contributory Pension Fund. Expenditures are paid through the Consolidated Fund and recharged to the Contributory Pension Fund in accordance with section 3(3) of the Contributory Pensions Act 1970.

The mission statement of the department is *To ensure contributions are collected and benefits are paid.* Pretty simple.

The vision of the department is while remaining true to our principles and values, we must keep up with the times in the way we serve and operate. We know that times change and that our evolution must be substantial and continuous in order to serve future generations efficiently and compassionately.

Madam Chairman, the core function of the department operates under two main Acts of Parliament to administer the Government of Bermuda's social insurance programmes, as well as the war pensions and gratuities programme.

The Contributory Pensions Act 1970 and, of course, as we know, under this Act all employed and self-employed individuals who are over the age of 18,

or under the age of 26 in the instance of full-time students who work more than four hours per week are required to pay contributions. The two major classes of benefits paid out of the fund are contributory benefits which are for old age pension and gratuity, widow and widowers allowance and gratuity and disability benefits; and non-contributory benefits which are for old age pension and a disability benefit.

The other Act is the Pensions and Gratuities (War Service) Act 1947 and under this Act benefits are payable to Bermudian war veterans or their surviving spouses who served during World War II. There are currently 72 veterans or their surviving spouses in the programme.

Madam Chairman, highlights for the last year are as follows:

First, the department of Social Insurance new Director, Mr. Gershon Gibbons, of Dandy Town fame, started on 1 May 2023. The new director brings valuable knowledge to the department having been responsible for administering Bermuda's Government pensions funds and the enrolment of employee benefits and managing numerous Government IT projects.

On 14 July 2023 the Contributory Pensions (Amendment of Benefits) [(No. 2)] Order [2023] was tabled in the House of Assembly increasing pension benefits by 4.1 per cent, keeping this Government's promise to increase pensions by the rate of inflation to ensure that our seniors do not fall behind. Something I was quite certain, Madam Chairman, that you would appreciate.

The Chairman: Very much so.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

Management consulting services. The review was completed and a report was received in February 2023. The review concluded that the staff in the department should be increased to serve the population better and a comprehensive review/update of job descriptions is required.

The review also stated that there is a need to review processes and systems to provide improved pension administration and collections to reduce non-payment of contributions, streamline operations and to execute on the Department of Social Insurance's mandate.

Madam Chairman, though there has been a recommendation for an increase in positions, the position of the Ministry of Finance is that we will make investments in technology to keep that at a minimum. And as I will go to additional technology investments of the Department of Social Insurance, I do believe that we will be able to achieve that goal with a minimal increase in complement.

Keeping with the highlights, the department continued to maintain effective work relationships with the Debt Enforcement Unit of the Attorney General's Chambers, the Public Prosecutions, Department of Immigration and also the Tax Commissioner and Transport Control Department with respect to efforts to assist in debt collection. And as always, the department participated in various workshops and presentations where they provide clarity to attendees regarding pensions, benefits and contributions managed by the Department of Social Insurance.

Cost Centres and Key Programmes

Hon. E. David Burt: If I may, Madam Chairman, the department operates five main cost centres. I will go through them in order and give details as I go through.

Cost centre 38000, Senior Management Administration

Hon. E. David Burt: The Administration section provides overall direction and management for the department. The budget estimate for this cost centre is $2,121,700 which is an increase of $261,400 from the original budget. This increase is due to a salary review which resulted in upgrades to employees in this section and unfunded positions being funded in the 2024/25 budget. Additional funds were also budgeted for the office upgrades and overhead costs.

Cost centre 38010, War Pensions and Gratuities

Hon. E. David Burt: The War Pensions Section administers (found on page B-119) the benefits to war veterans under the Pensions and Gratuities (War Service) Act. The budget estimate is $3 million, which is $532,—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh sure. Wrong page number?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: I will promise you by the time the Opposition Leader asks the questions, we will have the information right in front of him.

The Chairman: All right. Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Not a problem at all. Thank you very much, Madam . . . No, I think it is there. No, it is there.

The Chairman: Really?

Hon. E. David Burt: It is at the bottom of page B-119. War pension and gratuities.

The Chairman: That's it? That's the only one?

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, because the other things are recharged, remember. So, they are charged back to,

but we will get . . . we will . . . because it is not listed here under general summary of the expenditure because remember the expenditure is not in the Consolidated Fund. Though the funds are paid from the Consolidated Fund, those are recharged back from the Contributory Pension Fund [CPF] under the Contributory Pensions Act. So they do not typically show up in the Budget Statement. But we will just confirm to make sure there is nothing that is off.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: But the one I am dealing with right now is certainly [page] B-119. But I will make sure to get clarification for that, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you for pointing that out.

On page B-119, as I said, the budget estimate this year is $3 million which is $532,400, or 15 per cent less than the previous year. The budget is based on 72 war veterans which is six less than the prior year.

Benefits

Hon. E. David Burt: The Benefits Section is responsible for the administration of benefits to members of the Contributory Pension Fund. And under the Contributory Pensions Act the Contributory Pensions and Workmen's Compensation (Reciprocal Agreement) Act 1970. The budget estimate for this cost centre, is $489,800, which is an increase of $103,600 over the 2023/24 original budget of $386,200. This increase is due to two vacant partially funded positions being restored to 100 per cent and one unfunded post being funded for the 2024/25 budget year. The total benefits paid for August 2022 to July 2023 was $204 million compared to $188.6 million in the previous year which is an increase of $15.8 million or 8.4 per cent. This increase is partially due to the increase in pensions on 16 August [2022] which was applied retroactively to 16 August 2021.

In 2022/23 the total benefits paid was $168.7 million . . . sorry. Let me start again, Madam Chairman. The total amount paid, as we said, $204.4 million. Out of that $168.7 was paid for contributory pensions. And $14.1 million was paid for widows and widowers' allowance. Gratuities of $11.5 million were paid. Madam Chairman, $7.1 million was paid for non-contributory pensions and the remaining $3 million in benefits paid for the period were for contributory and non-contributory disability payments.

Madam Chairman, I certainly would like to commend the manager and the staff of the Benefit Section who have continued to process the payments on time . . . sometimes we get a little banking issue, but almost all of the time they are there right on the day. Of course, if they are not there on the day, you and I get calls.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: So we try to make sure that we get that done and sorted on time.

Compliance, Business Unit 38040

Hon. E. David Burt: The Compliance Section monitors the compliance of employers and employees according to provisions of the Contributory Pensions Act. The budget estimate for this is $1,033,500 which is $69,300 more than the 2023/24 original estimate of $964,200. And this increase is related to the expected recruitment of the debt collector for the Department of Social Insurance in the current year.

From August 2022 to July 2023 the total reported debt from employers and self-employed persons increased by $804,800, 1.6 per cent, from $49,047,000 to $49,851,800. Inactive accounts of debt of $21,662,700 were included in the year's debt total due to a mandated reporting policy. There was a total debt to the Contributory Pension Fund of $71,514,500. Given the progress that the Office of the Tax Commissioner has made in relation to collecting outstanding debt, the additional hiring of a debt collector in the Department of Social Insurance will also provide synergies and the possible effect of use of shared resources to advance debt collection. As a reminder, we have made significant progress on getting back payroll taxes and now the Ministry is turning its focus to make sure that we advance the same matters on social insurance. So delinquent employers beware!

The Compliance Section continues to work with delinquent employers to establish practical ways to reduce their outstanding debt and oversees the execution of payment plans and follows up to ensure that they are monitored. And of course, the Attorney General's Chambers Debt Enforcement Unit works in close collaboration with the department to assist the collection of outstanding contributions to the Department of Social Insurance. In most cases the employers who the Department of Social Insurance are unable to contact were delinquent over 120 days are the ones who are referred to the Debt Enforcement Unit.

Outstanding contributions collected for the contribution year amounted to $2,753,234 compared to $1,401,744 in the prior year which means there is almost a doubling of debt collection from one year to the next. But we are going to look to significantly increase that as we bring on a full-time debt collector and work with the Office of the Tax Commissioner. And this doubling reflects the efforts of the Compliance staff and the mandate to make sure that we collect the outstanding debt. So I know the headline is going to be the amount of debt outstanding, but I think it is important to note that we collected more debt than we did last year and

the amount of debt that we collected this year is less than the increase in delinquent accounts. A key point to note.

Madam Chairman, the Compliance section, as mentioned, has staffing challenges and therefore we are going to ensure that the capital account budget allocation includes the purchase of debt management software to automate the identification and monitoring processes. And as I said, Madam Chairman, you have seen the success that additional investment in IT resources for debt collection has provided for the Office of the Tax Commissioner. And the Department of Social Insurance will continue to work with the Attorney General's Chambers Debt Enforcement Unit and the Department of Public Prosecutions to collect the outstanding debt through the court system where needed.

Contributions

Hon. E. David Burt: Contributions for this section is responsible for the administration of records and accounts from employers and employees participating in the Contributory Pension Fund under the Act. The budget estimate for this cost centre is $588,900, which is $75,200 more than that of the original budget. And this increase is due to negotiated salary increases for the employees of that section. The total contribution received through July amounted to $112.6 million compared to $105.9 million for the prior year which is an increase of $6.7 million or 6.3 per cent.

Comparative Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. E. David Burt: Salaries and Wages. An increase of $322,000 reflects the estimates for vacant posts across the department which are budgeted at 100 per cent versus 75 per cent for the prior year.

And Madam Chairman, it is noted that all the individual amounts can be seen on page B-120, even though the amounts that are credited to the programme balance it out to the $3 million, which is just for war veterans. But as I am going through the subjective analysis you can see all of the various items that are listed for those departments.

Salaries and Wages. I covered the increase of those matters. And this increase is also due to a salary review which resulted in upgrades for employees in the department and unfunded positions being funded in the 2024/25 budget.

Professional services. The decrease of $530,000 is primarily due to a decline in war veterans medical claims and war pension awards due to reduction in the number of war veterans expected to benefit from these payments.

Receipts and accredited programmes. This amount represents the cost to operate the Contributory Pension Fund. And initially, as I said, payments to the Consolidated Fund recharged to the CPF are made in accordance with the Contributory Pensions Act. And the recharge for 2024/25 is budgeted at $4,204,000 which is an increase of $509,720 of the original budget of the CPF over the prior year. Some people may ask why we are increasing the amount of funds that we are spending on the Contributory Pension Fund. I think I have made that clear. There is a focus on better service but also a focus on making sure that we deal with debt enforcement in the exact same way that we have been able to increase resources for the Office of Tax Commissioner to claw back a lot of those payments, the same principles will be applied here to the Office of Social Insurance or the Department of Social Insurance and we are expecting that we will see some results.

Activities and Plans for the Next Fiscal Year

Hon. E. David Burt: The following activities are slated for the department:

- Completion of the actuarial review for the Contributory Pension Fund which started at the end of the third quarter of the last financial year. The actuarial review is required every three years per section 35 of the Contributory Pensions Act [1970]. And the review aims to indicate the financial condition and long-term sustainability of the Fund and to investigate the potential financial implications of the future contribution benefit increases to the fund.
- Utilise the Government portal to allow contributors to search for their social insurance number, thus stopping people from calling, which of course, is another improvement and further digitalisation of this effort for the Government. By the second quarter of 2024/25 we will have applications online. So, applications for social insurance will be able to be completed online and registered inside of they system. And what we will also be doing is increasing the public relation campaign to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities under the Contributory Pension Fund, the UK [Bermuda] Reciprocal Agreement and the war veterans' legislation.
- Continue to conduct orientation sessions for newly registered employees and implement the remaining recommendations of the MCS [Management Consulting Section] review.

Significant Progress to New Initiatives

Hon. E. David Burt: I just want to touch on significant progress or changes to new initiatives, as we have spoken about our debt collection effort, which I mentioned earlier in this brief and presentation, are managed from the chief operating officer inside of the Ministry of Finance.

- Continue to participate in entrepreneurial workshops to educate the public about the benefits of rights for employees and employers.

- Establish more cross-ministry initiatives to develop supportive strategies to close existing gaps in legislation that allow persons to avoid payment obligations.
- Development and implementation and purchase of a new debt management system.
- The department will also embark on succession planning exercise where current employees will be given opportunities to be profession-developed and cross-trained. Succession planning will facilitate smooth transitioning when a staff member terminates service or retires.
- Partner with the Department of Employee and Organizational Development to encourage persons in the financial industry by creating opportunities in the Department of Social Insurance through the Government bursary and training programmes.

Madam Chairman, I did cover the capital account but just real briefly, on page C-11, the Department of Social Insurance has been allocated $284,000 in capital funding for the purchase of debt management software. And as indicated, this application will provide improvement for the collection of debt using IT supported intelligence. And we have seen this assist in other departments. Additionally, funding has also been allocated for the updating of the furniture in the department.

Madam Chairman, the public officers in the Department of Social Insurance are to be commended for their commitment in providing valuable service to the local community and overseas beneficiaries. It has been a pleasure to work with the new Director of Social Insurance, Mr. Gershon Gibbons. And I look forward to witnessing progress and members of the public can look forward to an increased digitalisation of efforts there. And as I said, delinquent employers can look forward to the implementation of the debt management system which will allow the department to better follow up with those persons who are not . . .

There is one other thing that I wanted to get in this year. It is probably not going to make it because I am conscious of trying to ask too much from departments. But another thing that we are going to look at once we get past these hurdles, is to make sure that notifications can also be sent to employees of delinquent employers, so employees can be aware. And so that is one of the things that we want to do. It is something that I know has been recommended and suggested. We have to work through these various work plans to make sure we can achieve these things. But we are dealing with these things this year and moving on to other items next year.

Great. Thank you, Madam Chairman. With that I am happy to move to the Office of the Tax Commissioner.

The Chairman: Premier, I just will—

Hon. E. David Burt: So I can—

The Chairman: —take a little break just to remind the listening audience that we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

The heads that have been debated are the Ministry of Finance Headquarters, and the Minister has delivered a brief on the Accountant General, and he has also read his brief on Social Insurance, Customs, and he will be moving toward the Office of the Tax Commissioner. And this is the fourth session of debate within the Committee of Supply. And at this time each of the ministers under the various ministries deliver briefs just showing and describing the performance of the ministries over the year and the allocated budget spending for the following year, which begins 1 April 2024 and runs to 31 March 2025.

Minister of Finance, are you ready now to proceed?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you so much, Madam Chairman, for that break.

The Chairman: You are welcome.

Hon. E. David Burt: I will happily now move on to Head 38, which is the Office of the Tax Commissioner.

HEAD 38—OFFICE OF THE TAX COMMISSIONER

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the estimates for Head 38, Office of the Tax Commissioner [OTC] begin on page B-122. The total projected revenue is $792.6 million, which is a substantial increase from the revised current year estimate of approximately $730 million and the prior year's budget of $726.6 million. A key contributor to the increase is expected to be the change in the base date for the new-hire relief currently available to large businesses.

The OTC's budget allocation for the fiscal year is $4.551 million, which is comprised of $4,051,000 in current expenditure and $500,000 in capital expenditure.

Madam Chairman, the primary responsibility of the Office of Tax Commissioner is to effectively administer the timely and accurate collection of all taxes and stamp duties in accordance with applicable legislation. The Office of the Tax Commissioner's vision is to be a significant contributor to Bermuda's prosperity and stability by being a progressive, modern tax administration committed to supplying superior customer service, continuous improvement and collaboration.

The OTC's mission is *To leverage modern technology to ensure taxpayers' compliance through quality service and effective enforcement*.

The OTC is divided into four cost centres:

- The Administration Team, noted in the Budget Book as 48000, provides the overall direction

and management of the office which includes strategic planning, staff development, training and general office support.

- The Stamp Duties team, 48050, which is responsible for administration and collection of stamp duties under the Stamp Duties Act 1976. This includes the adjudication and processing of a variety of legal instruments including but not limited to conveyances, transfers, leases and mortgages, as well as administering the Primary Family Homestead Designation Programme.
- The Audit and Compliance Team, 48070, which is responsible for ensuring that taxpayers are compliant with the Tax Acts throughout the life of the taxpayers starting with their initial registration. The team conducts audits and inspections of taxpayer books and records and is responsible for knowledge management and taxpayer education.
- The Operations Team, [48080], which oversees the collecting and reporting on all taxes under the remit of the Office of the Tax Commissioner. The team maintains taxpayer accounts, receivable balances, levies, penalties for late and insufficient payments and is responsible for debt collection and enforcement.

Key Achievements in 2023/24

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the last fiscal year saw progress being made in the OTC's departments continuous pursuit of its goal of becoming more effective and efficient in its effort to collect current taxes and arrears. The collection of tax arrears has been a major priority for the Tax Commissioner over the last year. At the start of this year the Office of the Tax Commissioner was given a target of collecting $7.5 million in delinquent tax receivables. We are glad to report that collections on delinquent receivables up to early November of 2023 had exceeded $15.6 million. I hope I can get an updated figure for that (for the technical officers who may be listening) as it would be great to provide that update to the Committee of Supply. But this is a testament to the improvements in debt collection tools and processes that have been accomplished with the OTC's Operations Debt Management Section and the significant amount of capital investment that has been made to ensure that this is able to happen.

The Debt Management activities have been strengthened by technology improvements, streamlined processes and established timelines for case management that enable the agency to make data-driven decisions and focus collection efforts in a more targeted manner.

The OTC has enhanced its business intelligence and reporting capabilities enabling the department to have a more accurate view of taxpayer compliance. The OTC is able to segregate those debts with the lowest possibility of collection and prioritise immediate efforts on those with higher chances of a successful collection. The OTC can now identify those debts with greater opportunities for collection and those which may be more difficult or require more stringent approach or those which are considered uncollectible. As a result of these improvements, OTC debt collectors can best utilise practices to make more effective use of the efforts working with delinquent taxpayers and recovering past due taxes.

Madam Chairman, as in previous years, payroll taxes continue to account for a substantial portion of Government revenues and we have seen increases in payroll tax revenues during the past two fiscal years. This despite payroll tax receipts for those years being impacted by relief granted to certain sectors experiencing financial hardships due to the global economic climate and notable reductions in tax rates for all local companies as well as all employees earning less than $132,000.

A reminder, Madam Chairman, 86 per cent of workers in this country received a tax break underneath this Government in last year's budget and 86 per cent of businesses received a tax cut as well. Madam Chairman, it is important to remember, as I repeat again for those persons who may be listening, that the Opposition branded these changes as "irresponsible." But those changes have resulted in the highest payroll tax revenue in history and have set the foundation for a balanced budget.

Madam Chairman, I will digress and say I think that it is *irresponsible* to double the debt in four years and leave a $200 million mess like Morgan's Point. But as usual, Madam Chairman—

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Honourable Minister is misleading the House. The Opposition did not double the debt in four years as can be seen from the Budget Book. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, sir.

Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Again, Madam Chairman, it is very important to note. Branded as *irresponsible,* cut taxes for 86 per cent of employees and 86 per cent of businesses, highest payroll tax revenue in history and on path to balance a budget. The opposite of irresponsible; it is sound, fiscal management by this Government.

The OTC's new hire relief programme was initially established in 2018. Something else that was put in place by this Government. And since then the programme has both been expanded and extended. Changes to the relief have included the expansion of it from just the top-tier of taxpayers to the top two bands

of taxpayers. And also the extension of the new hire relief for qualifying employers, established in 2018 and 2020 was extended last . . . two years prior to 31 March 2024.

Revised payroll tax estimates for 2023/24 are projected to be $522 million or 45 per cent of Government's total estimated revenue for the year. This is an increase of $35.3 million, or approximately 7.3 per cent over the previous year's actual payroll tax receipts of $486.9 million.

2024/25 Fiscal Year

Hon. E. David Burt: In fiscal 2025 the OTC will continue its work on modernising its technology reporting capabilities and operations to support effective debt collection, improve customer service and successful resolution of taxpayer noncompliance.

Madam Chairman, the goals for debt management in the next fiscal year are as follows:

- to ensure that limited resources are focused on the collection and compliance efforts that are most likely to be successful;
- to continue to ensure that all debt collection activities are performed within a consistent process timeframe and framework;
- to increase the successful enforcement action such as increase in court appearances for those taxpayers who are financially able to pay yet refuse to be compliant with tax laws; and
- the department has set a goal to exceed the target that has been set by the Ministry of Finance to collect at least $10 million of outstanding debt.

There are also improvements planned for OTC's Compliance Section. The goal of the Compliance Section is to help facilitate greater taxpayer compliance and, as such, the OTC intends to address underlying issues which could increase tax arrears.

Madam Chairman, planned improvements to minimise or prevent increases in new or outstanding taxes include

- identifying at-risk taxpayers early when they begin to struggle to pay;
- ongoing monitoring of the debt collection process to track effectiveness of efforts via key performance indicators and adjustments as needed to further improve debt collection efforts;
- improve the tracking of noncompliant taxpayers to enable faster initiation of compliance activities [which] increase the likelihood of successful collection of tax debt;
- increase the number of compliance-related activities such as audits; and
- decrease the number of arbitrary assessments by identifying at-risk taxpayers early when they begin to struggle to pay their taxes due to financial difficulties placing them on instalment plans in an earlier stage.

Madam Chairman, the OTC will make further improvements on the Operation Section in relation to the production of end-of-year accounts and receivable estimates in year-end reconciliation. This work is expected to upgrade the department's capabilities with respect to reconciling outstanding debt while also increasing the efficiency of the Operation Section, decreasing the time required to complete year-end accounting tasks.

The continuation of debt collection and other changes related to revenue generation provide a base support for projected revenues of $792.6 million, which is approximately $66 million more than the current year's original estimate of $726.7 million.

Madam Chairman, payroll tax revenues for the upcoming year are projected to rise to $580 [million] and this represents a $68 million, or 13 per cent, increase over the original estimate of $512.5 million for this current fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, as previously stated the budget allocation for OTC in the upcoming fiscal year is $4.551 million, divided between current and capital. The capital expenditure budget will be used to continue modernisation efforts within the Compliance Section and to make further improvements to the Operation Section regarding accounts receivable estimates and year-end accounting.

For fiscal year 2024/25 the OTC's salary budget has been increased by 4 per cent, or $117,000, only as a result of negotiated salary uplifts. All other expenses remain relatively the same.

In conclusion, Madam Chairman, I wish to thank the staff at the Office of the Tax Commissioner, led by the Tax Commissioner Mr. Derek Rawlins, for their hard work and their dedicated service to the Government and the people of this country. I think that we can all applaud the efforts of the Debt Collection Unit which, by the way, Madam Chairman, consists of a team of consultants who are working on collecting taxes for the Government. An important point to note.

I would now like to move on to Head 39, Registrar of Companies.

HEAD 39—REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I now present the budget for Head 39 the Registrar of Companies [ROC] which is found on pages B-127 through B-130 of the Budget Book.

The Registrar of Companies is allocated a total budget of $12,043,000. And this is up $2,503,000, or 26 per cent, from the previous financial year.

Madam Chairman, the Registrar of Companies is government's third largest revenue-generating department and is projected to collect approximately $76 million of revenue in this upcoming fiscal year. Its operations are regulated by several legislative mandates,

including but not limited to the Companies Act 1981, the Limited Partnerships Act 1883, the Exempted Partnerships Act 1992, the Limited Liability Company Act 2016, the Overseas Partnerships Act 1995, and the Government Fees Regulations of 1976. These provide the framework for maintaining the Registrar of Companies and the timely collection of associated registration fees.

The department is also responsible for the administration of liquidations and personal bankruptcies as well as the regulation of Bermuda's real estate dealers and dealers in high-value goods sectors. High-value goods are like jewellery, for example.

The legislative framework for the Registrar's mandate in this capacity is the Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1982, Bankruptcy Act 1989, Bankruptcy Rules 1990, Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Act 2017, Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Regulations 2017, and Registrar of Companies (Supervision and Regulation) Act 2020.

Bermuda continues to be impacted by ever-increasing pressures and requirements that are imposed by other jurisdictions or regions, mounting challenges from our competitors and increasing scrutiny from global and regional standards setting and oversight bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD), the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the Caribbean Financial [Action] Task Force (CFATF) and the European Union oversight bodies.

This changing landscape has driven the Registrar of Companies evolution as a regulator and this legislative mandate has been underpinned by the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 and the Economic Substance Act 2018. Indeed, Bermuda's implementation of the Economic Substance regime is closely monitored or reviewed on an annual basis by both the European Union and the OECD. By the way, Madam Chairman, with the assistance of a consulting team we passed those assessments which of course not every country in our region managed to do.

Similarly, FATF and CFATF have looked to the ROC to enhance its AML/ATF [Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing] compliance framework with respect to legal persons as well as in the real estate dealers and high-value goods sectors as the competent supervisory authority charged with their oversight.

Still in the regulatory lane, beneficial ownership is another evolving space with policy positions emanating from the United Kingdom, the European Union, the OECD, the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the Financial Action Task Force, and commitments have been made to both the European Union and also the United Kingdom. Beneficial ownership also features prominently in Bermuda's AML/ATF and economic substance regimes of which the Registrar of Companies has been designated to oversee.

For fiscal year 2024/25, the ROC's mandate within the tax regulatory policy and compliance domain has been expanded. The Tax Treaty Unit that was in the Ministry of Finance Headquarters has been incorporated into the ROC to exploit the obvious synergies with the ROC's economic substance regime, as both economic substance in Bermuda's tax treaty and information exchange regimes fall within the broader scope of the OECD's BEPS, which stands for Base Erosion and Profit Shifting framework which addresses international tax concerns.

Madam Chairman, despite external pressures Bermuda's corporate register remains resilient with a total number of companies and partnerships on the register ending the year at approximately 16,000.

Madam Chairman, the Registrar's mission is *To leverage technology, enhance user experience and facilitate regulation, accurate data collection and analysis.* The department's mission objectives can be found on page B-127 of the annual Budget Book. And I know that the Opposition Leader can read it so I will spare us from reading those items.

Major Achievements

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the department has been active in this current fiscal year and some highlights include the following:

Administration and Restructuring. In order to fulfil its mandate, the Registrar proposed a revised staff structure which required significant effort for the Minister of Finance to get approved by the Cabinet. And they are currently recruiting to fill 28 newly created positions, Madam Chairman.

E-registration. The e-registration system remains highly effective, significantly reducing the average application processing time from weeks to mere days. Incorporation requests would typically process on the same day they are submitted. The follow-up load capacity in the Ministry has increased from 7,500 last year to 9,300 this year allowing users to access a greater volume of company information through the online system. The user base has also expanded from 7,000 last year to 8,900 in this year.

Major Achievements in Insolvency and Liquidations. The department added three support staff from a recruitment drive to add a further full-time and support staff to facilitate the administration of court-ordered liquidations and personal bankruptcies over which the official receiver has been appointed. New staff will support and assist the upcoming testing and implementation of the liquidation's module of the online registry system. In addition, this department introduced and collected approximately $109,000 new filing fees from voluntary liquidations. It also simplified filing requirements to assist industry in filing voluntary liquidations and also recovered approximately $18,000 of unclaimed assets for the benefit of the Government of Bermuda.

Real Estate and Major Achievements. The department continued the implementation of a contingency plan for the real estate sector as a consequence of the IT security cyberattack to ensure that Bermuda continued to meet its international AML/ATF obligations; co-chaired the supervisory forum of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee; effectively managed the collaboration with supervisory authorities to support coordinated AML/ATF supervisory functions amongst member agencies; facilitated agency cooperation on the national AML/ATF plan and strategy; and also successfully completed the FATF standards training course, Train the Trainer, the FATF Institute in Busan, Republic of Korea from the 27 November to 1 December 2023.

Compliance. The department began the implementation of the Economic Substance Compliance programme in keeping with Bermuda's commitment to cooperating with the EU and the OECD in the implementation of the International Tax Governance standards ensuring compliance with enforcement actions in 2023 generated penalties of $868,000. Long-term successful compliance and enforcement actions resulted in greater compliance by Bermuda-registered entities with statutory requirements. In addition, they successfully completed the monitoring assessment conducted by the OECD's FHTP Secretariat. And that stands for . . . OECD I think I have said enough times. FHTP is Forum on Harmful Tax Practices. They successfully participated in the OECD's cybersecurity assessment and also began the implementation of the Corporate Governance Compliance Programme.

Madam Chairman, the ROC (Registrar of Companies) is pivotal to the continued success of the international and domestic business sectors in Bermuda and stemming risks related to the EU's Annex I and Annex II, for non-compliant jurisdictions for tax purposes, the EU's AML list and the FATF high-risk jurisdictions, subject to a call for action, which is known as the FATF list.

Bermuda, consistent with its reputation as a quality international financial centre, has committed to having a robust and competitive risk-based compliance framework with adequate resources to give it full effect. This budget proposes to provide the increased resources for the effective implementation of the department's expanded mandate, and to appropriately address the significant threats that Bermuda is facing.

Now, Madam Chairman, I just want to elaborate on this point because I think it is important to note. It is one thing about having the laws in place, but if you are not actually enforcing the laws then you can end up on the same list of which you are trying to avoid. And that is why it is vital that the resources that you put in place make sure that the inspections and compliance activity can actually be demonstrated. Because what is assessed by the EU and the OECD, FATF and other bodies, is not just the laws that are in place but whether or not you are actually enforcing the laws and checking up and following. And that is why we see a significant increase to the bodies in the Registrar of Companies as it has grown to be a bona fide regulator. And it is important that those resources are there so we can pass these assessments, which I have mentioned on numerous occasions that not every jurisdiction in the region has managed to do. But we have managed to achieve.

Expenditure Overview. The estimate for 2024/25 is $12,043,000 which is up by $2,503,000 or 26 per cent from the previous year. And the budget for the Registrar of Companies is set under seven cost centres. Those are:

- Policy Planning and Administration;
- Finance and Revenue;
- Entity Registration;
- Insolvency and Liquidations;
- Real Estate and Licences;
- Treaty Management and Administrations; and
- Compliance.

The main reason for the increase, as I mentioned, Madam Chairman, is due to the transfer responsibility from the Treaty Unit from the Ministry of Finance to the Registrar of Companies. Additional resources are also required by the ROC to support its extended role to enforce compliance under the Economic Substance Act, Companies Act, and other relevant Acts as I just mentioned.

Cost centre, 49000, Policy Planning and Administration, on page B-128. This cost centre, Madam Chairman, includes planning, strategic direction, administration and other activities which are associated with the daily operation of the Registrar of Companies Department.

The information technology, financial and administrative support, budget development, accounting, personnel administration and general office administration are also included in this cost centre. The budget decrease of $197,000 for this cost centre for the fiscal year is as a result of the reduction of the cost of engaging consultants as new staff positions are being filled.

With the continued increase in personnel the Registrar of Companies has outgrown its current office space located in the Government Administration Building. The Estates Section of the Ministry of Public Works is assisting in identifying alternative accommodation for the Registrar of Companies' offices.

Cost centre 49010, Finance and Revenue, on page B-128.

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman (as the Chair has changed to the Honourable Member for constituency 22), the Finance and Revenue cost centre is responsible for the collection of the annual fees submitted by companies in accordance with the Companies Act 1981 and all the other various Acts that I have mentioned previously in this brief. The Registrar of

Companies previously collected $68 million in revenue annually. However, the imposition of a fee to cover regulatory costs resulted in an increase in expected revenue. To ensure adequate controls around completeness, accuracy and timeliness of collecting revenue, this section and staff and processes come under the direct oversight of a departmental controller. Estimated revenue for this cost centre is reflected on page B-129 and that is $76,188,000 or 98 per cent of the total revenue which is $76,648,000 anticipated for the department. The balance of revenue, which is $320,000, is derived from licences in the general licensing and insolvency cost centre which I shall discuss in due course.

Moving on to Entity Registration, [cost centre 49020]. This cost centre includes 10 persons involved in the registration of companies and the processing and maintenance of statutory and legal documents which must be registered and available for public inspection in accordance with the prevailing legislation. In this upcoming year the ROC will take responsibility for managing and maintaining the beneficial ownership register. The budget increase will be used to pay salaries and staff currently being recruited for this new activity.

Cost centre 49040, Insolvency and Liquidations, page B-128. Mr. Chairman, this cost centre is responsible for the execution of court orders to administer liquidations in accordance with the Companies Act 1981, winding-up rules, personal bankruptcies in accordance with the applicable rules and laws. This cost centre encompasses the salaries of five full-time staff. Other expenses include the cost of various professional services, for example, legal, accounting, contractors and administering court appointed corporate liquidations and personal bankruptcies. The budget increase will be used to pay salaries of staff who are currently being recruited. The estimated revenue for this cost centre is reflected on page B-129, $320,000 which is the balance of the total estimated revenue mentioned earlier.

Cost centre 49050, Real Estate and Licences. Mr. Chairman, this section is responsible for the processing and issuance of licences and permits to exempted local and overseas companies to carry on business in Bermuda; the processing and issuing of licences to and the regulation of real estate brokers and agents and ensuring industry compliance through active monitoring and enforcement. Expenses under this cost centre include the salaries of six persons and the budget increase will be used to pay salaries of staff who are currently being recruited.

Cost centre 49070, Treaty Management and Administration. Mr. Chairman, budgetary and administrative responsibilities for the Treaty Unit will be transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Registrar of Companies, effective 1 April 2024. The budget for this unit is $1,573,000. This represents a nominal increase of $24,000, or 2 per cent, to this budget allocation compared to the original 2023/24 estimate. The work of this unit continues to diversify from the original core activity that led to its creation which was the negotiation and processing of international tax cooperation on an on-request basis.

The Treaty Unit's remit is to negotiate and administer agreements to bilateral tax information exchange with member countries of the European Union, G20, OECD, and other jurisdictions in key countries. Participate in the OECD multi-lateral exchange information treaty with more than 100 participating countries. Manage and administer requests for tax-related information received under the provisions of Bermuda's tax agreements, and to ensure that Bermuda is keeping with the common reporting standard, the country-by-country reporting standard, the tax information and exchange agreement standard on information on a request basis by the OECD, and any new tax reporting standards that the OECD may decide to come up with this week. (That was for you, Mrs. Lister, I know I will get a chuckle out of you.)

But, Mr. Chairman, the Treaty Unit, in addition to negotiating and managing international treaties, has also increasingly worked with Bermuda's international business stakeholders to address international tax policy threats. The international business sector continues to be the bedrock of our economy and therefore the work of the Treaty Unit is critical for the protection of this significant contributor. The Treaty Unit's main achievement in the current fiscal year is to play a key role in Bermuda's response to the emerging OECD global tax standard. The Treaty Unit provided policy advice, Bermuda's input into the G20, OECD inclusive framework on the two-pillar solution on BEPS, which as I mentioned is base erosion and profit shifting.

We know the most well-known element of this work, the global minimum tax of 15 per cent, which represents one of the biggest challenges in the history of Bermuda's international business sector and thus is also a significant threat to Bermuda's economic stability. Therefore, the Treaty Unit, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, has been working in close consultation with various international business stakeholders for almost the past three years on a constant basis. Some of those international business stakeholders are now members of the newly appointed International Tax Working Group, to which the Treaty Unit provides support and advice in their critical deliberations on the appropriate implementation of this new global agreement.

The Treaty Unit's management of Bermuda's compliance to the OECD and European Union international tax policies has become a majority component of the Treaty Unit's work. Although the Unit continues to negotiate and manage tax treaties and updates Bermuda's tax treaty relationships when required, the Unit is also involved in managing aspects of the threat posed by the EU listing process which represents a constant and never-ending threat to the country.

Mr. Chairman, there are at least five separate but equally volatile doors to EU listing. Those are the

EU OECD economic substance, and also following OECD regimes which are handled by the Treaty Unit, which are the OECD common reporting standard, the OECD country-by-country reporting standard, the OECD tax information exchange on an on-request basis and participation in the OECD Multilateral Tax Treaty.

An important point, Mr. Chairman . . . I am happy that you are in the Chair. You might like to hear this one. There is also a likelihood that the OECD global minimum tax regime, which has already been approved by the European Union and with plans being announced in other countries, will be added to the OECD standards, which the EU monitors. I wish to repeat this point, Mr. Chairman, so that the listening public and media can understand, as Members opposite in debates have stated that other jurisdictions are not implementing the global minimum tax in an attempt to cast doubt over this Government's decision which was taken in line with international business and where we see international business fully supportive of the Government's efforts.

Why, Mr. Chairman? Because they do not have a short-term approach to the management of Bermuda's economy. And they realise (like this Government understands) that non-compliance with international standards will result in negative listings from the European Union which can negatively impact our entire business environment. Just to note, Mr. Chairman, soundbites do not keep you off of negative international lists. You must do the work that is required.

So while both the timing and implementation of any such measures in various countries remain highly uncertain, the potential impact on Bermuda's attractiveness is significant and therefore the work of the International Tax Working Group in conjunction with this particular unit, which will be moved to the Registrar of Companies, is important.

Mr. Chairman, the Treaty Unit will continue the following initiatives in the next fiscal year:

- Negotiate tax information exchange agreements and other agreements related to tax information exchange and associated agreements or negotiate revisions to existing tax agreements as to maintain Bermuda's tax agreement relations with member countries of the EU, G20 and OECD and other countries.
- Seek to keep Bermuda compliant with the OECD tax standards especially during a period of revisions to Bermuda's domestic tax regime. And administering requests for exchange of tax-related information on the by-request basis received from Bermuda's over 100 partner countries.

I will now move on to cost centre 49080, Compliance.

Mr. Chairman, the Compliance cost centre is responsible for encouraging and ensuring compliance via powers executed through the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act and other relevant Acts, most notably the Companies Act, the Economic Substance Act 2018, including ensuring adherence to the filing, registration and other corporate requirements of the relevant Acts, to inspect registered entities for the aforementioned purposes and to investigate instances of a registered entity's failure to comply with the provisions of the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 or any other relevant Acts.

The Compliance Unit is being enhanced as a consequence of the requirements placed on Bermuda by the European Union and the OECD. And the expectation of these international bodies is that Bermuda not only has sufficient people and resources to fulfil its compliance requirements, but that those people resources have adequate prerequisite skills and training. Consequently, the existing compliance posts are being amended to recruit an increasing number of technically proficient individuals. The budget increase will be used to pay salaries of staff who are currently being recruited.

Before I go on, Mr. Chairman, and this has been a theme of my presentation today, it is important to make a point that the success of the Registrar of Companies while they are seeking to hire persons to fill roles, in passing all of these international examinations of which they have had over the past year, has been achieved by consultants. Yes! We have hired consultants to ensure that we stay off international negative lists. The same consultants the Opposition complains about have assisted not this Government but this country in ensuring that we are a world-class international financial centre free of international negative listings. Some may assume that the Opposition may take a different approach if they were in Government just for political expedience, but not in the best long-term interest of the country, an interest that Government has demonstrated time and time again through its prudent and deliberate attention to international evaluations.

I will move on to Analysis of Current Account Estimates for this department on page B-128. Mr. Chairman, I will refer to this page. The 2024/25 budget allocation showed an overall increase of $2.5 million and as previously mentioned, the transfer of the Treaty Unit resulted in a budget increase of $1.573 million. Additional increase in personnel resulted in a budget increase of $1.2 million, reflected in the Entity Registration, Insolvency and Liquidation, Real Estate and Licensing sections. These increases are partially offset by a reduction in the cost of professional services as the ROC moves toward full implementation of a revised staff structure.

Mr. Chairman, there are no other significant changes between budget estimates for 2023/24 and 2024/25 fiscal years.

Moving on to Revenue . . . which can be found on page B-129. I would like to touch upon the revenue generated by the Registrar of Companies. These

figures can be found on page B-[129] and the department is forecasting an overall revenue of $76,508,000. This is a decrease of $140,000, or less than 1 per cent, on projected revenue over the original revenue estimate of $76,648,000 for last year.

In 2020, the Registrar undertook a review of the department's corporate fee structure and identified potential fee changes that would expand its revenue base. Following consultation with stakeholders, new transaction fees were introduced in 2023. In line with the Registrar's increasing regulatory function the proposed corporate regulatory fee, which was tabled for first reading in this House earlier in February under the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act [1975] will be implemented by 31 March 2024 and this fee will be applied as an annual fee payable of $150 for local companies and $500 for non-local companies. This initiative is expected to add $6 million in revenue.

Manpower

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to Manpower, which is found on page B-129, the department's budget supports an establishment of 50 full-time positions. The importance and need for a further increase in resources has already been noted during this particular budget presentation. And certainly we need additional resources to address the ever-increasing threats which are critical to protecting key sources of revenue for the Bermuda Government which in turn allows us to continue to provide services to the public.

The department must have the resources to ensure that Bermuda's corporate citizens are in compliance with Bermuda legislation relating to the carrying on of business in Bermuda and from within Bermuda. Additionally, roles that were previously performed by consultants in managing insolvencies and liquidation were converted into substantive posts to generate greater operational oversight, efficiency and cost savings.

Capital

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, Capital can be found on page C-11. I would like to now turn to the new electronic registry system which is in step with this Government's modernisation efforts. The department introduced its online economic substance declaration platform in May 2020 and implemented its full online registry system in June 2021. This system now provides real time access to publicly accessible company data and has streamlined the registration process.

The Registrar of Companies has been allocated $300,000 in capital funding for expanding the functionality of the system to include the beneficial ownership register and to provide for other improvements in system efficiencies. These improvements were initially expected to be completed in the current year; however, some of that development work has been deferred. Additionally, the Registrar of Companies has been allocated $45,000 for the purchase of computer equipment for use by the newly recruited staff.

Mr. Chairman, the new system is similar to those already in use in other jurisdictions and will assist in maintaining Bermuda's competitiveness with other offshore registries.

Plans for the Upcoming Fiscal Year

Hon. E. David Burt: As I mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the department has now become a bona fide regulator, having evolved from its primary purpose as a repository for corporate filings. The international pressures that are being exerted on our jurisdiction from the various aforementioned regulatory and other bodies mean that the department had needed to review its organisational structure and resources with a view of staying ahead of the various international sanctions that can have a detrimental impact on our economy.

Having that initial planning instruction work being completed, and as I mentioned earlier the Cabinet's approval for the new positions, we note that the department is now engaged in its recruitment process. But there is one other important thing that must be touched on [and that is] in any department, the review of how the department delivers services must not only address international regulatory bodies but also the need for Bermuda to be a more responsive jurisdiction in which to do business. The department is reviewing the legislative framework around several key initiatives with a view to make enhancements.

Amendments to section 129A of the Companies Act 1981 to remove the requirement for a licence for a Digital Asset Business licensed company to hasten the incorporation process for select FinTech companies and amendments to apply penalties for carrying on business without a 129A or 114B licence.

The second phase of modernisation amendments to various pieces of legislation by the Registrar of Companies is to accommodate the electronic registry so as to ensure that the legislative framework reflects the department's ability to work in a paperless virtual environment. With respect to Bermuda's economic substance regime, the department plans to continue their engagement with both the OECD and the EU with respect to level-setting amendments to the Economic Substance Act. Additionally, as the compliance regime for economic substance develops, the department is reviewing possible amendments to the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act [2017] with a view to streamlining the enforcement process.

There will need to be amendments to the Real Estate Brokers Licensing Act 2017 to strengthen the AML/ATF framework, to streamline the licensing process to ensure a high level of competence amongst licensed brokers and agents by increasing the minimum expertise. This one is particularly important to me: the

reduction of red tape by replacing antiquated legal processes that require companies to incur legal fees for routine interactions, such as corporate leasing of office space. Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, this is something that I wanted to make sure was delivered this year. It is not something that we have managed to deliver this year, but it is something that I know that the Registrar of Companies is actively working on and I know that drafting instructions being completed and it is currently being drafted so we can go through this particular process which I am sure is welcome to your clients, Mr. Chairman, but also to many clients who have to, of course, file legal notices if they want to have a dentist office or a lawyer's office or a medical practice or lease something and all the rest. There are a significant amount of things which were previously in the Companies Act [1981] which we just need to get rid of to make sure that these things can happen very quickly without having to incur legal fees and others.

Additional work is to evolve Bermuda's bankruptcy legislation and bring the following in line with international standards.

- official receiver obligations;
- reduction of administration debtors and bankruptcy estates; and
- the period spent in bankruptcy for debtors and bankrupts before eligible for discharge.

The Bermuda Government is committed to implementing beneficial ownership disclosure in line with the European Union and anti-money laundering directives from the Financial Action Task Force. The ROC has been tasked with designing and implementing a beneficial ownership register and disclosure framework transitioning the existing register and process from the Bermuda Monetary Authority to the Registrar of Companies throughout 2024/25. The ROC will work with the BMA in ensuring that key activities surrounding the vetting and due diligence processes are transferred over appropriately. The ROC will also review and enhance existing legislative requirements to support these commitments and to ensure alignment with changed FATF recommendations relating to beneficial ownership whilst also building out an electronic portal which will allow entities and stakeholders to access relevant information where appropriate.

Going forward the ROC will have the ultimate responsibility for the receiving and sharing of information of beneficial ownership and every eligible entity will be obliged to file details on beneficial ownership with the ROC.

Moving on to proposed outputs for the Registrar of Companies:

- Increased disclosure amongst registered legal entities in the new electronic beneficial ownership register portal.
- Transitioning of beneficial ownership filings by companies for the purpose of achieving appropriate related transparency objectives.
- Streamline legislative regimes for the harmonisation of existing relevant exchange control and beneficial ownership obligations that also reflect the most current FATF recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, technology has also become an integral part of how the department operates and consequently over the year, further enhancements are expected to be rolled out in the department.

- Establishment of a new website that will improve user experience and additional automation of application requests.
- Implementation of the liquidation/bankruptcy module on the registry system which will facilitate online processing of corporate insolvency platform.
- Development of the electronic platform for the receipt of real estate licence applications to enhance efficiencies and streamline the process.
- Full migration of all entity data on to the e-Registration system and elimination of physical files for the workplace creating a setting that is as close to being paperless as practical.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my appreciation for the work undertaken by the Registrar of Companies, to the entire management and staff of the department led by Registrar, Mr. Kenneth Joaquin. They have made significant progress last year and although they are not perfect, as there are certain challenges in that department with the increasing workload and staffing challenges that we have, but they have significant, outstanding results for Bermuda on the international front. And I have had the privilege of witnessing their work firsthand and I am certainly appreciative for their continued efforts.

With that, Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks on the Registrar of Companies and I will now turn my head . . . my interest to Head 58 which is Interest on Debt . . . I am clearly getting a little bit tired, confusing my words. But we are almost done.

HEAD 58—INTEREST ON DEBT AND GUARANTEE MANAGEMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: [Business unit] 5801—Debt and Loan Guarantees, page B-131.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 budget allocation for interest on debt, Head 58, is $127.8 million. Of this estimate, $127.1 million represents ongoing debt service costs with the various debt instruments held by the Government of Bermuda, while $400,000 is allocated to facility fees and other related costs. The remaining $250,000 is for the costs associated with the management of Government's guarantees.

Mr. Chairman, a key achievement of 2023/24 was the repayment, in December 2023, of $50 million ten-year senior notes for the people of Bermuda who supported the Government with essential financing back in 2013. This repayment has resulted in the

interest charged to the Government being reduced by $2.37 million per annum and there is no further refinancing of the $3.2 billion of debt until January 2027.

Moving on to the amount budgeted for guarantee management. The budget is set to reduce by $250,000. Throughout 2023/24, significant work has been done to ensure the Fairmont Southampton project guarantee matters are completed. As you are aware, ground was broken in January at the beach club. Equally the Morgan's Point company has now been established and responsibility for managing and running the site is intended to be transferred from the liquidators to the new company. Thus funding from the Government will now cease as the new company will source external funding.

However, Mr. Chairman, work is continuing to ensure that entities with loan or credit facilities guaranteed by the Government are effectively managing their obligations and are appropriately managing their financial affairs. The diligent execution of work in relation to the establishment oversight of guarantees is consistent with this Government's commitment to ensuring appropriate and effective risk management, maximisation of economic benefit and prudent economic and fiscal management while supporting economic growth. I say all of that to say, that is the reason why there is $250,000 in that particular vote. Though work is complete on the matters related to Morgan's Point, the transfer and . . . largely complete on matters related to the Fairmont Southampton, what we must make sure to do is that for the management of these guarantees there is a need to make sure there is oversight on a regular basis. And that is what that $250,000 in that vote [is for].

Thus concludes my presentation on Head 58. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank all of the teams who are part of the Ministry of Finance for their dedication and professionalism. There have been many challenges faced over the past year, as we all know, but this department has persevered under the able leadership of the Financial Secretary.

This submission has highlighted the various threats and challenges facing Bermuda. We will continue to proactively address these matters to ensure Bermuda's continued stability and security, remain committed to serving and protecting the people of Bermuda through fiscal prudence and effective management of our resources and extending economic relief wherever possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Finance Minister.

We are in Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2024/25. We have just heard all the heads being presented by the Finance Minister in relation to the Ministry of Finance. This debate is listed for four hours and is due to conclude at 7:50 pm which is in approximately an hour and a half or so.

Is there anyone who wishes to speak in the debate?

I recognise the Honourable Opposition Leader Jarion Richardson.

You have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the Honourable Minister, the Honourable Premier, for his presentation this evening covering all of the relevant heads under the Minister of Finance.

I will open my line of questioning on Head 10, Ministry of Finance HQ, under the heading General Summary dealing with programmes and business expenditures. Would the Honourable Premier be able to explain . . . relating to cost centre 20000, that cost centre's label is Policy Planning and Management. In 2022/23 the actual expenditure for that was $5 million. Then in 2023/24 it was halved, going to an original estimate of $2.3 million and then it went up. It was actually revised . . . $5 million was added to that expenditure. The Honourable Premier has asked this Honourable House for $2.6 million for that Policy Planning and Management area. I would like the Honourable Premier to explain why that number went up from $2.3 [million] in 2023 . . . that is, $2.3 million to over $7 million. And why is he going to reduce it back to $2.6 million in 2024/25?

Also, I can ask the Honourable Premier, as it relates to cost centre 20996 labelled Cyber Incident [2023], what the $3 million is for. Obviously, we have had quite a lot of information circulating around the community relating to the cyber incident, assuming this being the hack on government, and we have seen consequential changes to the operations of government based on that. Given that some $3 million was spent in the 2023 budget, if he could speak to that as we are now reviewing that process—[page] B-110.

Further, as it relates to cost centre 20010, Financial Planning and Control Unit, in the previous [1]Hansard, the Honourable Premier had said that, "the department has set objectives to provide support for the open budget process; enhance budget monitoring and . . . continue the development of budget preparation methodology website." My question is, Did this take place?

Following on from that, as it relates to head . . . sorry, not head. I am still on Head 10, but I am on cost centre 20030 relating to Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy. At [2]Hansard [page] 918, relating to last year's debate, the Honourable Premier said, "This unit provides research and analysis of economic and financial conditions to help facilitate sound decisions on public policy and fiscal debt and guarantee management. The Unit also manages the relationship with credit

[1] *Official Hansard Report*, 10 March 2023, page 916 [2] ibid., page 918

rating agencies and assists other government entities with addressing [financial] needs." And represents the Ministry on a number of quangos. Given the clear need and importance of such a department, why is the Honourable Premier now reducing their budget by 32 per cent?

Moving on, still under Head 10, in relation to cost centre 20020, International Affairs and Regulatory, as well as 20110, Gaming Commission. The latter, that being the Gaming Commission, had . . . I do apologise. It was the former, International Affairs, had five strategic goals in 2023/24. Namely to reassess the supervisory framework including in relation to compliance with AML requirements. My question to the Honourable Premier is, Did that happen? And if so, what was the result of evaluating the supervisory framework for the Gaming Commission?

Mr. Chairman, as we are well aware there are no casinos in Bermuda at the moment. It seems the remit of the Gaming Commission is limited to regulating casinos as they are on ships. We also have no betting. Undoubtedly, an additional spend of some $800,000 after spending $10 million last year on them requires in-depth response from the Honourable Premier.

Moving on, Mr. Chairman . . . and I will just ask all the questions for the head and then I will take my seat for responses and then ask supplementals as I see fit.

As it relates to the performance measures, I note that cost centre 20000 Policy Planning and Management as well as 20010 Fiscal Planning and Control, and 20030 Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy have performance measurements. However, what we do not see are performance measurements for 20020 which is International Affairs and Regulatory Unit and 20100 for NAMLC. Now what we are seeing is an increase . . . a 46 per cent increase in funding for International Affairs and Regulatory Unit. So it is curious that there does not seem to be any specific tasking for them despite, again, their 46 per cent increase in funding.

Further, I would like to ask the Honourable Minister, the Honourable Premier, Why aren't performance measurements accurately reflected in the Budget Book especially as it relates to 20010, Fiscal Planning and Control Unit? We previously discussed (in my above questions) a number of objectives that they had set out last year and I am not sure if they are moving into this year. And it also relates to 20020, International Affairs and Regulatory, as well as 20110 Gaming Commission. Again, we are looking at five strategic goals and again nothing mentioned in the Budget Book. It is quite important, given how much we are spending on these items, that we know what they have accomplished.

I also have a question for the Honourable Premier, under Head 10, Ministry of Finance [HQ]. This Ministry, by the way, Mr. Chairman, is . . . the mission statement is the *Achievement of economic prosperity and to ensure the financial security of Bermuda*. It includes items such as formulating and adhering (this is the department objectives) . . . formulating and adhering the sound and prudent fiscal management. It provides strategic direction; arrange all government borrowing; maintaining relations with credit rating agencies. But if you notice, Mr. Chairman, when you go on to [page] B-112 under their business plan for the year, their performance measures, they seem to be saying that change in GDP is how they are going to measure their own performance as well as changes to [government] net debt to GDP and [government] net debt to revenue. These are pretty huge macroeconomic statistics. So I was curious to see that there were quite a number of expectations or objectives that were mentioned in the Minister's brief but when it came to the documentation, I did not see that. I would like the Honourable Minister to speak to why his objectives are not outlined in writing but these macroeconomic statistics are.

Moving on to Grants . . . oh, sorry. No. This is a great example, Mr. Chairman. I note that both last year . . . in last year's Hansard and this year, NAMLC was supposed to support the BMA in sectoral digital asset business risk assessment. And I believe he spoke to it a little bit, but I would like to know how much of that was completed. Or rather, when will that be circulated to the industry? It might not be to everyone's awareness, but digital asset business in Bermuda is an industry that requires quite a lot of expertise and this is the kind of document that actually informs the success of the programme. So it not being undertaken at this late stage of the programme means that it has been a problematic implementation.

Moving on to Grants and Contributions. Mr. Chairman, under [page] C-18, 7066, I note that the contribution to the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force has gone up by some $40,000. It is a curiosity considering we have been paying $68[,000] pretty consistently. I would like to know why it went up by $40,000. And also what are we getting for that?

Also on page C-8 *[sic]*, 6965, Corporate Income Tax Authority. The Honourable Premier is asking for $1.2 million to stand up the new Authority. Insofar as we are aware in the Opposition, there has been no decision as it relates to the structure of this new Authority, when it will be stood up. When will the enabling legislation be brought to the House and other aspects like that? So the extent to which this idea has been fleshed out would be important to bring in this budget given that we are being asked to allocate some $1.2 million to this initiative.

There is a further question on this and it certainly relates to the Gaming Commission. It is fairly simple, though. The question is, Why are we continuing to fund the Gaming Commission if there is no gaming to supervise or regulate? It is a pretty basic question, but it is one that I think we need to get to the heart of because for all of the numbers in this Budget Book, we just need to get to some simple answers sometimes.

Also I have a question relating to the Gaming Commission. The Honourable Premier mentioned that Butterfield Bank pulled the loan and that the Gaming Commission did try to get another, but it could not. And I would like him to clarify because that makes it appear as if the Gaming Commission is not credit worthy. Butterfield isn't the only bank in Bermuda. But if the other three were approached and all three said *we are not going to give you a loan*, that seems something to worry about.

Last but not least, I see on page C-22, specifically in [line item] 76925, Corporate Income Tax Cap. Grant. I would like, given that we are already allocating $1.2 million to standing up the Corporate Income Tax Authority, I would like the Honourable Premier to speak to this additional funding.

With that being said, I will take my seat for Head 10 and will likely have supplementals.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member. Just could I check something?

You indicated you were talking to page C-8 of the Budget Book when you posed certain questions on the Corporate Income Tax Authority and the Gaming Commission. I think you may have meant C-18 of the Budget Book.

If I look at C-18 I see two line items, I see line item 6965 in relation to the Gaming Commission and I see line item . . . well actually, it is a repeating line item 6965 for the Corporate Income Tax Authority. That is probably a typo. Are those the numbers in the right hand column you are referring to? The $800,00 and the $1.278 million?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. They are referred to there, Mr. Chairman, and the last number I referred to, which for some reason I have transposed to C-22, was actually C-11. And it is business unit 76921 Corporate Income Tax Cap. Grant of some $750,000.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister, those are some questions for you from the Honourable Opposition Leader in relation to the primary head, the HQ, and also the Grants and Contributions.

I don't know if you want to deal with those now or if I should take questions from others.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, you can take questions from others, if there are, but I would invite the Honourable Opposition Leader to get as many of his questions as he can. Because the answers are still being prepared.

The Chairman: I understand that.

Hon. E. David Burt: So it is difficult for me to get them to him right now.

The Chairman: Okay. Honourable Opposition Leader, if you have any other questions under any other heads, the Honourable Finance Minister has invited you to pose those questions now.

Thank you.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

For the avoidance of doubt, though, I want to make sure that we reserve the right to obviously ask supplemental questions.

The Chairman: Yes, understood. Obviously.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

The Chairman: As long as there is time . . . and we have until 7:50 pm so there is still time left in the debate.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Perfect. Thank you.

Perfect. Moving on then to Head 11 to Accountant General, Mr. Chairman. My question and comments relate to cost centre 21000, Policy Planning and Management, which costs $1.2 million, and the purpose is to set the strategic direction in the general administration of the department.

Given that we often see in this Ministry titles like policy and planning and administration which are separate to performance units, such as financial reporting or compliance, or rather that we can infer certainly just from the title certain performances, such as revenue receipting, but when it comes to policy planning and management and administration, and especially when it comes to such lofty words such as *strategic direction*, I do think we have to boil it down a little bit. For a price point of $1.2 million strategic direction . . . it seems a bit rich. So I am really interested to see what the policy planning and management is that 21000 cost centre does relating to its strategic direction. Especially given that this is Head 11, Accountant General and definitely the Honourable Premier can speak to why the Accountant General needs strategic direction within this 38-person department.

With also that said, Mr. Chairman, the FTE said that . . . oh, sorry, under FTE the Honourable Premier said that there are 10 . . . and I stand to be corrected. I believe he said that they are understaffed by 10. But then on [page] B-115 there is a staffing request for 38. I note that in 2023, the original, staffing full-time equivalent numbers were 40. It was then revised and it stands now at 34 and now he is asking for 38 full-time equivalents. So if he can just clarify what he meant by understaffed by 10 that would be appreciated.

As it relates to performance . . . that would be fine, thank you. Those are my questions on Head 11, Accountant General.

Moving on to Head 12, Customs.

The Chairman: That is page B-118?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, that is right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My questions are relating to the revenue summary. There have been a number . . . now I am not sure how we want to tackle this because it is made quite clear in the Budget Book, if I can read this portion to you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Please proceed, yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: There is a split somehow in this department. It seems like the money goes one place but all the management/responsibility goes another place within the government structure. And the note says that, "Due to the Government of Bermuda [Organizational Restructuring] . . . the Minister of National Security is to assume ministerial accountability of the Customs Department . . . and of those customs officers performing border control functions. The revenue collection and reporting functions within the Customs Department remain unchanged, and are to be retained by the Ministry of Finance."

I look forward to the Honourable Premier answering or clarifying these questions and these points. Namely, there have been a number of complaints that have been related to the . . . that seem to be related to revenue collection and reporting amongst small importers in Bermuda. My question would be, Has the Minister looked into this and has anything been done to address these multiple complaints?

These complaints arise . . . or accusations of unfairness, that is that some importers are allowed to bring in certain kinds of materials and others are not. And small businesses have to fight hard to be able to bring in products. It would be interesting to see if this aspect has been picked up at all by the Honourable Premier, especially given that this would impact, in fact, our revenues in collections especially relating to Customs. Obviously, if someone is having a tremendous amount of difficulty bringing in some products, it is going to detract from our revenue within that fiscal reporting period.

Fewer boats . . . also, I have some questions about this revenue increase. I note the revenue increase is up 3 per cent. I see a general increase at $6.8 million and this is on page B-118. We have noted that Stevedoring Services has published reports saying that there are in fact fewer containers coming in. So it is a bit interesting to see how our Customs duty is . . . how we are making more money on Customs duty even though we are bringing in fewer things. One of the explanations could be that our inflation is going up so that is how we are collecting that money. Which is a bad thing. But I would be interested to hear what we are anticipating, why we are going to get another $6 million from imports when we are in fact importing fewer things.

The Chairman: That is page B-118, line item 8007, at the top.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you. Okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Moving on to Head 28. Again, mindful that people are compiling this information for response, so I am mindful we have to sort of keep going with these questions.

Head 28, Social Insurance, under Subjective Analysis, Head 28 starting on [page] B-119.

The Chairman: Yes, I have that. Social Insurance.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you. Actually I will, actually by your leave, go over to page B-120.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: And start there. Specifically on cost centre 38040 Compliance, staffed by five and then going up to six. What are some questions relating to issues of noncompliance being detected and financial penalties being applied? That is, How many cases of noncompliance has this department detected so far? Have any financial penalties been applied to those parties who are noncompliant with the necessary regulation and legislation?

I would also ask for some clarification from the Honourable Premier. In last year's debate, at Hansard [10 March 2023, page] 931, it seems the Honourable Premier had reported that there were $49 million outstanding in debt owed to this department. But I am pretty sure I just heard him say there is in fact $79 million. So I am not entirely sure which number is the right number. But I stand to be guided because obviously that is quite a big swing.

The Chairman: Can I just check . . . sorry, you said $49 [million] in last year and you said $79 million today?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, today.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: A further question. In his brief, the Honourable Premier stated that there has been a change . . . or rather that 120 days . . . this relates to the debt situation. The compliance folks and the inspectors under Head 28 Social Insurance, if an employer is tardy by 120 days, then it goes straight to the

debt collecting team over at the Attorney General's Chambers. But I note that in, again, last year's Hansard or last year's brief, the Honourable Premier said that that time period was 90 days. So it appears that we have gone from 90 days in arrears to 120 days in arrears. Given that we have now hired, or rather, that Head 28 includes a full-time debt collector, I would have thought that we would have been gaining more efficiencies in this department. But it appears as if we need more time . . . or for some reason more time is being given to those in arrears. It is a point of curiosity, if the Honourable Premier can speak to that, that would be quite helpful.

Moving on to Head 28, [page] B-121, Performance Measures, Mr. Chairman. I note that one of these performance measures, specifically under business unit 38000, Senior Management and Administration, says that we are going to summarise financial transactions and input into *QuickBooks* within 20 days after the end of each month. My question is, why is this department using QuickBooks?

It appears from the pervious area, which was Head 10 Ministry of Finance HQ, that the Oracle E1 system has had some $150,000 spent on it last year and we are anticipating $175,000 spent this year. And of course, given that we are dealing with arrears in the numbers between $40 [million]—obviously, we are waiting for the Honourable Premier to come back and explain it to us—between $40 million and $70 million . . . it seems that QuickBooks is not the appropriate tool for managing the affairs of the Social Insurance team. If the Honourable Premier would be able to clarify why QuickBooks is in here. Are they in fact using QuickBooks? And are they transitioning off . . . I am hoping that he finds that as shocking as I do and they are moving into a more enterprise scalable solution.

Moving on . . . I note at last year's Ministerial brief, and in fact he has mentioned it again, but last year at Hansard, [10 March 2023, page] 932, I am quoting here, "An Actuarial Review of the CPF is planned for this year as a review is required every three years per section 35 of the Contributory Pensions Act [1970]. This review aims to indicate the financial conditions and long-term sustainability of the fund and to investigate the potential financial implications of future contributions and benefit increases to the fund."

This was outlined to have . . . it was supposed to be done last year. And given that the Honourable Premier has mentioned it again in his brief, I am assuming that it has not taken place. I would really like some clarification from the Honourable Premier if it has taken place (because I believe he said it hasn't), and when exactly are we looking forward to this taking place given that we obviously have already heard that it should be done and it hasn't been done.

Noting from Capital Acquisitions under [page] C-11.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Chairman: If you could pause there please, Honourable Opposition Leader.

Yes, a point of order, Mr. Premier?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is clearly misleading the House. The brief stated that the work has started in the last fiscal year, at the end of last fiscal year and it is not yet complete. So it is not correct to say that it has not started.

The Chairman: Thank you for that answer from the Finance Minister.

Opposition Leader, you have got an answer to that. Is that satisfactory? Do you wish to—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I would note for the listening public that even though we have records of Hansard, unfortunately when the . . . Ministerial briefs are not shared. So oftentimes the words just sort of flow right . . . unless you are keeping up shorthand, you can't keep everything.

I thank the Honourable Premier for that clarification. However, it strikes me as a bit demure though because we are talking about when things started and when things are continuing. The fact is that it is supposed to be . . . it has not been done. That is where my point is.

With that being said . . . moving on to . . . I am sorry. I was interrupted. I was going on to [page] C-11 with a question relating to . . . where are we? Head 28, 76925, Debt Management System. And I was looking forward to the Honourable Premier explaining more about this debt management system. We see a spend, or an anticipated spend for $249,000. And that is also quite key here because as we mentioned earlier under the performance management, we are talking about QuickBooks entries. So it is quite . . . about that between the Head 10 Ministry of Finance HQ spend on an enterprise system (Oracle E1) and then between our spending on Head 28, this very specific department, on debt management of $250,000 it is even more important that we clarify whether or not we are looking at a financial QuickBooks solution for managing anywhere from $40 [million] to $70 million in debt.

The Chairman: So that question is in relation to [page] C-11, the second heading under Social Insurance 76925 and you are contrasting it with the number above at Ministry of Finance HQ.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, that is exactly it. I am asking—

The Chairman: I understood. Thank you.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Moving on to Head 38 Office of the Tax Commissioner. It would be great to hear from the Honourable Premier under the General Summary . . . by the way, I am referring to page B-122 in the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Yes, I have it.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Referring to cost centre 48000 Administration where we are seeing a 33 per cent increase. So it is going from an original in 2023/24 of $956,000 to $1,267,000. That 33 per cent increase is quite substantial. So I am looking forward to an explanation on that specific point.

Under Subjective Analysis, on [page] B-123, we see Rentals in the amount of . . . or rather the request is for $366,000 for this year for the Office of the Tax Commissioner. But I note that their rental on page C-27 of the Budget Book is for the Perry Building. That comes in at $361,000. My question to the Honourable Premier is, What else is being rented? Why is there a variance between these two numbers?

The Chairman: Between the numbers at page C-27 and B-[123]?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: That is exactly it, thank you.

An Hon. Member: Which one is that? C- what?

The Chairman: Page C-27. In answer to the question from the Honourable Minister, thank you.

Please continue. You have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Yes, thank you.

I would like to speak to Professional Services under this Subjective Analysis on page B-123. We see an increase of over 25 per cent, but we note at Hansard, that is last year's brief by the way, Hansard [10, March 2023, page] 936. Let's just pull that up, if you will bear with me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: So we are at page B-123 under Head 38, Office of the Tax Commissioner and the question being posed is in relation to Professional Services in the box which is right in the middle, and you are referring to the increase compared to last year's statement. Is that right?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Well . . . because there's increases going up, but last year the Honourable Premier made the point of reducing the funding allocation to Professional Services by 21 per cent as part of efficiency measures. So, if the efficiency measures . . . I would like him to speak to why these efficiency measures have lapsed, gone away or changed because we have gone from reducing by 21 per cent to increasing by 27 per cent and that appears to be a variance in behaviour so I would like some clarification on that.

Moving on to Revenue, Mr. Chairman. Specifically on page B-124.

The Chairman: Yes, 124.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I note under revenue centre 8017 Payroll Tax, it is anticipated to go up by 13 per cent. That is the receipts from payroll taxes, anticipated to go up by some $68 million. If he could speak to why we are anticipating payroll tax going up by some 13 per cent in this one year.

Equally . . . also, I notice under Land Tax, we are going to get under . . . this was revenue centre 8027 Land Tax.

The Chairman: Yes, I see it.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: And it is going up by $4 million. That is a curiosity. Obviously, land tax . . . I am just curious about how he is estimating that number. I will leave it for him to explain.

Moving on to Capital Acquisitions. If you bear with me while I just change the page.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

Thank you so much, Honourable Minister Furbert, for saying I need to come to a class. Your dignity is noted.

The Chairman: Are we at page C-11, Opposition Leader?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: We are at page C-11 under Tax Modernisation Programme, business unit 76333, again, Tax Admin Modernisation Programme.

The Chairman: Yes, I see that.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I note—

The Chairman: One up from the bottom, yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you. I am seeing the spend on $974,000 in 2022/23 and an original estimated spend of . . . which was matched, by the way, of $855,000 and now a request for some $500,000 of additional funding for this programme. If the Honourable Premier could speak to this programme. Obviously, there is quite a lot of money, speaking to this programme and its benefits. That would be appreciated.

Now moving on to Performance [Measures] on [page] B-125.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I just want to make a point on this one, Mr. Chairman. Ever since I have joined politics and participated in the Budget Debate, there is one thing I have noticed . . . or rather, I have noticed a troubling trend in more than a few cases where performance measures are very difficult to read or understand . . . or they don't seem to be tied in to a Minister's brief or they refer to just strange measurements, or they are outdated. Things like that. And I just wanted to note that under this Head 38, these performance measures are exceptionally clear and well laid out and very auditable and can be checked and crosschecked. I just wanted to turn to everyone who participated in the generation of Head 38's performance measures and say this is exactly the standard of management that we would expect. So I just wanted to thank them for their incredible professionalism. Thank you.

The Chairman: I think the PS can pass on a compliment on your behalf. Yes, thank you.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Moving on to Head 39 Registrar of Companies. I have to probably first declare a bit of interest in this one, having been a compliance manager for a local corporate service provider working in compliance to this day and having at one point worked for the Registrar of Companies on a specific set of projects, that I am familiar with this team and this specific need. But what I wanted to do is just make it absolutely and abundantly clear to anyone who hasn't fully embraced what the Honourable Premier said just how central and key a role this department plays in our international financial services . . . everything from charge searches, everything from maintenance of key records.

The Honourable Premier mentioned that it is moving from a repository to a regulator. And even in its former role it was incredibly key to the entirety of Bermuda's success in international business. To that end I think this is an area where we always have to pay very specific attention, or I would hope that Parliament always pays very special attention, because really the things that make us successful in our economy . . . I certainly do not attribute it 100 per cent to the Registrar of Companies, but a huge part of it comes out of the Registrar of Companies.

With that being said, I just wanted to speak to the move of the Treaty Unit from the Ministry of Finance HQ under Head 10 to the Registrar of Companies Head 39. That is a good move. The Treaty Unit, the kind of information that they have to acquire is typically stored at the ROC and if not the ROC under its new Compliance Measures Act has the ability to get those records quite easily. So that is a good move. But I would like to ask, given the ROC . . . we are anticipating a $12 million spend in this upcoming 2024/25 [fiscal year]. I note that the ROC recently announced that it is moving its domain from @gov.bm to @rocbermuda.bm. Given the recent cyberattack and hack and outstanding questions relating to what kind of information was accessed or has been maybe taken from Government, this is . . . it is a big question, Why are we moving from the @gov domain to the @rocbermuda.bm domain?

Further on . . . I have some questions specific to the brief where the Honourable Premier said that there are some 16,000 entities on the Register. I believe that is identical to last year at Hansard [10 March 2023, page] 937. So, if the Honourable Premier can update us. Are we still sitting at 16,000 flat on the Register or has that number changed in the year? I would hope it has changed and I hope it goes up.

The brief also said . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Honourable Premier, for that assistance.

The brief said identical fees on Hansard [page] 939 . . . if anyone in the listening public is wondering why I keep stopping . . . there is just a lot of interruption.

An Hon. Member: A lot of birds.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: A lot of birds.

The brief said identical fees. Oh, I will move on to Head 39 Registrar of Companies, under General Summary. We do see the department's budgeting has increased . . . has doubled in the space of two years. Starting at $6.3 [million] in 2022/23 moving all the way up to $12 million in 2024/25. This is often called (in my world) the cost of compliance. It is quite difficult to maintain our compliance with international norms. But it is just as hard for regulated companies in Bermuda to do the same. Compliance costs are going up across the board in Bermuda which makes the necessity to remove red tape so key. I just wanted to make that point.

To that end, I would like to speak to cost centre 49050, Real Estate and Licenses.

The Chairman: So we are still at page B-128 under Head 39?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: We are still at page B-128, where I am seeing doubling of the expenses under Real Estate and Licenses. That is an interesting space, Real Estate and Licenses, obviously dealing with real estate brokers and agents and the like. I don't think we are seeing that much more activity from real estate agents and brokers. But I would be interested to hear what the Premier justifies or explains how that number doubles up.

Also, another question relating to 49000 (that is, business unit 49000), Policy Planning and

Administration, Mr. Chairman, and this goes back to my earlier points where is see a lot of these line items in this Ministry for a strategy. This one includes planning, strategic direction, administration and other activities associated with the daily operations of the Registrar of Companies. It is currently estimated to require some $6.1 million in funding. I would like the Honourable Minister to be able to speak to that. Again, $6.1 million. That is just for this very specific head for (again) planning, strategic direction, administration. And we are seeing similarly described departments across his Ministry.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, a lot of planning.

Under Subjective Analysis, we see Repair and Maintenance increased. We are still on, by the way, B-128. I am seeing an increase in Repair and Maintenance, 162 per cent increase on that spend. That is an additional $370,000 going towards repair and maintenance. There is a question here, under Head 39 Registrar of Companies . . . the Registrar of Companies is obviously an office space team that works with computers and legal documents and requirements. I am just not sure what they are repairing and maintaining. So I would be really interested to get that response back from the Honourable Premier.

Also, Financial Services is $5.5 million. The Honourable Premier in his brief spoke to hiring a number of consultants to assist with getting into compliance with international norms. But at the same time I am seeing not only an increase, or a rather large number for Professional Services of $5.5 million, but there is a salary increase of 50 per cent. It is $5 million that is being requested for 2024/25. So I am a little confused as to why the Professional Services number is staying right where it is and the salary number is going up given the . . . I am pretty sure in the brief the Premier said *the point is to hire more people thereby reducing the number of consultants*. Obviously, that would have an increase in salaries. But what it looks like is that the number of consultants stays the same and the salaries go up. So some clarification there would be great.

Also Rentals. I see that Rentals, again we are still under Subjective Analysis under B-128. I see that we are budgeting $250,000 and it was . . . $250,000 was estimated last year and only $34,000 was spent. Given that the Premier's brief spoke to office rent and increasing the space for this department . . . we are obviously adding a lot of bodies to this department, and he had already asked for $250,000 last year but only used $34,000. Is it fair to say that they are still looking for a home? I am interested to know how that is going. This department, again, is quite key to the operation of Bermuda, Inc. so they should definitely be secured as quickly as possible.

Also under Revenue Summary. I note that we are anticipating, or rather the Premier's Budget Book is anticipating (I am on [page] B-129) a 10 per cent drop in Exempted Companies Tax. Exempted companies very much being our bread and butter in this space. We are seeing a drop of some $6.2 million in expected revenue. I am curious to know why we think that one is going to go down. Especially when we are anticipating increases in so many other lines of revenue.

I note in that very same Revenue Summary under revenue source 8227 Regulatory Fees Other. That is a new area, and I see an expected revenue of $6.3 [million]. Can the Honourable Premier speak to what that is?

Lastly, I note under (for Revenue Summary) 8267 Segregated Accounts [Fees] and 8266 Exempted LLCs [Annual Fees]. These were marketed quite aggressively for our clients across Bermuda and is a way to bring clients into Bermuda. These are corporate structures that have certain kinds of legal and tax benefits and I just note that it seems to be quite . . . our fees coming out of that seem to be quite low. So I am just wondering if the Premier could speak to why the uptake was so slow . . . or if anyone in the ROC has ever mentioned why we don't seem to be doing very well in those specific areas. Especially given how much work we worked on to get those basically in operation.

Also under Performance Measures. I am now on [page] B-130. I will note that we have . . . on the very last row, under the business unit Compliance. And I hope my colleagues in compliance do forgive me for this line of questioning, but I see some 240 onsite and desk-based or offsite inspections of registered entities anticipated. Given the number of compliance professionals that sounds about right. But what I am seeing is some 15 actual on-site of real estate agents and brokers and that number seemed a bit low to me. So I was wondering if the Minister could speak to how those targets were set.

Great. The last one I have is under Head 58 Debt and Loan Guarantees. I note that net debt is up $54 million last year and budgeted to increase another $38 million this year. My question to the Honourable Premier—it is my last question, so I am sure he can have a field day with it—is, What is this Government's plan to pay down the debt?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Those are the questions I have.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Opposition Leader.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Does anyone else wish to speak in the debate?

Honourable Premier, back to you for answers, I think.

While the Premier is preparing, this is just to remind the listening audience and Members that we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue

and Expenditure for 2024/25. We are on the debate regarding the Ministry of Finance and the heads thereunder. We have been hearing from the Honourable Finance Minister, Premier David Burt and from the Opposition Leader Jarion Richardson.

Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thanks, Chair. Could you let me know what time this debate is expected to end?

The Chairman: Yes, one moment please. 7:50, seven-five-zero. So just about 50 minutes—

Hon. E. David Burt: Forty-five.

The Chairman: Yes, 45 to 50 minutes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

Of course there were a number of questions. The Opposition Leader—it must be from our Florida Air Academy days—speaks really quickly, so I am not entirely certain if all of the technical officers were able to catch all of the questions.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: What happened, Craig? What are you laughing at?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: School mates?

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, we did go to high school together.

I will try my best to answer as many questions as he posed, but I am sure that if there are questions that are not answered, I am sure that he will ask more.

We will start on Ministry of Finance Headquarters, Head 10. I think the first question was Policy Planning [and Management]. He said $5 million was halved to $3.2 million and then revised upwards to $7.9 million, and what was that for? The significant increases in costs that were noted were due to the corporate income tax and the need to implement that. And so, this was the funding for the external bodies that were used. Yes, read *consultant* into that. Consultants assisted the Government in ensuring that we could deliver a well-regarded corporate income tax Bill. I am sure the Opposition Leader would know the Government's efforts and work in this area have been applauded by the wide scale of our international business sector. So, that is what that was for.

There was a question in regard to [the] Cyber [Incident 2023]. This was the Ministry of Finance contribution on remediation efforts paid to consultants and others to assist in returning Government systems back to operation.

The next question he had I think was under 20010 Fiscal Planning and Control. And the question as recorded is, *Did we meet objectives via the budget brief?* I can speak to [the] budget website. Yes, the budget website was updated with further features. Inclusion of department admission objectives and detailed funding allowing the budget process and budget preparation process to be more digitised and enabling us to ensure that we delivered this budget on time with a little bit less stress for the team up there in the Ministry of Finance who put together the budget. And with the learning from this year, I am sure it will get better for even next year as that is the site that is used. And as you will see, there is a constant thread of the continued investment in digitisation of various processes.

In addition to that there was a question of whether or not the open budgeting items were met. The open budget process is outlined every year in the Pre-Budget Report. I will ask the Opposition Leader to go ahead and refer to that as there are multiple parts of an open budget framework, which was put into place by the former PLP Government in 2011 and known to be maintained through the time that the One Bermuda Alliance was in Government. But tasks would include the Pre-Budget Report, Ministerial Statements to the House on Government's financial performance, also a reduced outline of the budget in easy-to-read format so that persons can understand what is inside of the budget rather than the technical language, and other things that the Honourable Opposition Leader can go ahead and review as they are spelled out annually in the Pre-Budget Report, which is tabled in the House.

And the question about enhanced budgeting and monitoring control, or whether or not these matters were achieved. Absolutely it was achieved as indicated by lower budget deficits than originally projected and continuing on that level. And you will note that, as the Fiscal Responsibility Panel has indicated, that expenditure has been largely kept in check and increased revenues have flowed towards deficit reduction.

It says . . . I am trying to get the questions as best as I can. I think there was a question around Domestic [Affairs and Economic Policy] when dealing with Head 10, and there was a question: As analysis of economic decisions is important, why are we spending less? The response is that the budget is being reduced due to unallocated costs. The actual cost for 2023/24 is $194,000, and therefore compared to actual costs the current year, there is an increase of $100,000. There are no issues relating to deliverables from this particular department.

[Regarding] the ask for the work plan for the Gaming Commission, I will go back to page 36 of the brief to outline the work plan of the Gaming Commission as it was covered inside of the brief, as were a number of questions that were covered in the brief. And the funding will support six employees and [the] work plan, which consists of continuing to address the issue of providing banking services to the casinos, which is critical for casinos operating in Bermuda, reviewing licensing and regulation of online gaming, and providing support for problem gaming via the help-line.

It is important to note there, of course, he says, *Why are there no performance measures for the Gaming Commission?* The Gaming Commission is a grant, so those things are managed through the reporting that the Gaming Commission would give to the House. But the Gaming Commission will be managed to ensure that they adhere to their work plan. And just because it is not inside of the Budget Book does not mean that these things will not be managed. And of course, it is evident that not every single objective can go into the Budget Book.

I think there was a question in regard to why we are still running the Gaming Commission. I will just answer by saying although there is continued work going on dealing with the issues of banking, the proceeds of casino gaming . . . Number one, the Gaming Commission manages things that are outside of casino gaming certainly. Number two, it is a strong part of our regulatory regime as it is a body that performs part of NAMLC and is considered a risky sector, so it needs to have adequate monitoring in place for our international assessments, which is pretty important. I think that it is also important that the work continues.

So, I understand the challenges faced, but I do not know what alternatives the Opposition would have in that particular case and instance. So, the Government is running on a far reduced work plan than normal. They are running at a bare-bones establishment. Unfortunately, this has resulted in redundancies at the Gaming Commission and others. But it is important that their core activities continue as they do have an important part to play in our ongoing efforts to be a credible and relevant jurisdiction when it comes to our anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing matters because it is an independent regulator.

There is a question as to why the loan was not extended for the Gaming Commission. The best sense that I can give is that it is a timing issue. I think we can all remember the banking crisis in early 2023, which made banks very risk-averse, and therefore local banks (which, like many other banks, are under considerable scrutiny and especially Butterfield Bank, which is a New York Stock Exchange traded bank) did not want to take on sectors and business deemed as having high risk. By the middle of last year, it was understandable that the progress towards the banking of casinos . . . not in any small measure due to the same crisis that was encountered by multiple banks in early 2023.

So, from the perspective of the Government, we are not going to let the actions of the private sector stand in the way of trying to make sure that we deliver the things that we need to do and remain compliant in our international objectives. And so, we could have funded another guarantee, and gone to another body, and gone through that, or we could have just returned back to what happened four or five years prior, which was that the Gaming Commission was funded by a grant of the Government of Bermuda, which was done in every year that the Gaming Commission existed under the One Bermuda Alliance.

There is a question of why objectives are not specific and their macroeconomic measures included. The Ministry believes it is right for the Government to be measured on both macro and micro measures. Other objectives are managed internally not just necessarily including the Budget Book as you understand the Ministry of Finance headquarters itself is to oversee the numerous departments that exist inside the Ministry of Finance, and the performance measures are numerous in the various other departments. Headquarters is there to make sure that we monitor and plan and strategise to ensure that all of the various departments are working and functioning in a certain way. But the performance measures are tied to, I guess I would say, the vision. And we speak about a strong economy and economic growth and making sure that we have the conditions to make sure that we continue with a strong economy.

There was another question. I think [it] was, What was the result of reviewing the Gaming Commission's framework in 2023/24? The Gaming Commission's review of the lottery's framework together with their regulatory powers. Proposals have been consulted on and submitted [for] the Ministry of Finance's consideration. [The] gaming regulatory powers' expanded lottery's proposal is under review. The Gaming Commission has been advised that Bermuda's commitment to the financial services sector will certainly be prioritised, and in that regard, there are a number of items on the International Affairs and Regulatory unit's list regarding financial services in the Registrar of Companies regarding compliance with international standards. The Gaming Commission's proposals would be advanced in tandem with those proposals and also in the support of the above. The Ministry of Finance, together with the leadership of the commission, has also met with all persons in the banking sector to verify whether or not additional revisions would be required.

As I think I indicated in the debate previously in this Honourable House, they had said, *None.* I made sure that I stated for the record what was communicated to us as Members of the Opposition had liked to speak about interference and other matters in gaming. And there was a, you know, inference that was stated by the Opposition and repeated by the other Member of the "combined opposition," the daily newspaper, which stated that, you know, unnamed sources—their favourite thing to say, *unnamed sources*—say that the issue with gaming is that the Minister of Finance is in charge of gaming, and he is also the Premier. And as I said when having direct conversations with our overseas partners, who are the ones that are the correspondent banking relationships, which are the ones that are most important contrary to what was reported in the daily newspaper, they said that this was regarded as a strength of our regulatory regime, and they thought that it made it more sound not less sound as it would

give additional impetuous to ensure that the credentials and the standards of the regulator were upheld at the highest levels. So, I hope that the second time I said that . . . I am sure it will not make it to the press; it will probably just be the same rehashing of old stories. But I just want to make sure that that is made clear, Mr. Chairman, to Honourable Members who are here today.

Just as a further note, as I am reading typing that is popping up on my computer in regard to the outcomes, we will determine the necessary possible revisions to ensure that the gaming sector model can move forward and be banked.

There was a question as to why there are no performance measures for the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit. The International Affairs and Regulatory Unit is presently measured under the external measurements indicators that sets down targets for external ratings agencies. A sovereign rating annual rating takes into consideration matters related to policy and how Government institutions manage the project. This is the case for all policy-making inside of Government. As a note, that body supervises a number of various agencies of which, of course, the measures are recorded in other departments. The unit also assists a wide range of Government departments in meeting their objectives.

I will go to the question of grants. To what extend has the agency been flushed out as this is being budgeted for $1.28 million? Work was conducted since September 2003 on the design of a targeted operating model for an administrative entity for the corporate income tax. OECD administrative guidance has been reviewed in addition to multijurisdictional assessments of other tax authority structures, and legislation and internal stakeholders have been consulted. Cabinet was apprised of progress in October 2023 and will shortly receive a memo on recommendations from the Ministry on this matter. There will likely be some form of discussion or consultation paper for the public in the exact same way that we followed the model for the corporate income tax where it went through multiple rounds of consultation. And the original timelines have been shifted back with legislation, and expect to be tabled in the House of Assembly in the next parliamentary session which begins in May of 2024. And legislation is likely to cover matters such as the legal structure, governance, function of the entity, et cetera.

Hold on one second if you could, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes. For the benefit of the listening public, we are currently in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2024/25. This specific budget is on the Ministry of Finance. There is approximately 30-odd, 35-odd minutes left, and we have been hearing answers from the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Premier in relation to questions posed by the Opposition Leader, Jarion Richardson.

When you are ready, Honourable Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Sorry, as I am getting old my back is not as good as it used to be, so I have to, you know, get some additional support. So, here we go.

The next question, I think, is could the Honourable Premier please speak to the additional funding for the corporate income tax [CIT] authority. And this is under capital. The $750 million capital budget is the CIT authority and the initial funding set aside for IT and software systems. So capital grants are being awarded. As we know there is going to be a need to stand up this particular body. We know that there is, you know, timing that is related to all of this. We know that there are certainly going to be some activities that need to take place this year. Significant activities need to take place next year, but we want to make sure that we get the core items up and running in this year.

Moving on to cost centre 20100 in the office of NAMLC, the Opposition Leader asks how much of the digital asset business risk assessment was completed by the BMA supported by the office of NAMLC. When can the industry expect a report on this assessment to be shared with them? The answer is this risk assessment was completed in late 2023, so the budget presentation of the technical report on the findings of this risk assessment had been prepared. NAMLC has ratified the report and constitutes it prepared for submission and consideration of the Cabinet. Simultaneously, a redacted version of the report is in draft form for the purpose of publication. It is hoped this will be able to be published shortly after Cabinet is offered opportunity to consider the technical report and the associated recommended items.

Grants and Contributions, [page] C-18. Why is there a CFATF increase from 68 to 100,000. What is . . . to this increase. The financial secretary is chuckling because when she told me that CFATF had asked to pay more money, I said no. And she said, *We have to because we are a leading voice in CFATF and have some of the best rankings in different things and participation, and they need to increase their funding.* So, reluctantly the Minister of Finance did agree after being pressured by the financial secretary.

But the answer is Bermuda is a member of CFATF, which provides training and other forms of technical assistance to its member countries. The size of the assessment teams required for the fifth round of mutual evaluations are larger than was required for the fourth round of mutual evaluations, and therefore CFATF has started staffing up to properly prepare. Also [it] needs to reflect the salary and benefits increased for CFATF staff to help them to retain qualified staff which we all know is a particular challenge inside of the compliance space. CFATF works closely with its members

to ensure their AML, CFT, and CPF regimes are robust. The contributions will also go towards defraying the cost of CFATF secretary and operational expenses to provide the technical expertise required by the region.

Question regarding performance measures for NAMLC. Is the regulatory unit at NAMLC presently measured under external performance measures? The House advised that rating agencies do not just measures fiscal and economic performance. They also measure public authority's approach to policy-making. Notwithstanding the above, the Ministry of Finance is working with the Attorney General's Chambers to update all of NAMLC's operational matters given that we work hand in hand with the Attorney General for the legal framework.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I can now move on to Head 11, and the question, I think, was [about] costs under 2100, and what does it do for strategic direction? The answer is the section is primarily responsible for the administration department. The budget of $1.3 million is primarily for rent, utilities, stationery, salaries, the four staff members, and the one assistant vacant post for the assistant accountant general for operations. The strategic direction for the department is directed by initiatives coming from the Ministry of Finance Headquarters.

So, let me just give the Opposition Leader a little insight. The Ministry of Finance has biweekly senior staff meetings. We also have individual meetings that will happen with the various department heads, which are mainly handled by the financial secretary. The work plans that we have, you might have an idea . . . You might say, *I want to do online payments,* but your idea of online payments has to be translated into a work plan, policy, planning, and all the rest. That is what happens. And that is what happens throughout all of the Ministry of Finance.

We have multiple different stakeholders, whether it's the internal stakeholders, which will happen to be this parliament and the country, or whether or not the external stakeholders such as the various ratings assessment agencies or the international bodies that examine us. And so, I do note there were questions in regard to what planning is going on. There is a requirement at that level, which are not operation levels, which are leadership levels, to ensure that they are doing the work to make sure that we can carry out all of the things that are necessary to do in any given year or series of years. And of course, sometimes you have to push back on the Minister and say, *We are not going to be able to do this this year if we have multiple things*, and all the rest. And so that is just the very nature of the way that these things work.

There is a question regarding staffing levels. There are currently 10 vacant posts. The revised 2022/23 FTE [full-time equivalent] includes temp staff. For 2024/25, some vacant positions were partially funded, which resulted in a total staff complement showing as 38 instead of the total as per establishment list of 40 full-time equivalents.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I am happy to yield to the Opposition Leader as I may have been trying to nourish myself and did not get exactly the question regarding Customs split between Finance and National Security. If the Opposition Leader could clarify the question—

The Chairman: Opposition Leader, could you clarify the question you posed on Customs and the split between the revenue and the expenditure?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I thank the Honourable Premier for the clarification opportunity.

My question as it related to the separation of duties between . . . bear with me . . . Customs and the Minister of National Security was exemplified in the question about a number of complaints that had been raised in the public . . . about a number of complaints that had been raised to me specifically as well, about unfairness for some importers allowed to bring in things and others not allowed to. And so, my question was, Where does this fall? Whose area of responsibility is this because this does relate to revenue collection? But I take the point. I stand to be guided by the Honourable Premier.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier. You have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. [It is] a good question because it is something that needs to be clarified.

Those things would typically fall in the Ministry of National Security that manages matters related to borders. Yes, we do have revenue collection. It is recorded in revenue under here, but it is literally just revenue. So, we are responsible for the policy, et cetera, all operational matters, all the different things, et cetera, are enforced and handled by the Minister of National Security. But that does not mean we do not work together.

You would have noted the statement from Customs and noted the statement that, of course, 99 per cent of shipments are cleared with no question. But we do understand there are continuing matters that we have to deal with in this Government's view. And the Throne Speech this year was "Serving the People." And we are just going to continue to work to get better at certain things. But I think it is important the Opposition Leader must also note that Customs is having an enforcement role to play as well to ensure that revenue is protected, to ensure that laws are followed, and to ensure that contraband and things that are not contrary to law are brought into the country.

So, there is a delicate balance. But if he or his Shadow Minister responsible for National Security

wishes to speak with the Minister of National Security or to write to us on anything specific, we will happily try to respond with any specifics that he may have.

The answer is certainly that Customs is tasked with dual responsibilities of collecting and safeguarding the revenue and controlling the cross-border movement of persons and their goods including the enforcement of provisions of importation and exportation of goods. Revenue collections is proper to the Ministry of Finance. Border control is proper to the Ministry of National Security. And the Customs Department Act [1952] was amended effective 1 April 2014, and I can assure you that the Progressive Labour Party was not the Government at that time that that happened. [Continuing on] . . . making provision for the Minister of National Security giving instructions and directions to customs officers for exercising border control functions.

Has the Minister looked into or done anything regarding complaints regarding inequitable treatment from small businesses? Absolutely! And the Minister has consulted myself [and] has consulted with the Collector of Customs. And where there are spaces where I do not believe that fairness is happening inside of the contours of the law, I will make my views felt to the Collector and the Minister of National Security at the same point in time. But I, you know, I am not going to comment on specifics on various cases. What I can say is, as I repeated before, if the Opposition Leader has specific items, I am happy to provide those specific answers.

What accounts for the projected duty revenue increase to $6.8 million? And that is just based on current trends. It consists of increased economic activity that is expected this year with, of course, increasing construction projects—not all of them are duty free—in addition to just continued economic growth and recovery. Members listening would know that Bermuda recorded its fastest GDP growth in, I will call it, 21 years in 2022. The last time we had growth that fast was way back in the early 2000s, and so we are anticipating that revenue collections will continue to grow.

It is important to know that customs duty revenue was depressed due to the significant number of rebates that were done to keep fuel prices frozen. But we have seen continued amelioration with fuel prices, and expected that to continue despite the fact that OPEC has extended its production cuts for another three months because they have not seen prices rise despite released tensions. And this, of course, is due to increased production coming online especially from a major CARICOM country named as Guyana that has some of the largest proven oil reserves per capita and is continuing to increase its oil exports.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: [What]?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: They are continuing to increase their oil exports. Do not go there. You know. Come on now, Jarion.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: So that is that. I think on Head 28 there was a question in regard to Social Insurance, and I thought I made it clear inside the brief. If you want to clarify the question . . . Was this about recharge, or do you just want me to go ahead?

The Chairman: I thought there was a question about debt statements last year versus this year. [That] was the question posed.

Hon. E. David Burt: That is later. No, no. This is the first question that was asked.

The Chairman: I am sorry. Opposition Leader, do you want to assist the Premier on the question posed?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: No, I think we started down the road but read the brief, and so I think we discontinued that question. I am not even sure how he got it.

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem. All right. Oh, maybe it was . . . Okay. That is fine. Either way, page 53 of the [brief] . . . We can confirm the costs are recharged back to the fund. So, all of the operational expenses of the Department of Social Insurance are not an expense of the Consolidated Fund even though they are paid out of the Consolidated Fund. They are recharged back to the Consolidated Fund under the Contributory Pensions Act 1970.

There was a question on, I guess, 38040, noncompliance being detected so far and any penalties issued. I do not have specific information. I am happy if they want it to be an official question that wants to be submitted so we can provide that information. But one of the things that I can say is that as we are moving, as a reminder, there was a restructuring of the Ministry of Finance Headquarters.

One of the things in the restructure of the Ministry of Finance Headquarters was adding a position of chief operating officer. The chief operating officer has been charged with working with various departments inside of the Ministry on a revenue collection basis to enhance that collection and to enhance these particular matters. We first started with the Office of the Tax Commissioner, which of course is a very large collector of revenue for the Government. And now we are moving those things on to the Department of Social Insurance with the investing of a debt management system similar to what we have seen over at the Office of the Tax Commissioner and ensuring that we can go ahead and do this.

In 38040, it says last year's debate $49 million outstanding. This year's debate $75 million. On the

difference, I think that I did cover that inside of my debate. The current outstanding debt is $71,514,400. The number which is being stated this year is inclusive of $21.6 million that has been included . . . that was included in this year's total debt due to a mandated reporting policy. The outstanding debt increase on active accounts by $804,000, or 1.6 per cent.

Just for the Opposition Leader's benefit, we have to make sure that we state things in regard to accounting centres and the Auditor General sometimes makes the corrections in other types of items. This is something that is similar to, you will remember the hubbub about two years ago where all of a sudden there was some assumption that the Government just tabled or increased the debt to the hospital (or a guarantee to the hospital) by $500 million or something like that. And it was just that the Auditor General required us to list the total guarantee amount for all the payments that Paget Health Services would be paid over the time rather than the principal amount which was previously recorded and previously acceptable to the Auditor General. Accounting standards changed and updated and all the rest and so we just have to follow through it. So that is the thing. There is no actual real increase. It is just the specific reporting and the new things that have to be reported there.

Moving on, Mr. Chairman, I guess there was a question of . . . the situation (it says) if over 120 days it then goes across to the Attorney General. Last it was 90 days. Why is this the case especially with debt collection departments . . . debt enforcement? The department does not have any debt collectors at this time. There is also a shortage of staff at compliance section. This is actively being addressed with hiring expected to be in quarter one of 2024/25. Debts over 120 days are submitted to the debt enforcement unit.

We go on to page B-[121], Performance Measures. Why is the Department of Social Insurance (DOSI) using QuickBooks to enter debt levels being so high they need to move to a new system. QuickBooks is used to summarise the financial information from the Pension Administration system which does not have an accounting component. However, as part of the review in upgrades to systems, the pension and reporting system will be looked to be in the new system that will have all of those things included in one. But the old pension system is still being used and QuickBooks is just being used to summarise the financial information, not actually do all the assessment of the multiple payers and multiple accounts, et cetera. That is not what that is for. There is an actual enterprise system that is used for that, and important to note [is] that system was not impacted by the cyberattack.

I will just answer the Actuarial Review question again because the Opposition Leader did state that it was not done last year, and it was promised to be done last year. The Actuarial Review does not take a day, first of all.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: It was said last year that the Actuarial Review is due this year. As I stated in the budget brief, it commenced in the fourth quarter of last year. It is ongoing. And when it is complete it will be prepared and tabled in this House in the regular fashion. So it is not to say that it was not done. It is not to say that it was not achieved. The department is following its legislative mandate to complete that review every three years. That review was due to start in 2023. It did commence. And we will make sure that we table those matters when that review is finished.

There was a question asked on $249 million capital spend. It said, what is this being spent on? Is it QuickBooks? No, clearly it is not QuickBooks, but it is a separate system outside of the current systems which are being used for debt management. It is similar to what has been used very successfully over in the Office of the Tax Commissioner. The system will assist the department in reducing the outstanding debt and effectively managing receivables on an ongoing basis. The software will also support the compliance enforcement and early detection of nonpayment of contributions by employers. The system's goal is to create a centralised automated reporting and monitoring solution. This will improve the Department of Social Insurance's ability to report on the collection of contributions, identify all employers with outstanding debt and age of debt in assisting in determining the collectability of outstanding debt and to create payment plans with improved management of those plans.

Moving on to Head 38. There were questions in regard to the Tax Commissioner. I think there was a question on page B-122, 4800 . . . sorry—

The Chairman: I think you mean 48000.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay, got it.

The Chairman: Administration.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, 48000. Thank you, that is helpful. Because I am getting dizzy myself from all this reading.

[Business unit] 48000, and it said Admin increasing by $311,000. Ah, yes. Administration 48000, $311,000 year over year, what is the cause? This is additional monies for a departmental controller to support administrative controls and debt collection. It is also due to a revaluation of roles within the department which will result in increased salary costs but which will also result in higher output from the department. This is something that I have said on numerous occasions, but I think it is important to reflect. Departments like the Attorney General's Chambers, departments like the Ministry of Finance, Registrar of Companies conducting similar functions are under incredible stress and we are

under increasing stress due to our employees being poached, often by the private sector—

An Hon. Member: Yes!

Hon. E. David Burt: But oftentimes also by the Bermuda Monetary Authority who can afford . . . or not who can afford to pay, who do pay higher wages. (Afford is a relative term.) And the fact that I would say is that this is the reason why in last year's budget statement we stated that we were going to make sure that we conduct a review of hard-to-fill posts and in this year's allocation you will see that some of these things are budgeted for. Because we are not going to be able to have a fully staffed Registrar of Companies if the pay scales are severely differential from what persons in compliance . . . I think that is your business, Opposition Leader. We know how persons are remunerated for compliance. We know how compliance roles are in high demand and it is vital and important that these particular things are remunerated properly so that we can have competent staff and attract the staff and *retain* the staff inside this department so they don't . . . you know, go to the BMA. So that is the reason why those things are there.

Are we still in OTC [Office of the Tax Commissioner]? Yes. Still in OTC. It says, what else is being rented by the OTC outside of the building? The differential in rents is only $5,000. As stated, a majority of the rental costs for the building, the small increase is due to a provision on the repairs and maintenance (R and M) on the building which may be charged via a rent increase. I think OTC is still at the Perry Building.

There was a question . . . I want to make sure I am on the correct head. Okay, I am still on the Office of the Tax Commissioner. I am not over to Registrar of Companies yet.

There was a question on page B-123 and it said Professional Services, and they [asked] why is this increasing by 27 per cent? The Premier made a point to reduce the efficiency measure in previous year, why has this changed? I think I was talking about the Registrar of Companies, not the Office of the Tax Commissioner. That was my thing . . . this is the cost to support the maintenance of debt management tools. As you will know, once you buy a system you then have to pay to update a system. So this is for the maintenance of the debt management tools which is important for debt collection and the actual costs are more than outweighed by the benefits due to prior debt being collected. So there is a small increase but it is important to know that there was a $15.7 million (at least) increase or additional money in back taxes that were collected.

On to page B-124 Payroll Tax increasing by $68 million—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: A point of clarification, if I can.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh I will—

The Chairman: Will you yield, Premier?

Yes, Opposition Leader.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I was looking at [page] B-123, under Professional Services. And I just want to find it here . . . but it was said in last year's Hansard that the reduction was part of efficiency measures. So the question was, If last year it was for efficiency purposes, then why is it going up this year? Surely those efficiencies have been realised. That was the question.

The Chairman: Thank you, Opposition Leader.

Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Great question and I think the answer which I gave explained it. We have got these things in place, but now we have to actually pay for the maintenance and upkeep of these particular systems. So from that perspective . . . under Professional Services. That is the best I can give. From that perspective, that is where . . . that is there. So I appreciate the Opposition Leader on referring to what was said last year, that is important. Those were the reductions that were done but what has happened this year is that there is an increase, needing to make sure . . . we made a significant investment in this debt management system. I think millions of dollars over the past few years. And now there is the need to maintain it. And that is not something that can be maintained under the Capital Account because maintenance is something that flows into Current Account. I hope that is helpful there.

And I see some new answers being typed for me as I speak so I might be able to give you some more [answers].

The Chairman: Well, you have only got about five minutes so . . .

Hon. E. David Burt: Well, let me hurry up then.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: There was a question in regard to payroll tax increasing by $68 million and why is this predicted. Now here is the thing that I want the Opposition Leader to know. We do not pick payroll tax numbers out of our head. There is a very big and detailed payroll tax model that is modelled on an annual basis which makes predictions in regard to economic growth, which makes predictions in regard to inflation . . . because inflation salaries go up and there is a question because, of course, things are collected on that basis. The $30 million is due to the estimated amount for the new hire relief. The additional . . . well, I don't think it is $38 [million], because I think we are going from last year's original to this year's. But either way the additional monies

are due to economic growth, the increase of jobs in the economy.

As we know, the economy added just under 1,000 jobs last year. There is expectation of additional jobs being added to the economy this year—whether they be the construction projects, continued growth/resurgence in the local and domestic economy. So that is the reason why those figures are predicted. There is a very comprehensive model that the Ministry of Finance uses. It is updated on an annual basis so all of these things are imputed in and this was the prediction that came out, and that is the number which we put. I think what we can see is that that economic model is pretty good, because last year, when we made sure that it was updated, we were just about on [with] the payroll tax number. We were a little bit under. But far better than we had been in previous years. We are pretty good with the model.

There was a question in regard to land tax increasing by $4 million this year and why. I think that is when Wayne had said his comment. But I think it is important to note that budgets are done on a modified cash basis and not an accrual basis. And so if there are additional collections coming in from back taxes, or monies that the debt collection unit is collecting, then those things would be recorded inside of the funds which were collected from that. So that is where it comes from and that is why it is showing that additional $4 million, I think, over the predicted amount.

There was a question in regard to the tax modernisation programme spend at $855,000 in previous year budget and actuals operating to be $500,000. What is the . . . benefits? These are capital acquisition costs for further enhancements of the debt management tool and also the reduction is due to the current stage of the project being finalised before the consolidated debt initiative occurs with both DOSI [Department of Social Insurance] and OTC [Office of the Tax Commissioner], but also in the brief I spoke about some of the accounting items that are going to be done. The base OTC system is still run off of an old I-Series system as well. And so some of the programmes that we are putting on top of that allow for better and easier interaction in reporting items so that there is less manual work that is needed on the Office of the Tax Commissioner side.

There was a question in regard to the ROC domain name changing, and this was driven by consultation with the OECD cybersecurity team in the wake of the cyberattack. They wanted the ROC to operate on a separate domain from Government to ensure proper segregation. It is important to note that the roc.gov.bm was not impacted by the things. It was on a separate server. And, as you would know, domain names can point to external servers. It doesn't necessarily matter. But it was something that the OECD asked for, so it is fine. But it was always stored on an external server, not necessarily a government server, to make sure that information was segregated. But this is just literally a domain routing item. It is in the same place. It is just a different domain and they didn't—

The Chairman: Premier, I think we have time for one more answer.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh dear.

Register growth year on year. Register growth 2022 [with] 16,103 entities. In 2023, [there were] 16,269 entities. And I will try my best to get the rest of the questions back to the Opposition Leader as I have them.

The Chairman: All right. Thank you, Honourable Premier.

Would you like to move your heads please?

Hon. E. David Burt: I am trying to find this piece of paper . . . okay, got it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the heads be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the heads be approved, namely Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39, and 58 under the Ministry of Finance.

Is there any objection to that? There being none, the heads are approved.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Finance Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39, and 58 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25].

The Chairman: May you now invite the Committee to rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again, please, Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: I am sorry. Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none . . . thank you.

We will sit again on Wednesday the . . . what is the date? The 6th of March.

[Motion carried: The Committee agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 7:51 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2023/24

The Speaker: Good evening, Members.

Are there any objections to the House rising and reporting progress and seeking leave to sit again?

There are none. We will now move on from that item. We have just completed the debate for today on the budget.

The next item on the paper is being carried over, [Order] No. 3 . . . [Order] No. 2, rather. We are doing [Order] No. 3, correct? [Order] No. 2 is carried over.

[Order] No. 3 is the second reading of the Economic Development Amendment Act 2024 in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister, would you like to present your matter at this time?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Economic Development Amendment Act 2024 be now read a second time.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none, continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to amend the Economic Development Act 1968 to allow applications to be submitted and approved for approved residential schemes within the city limits of the Corporation of Hamilton beyond a designated economic empowerment zone area.

Mr. Speaker, the Act currently permits approved schemes for the economic development of any part of Bermuda approved by the Minister responsible for economic development pursuant to section 2 of the Act. The Bill proposes to extend this area in which residential schemes can be approved to include areas within the city limits of the Corporation of Hamilton which extends beyond the designated economic empowerment zone areas.

The proposed legislation would enable this new type of approved residential scheme to benefit from foreign direct investment through facilitating residential unit ownership by restricted persons made possible because of the previous amendments to the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956.

Mr. Speaker, the Economic Development Strategy outlines the case to extend residential development in the City of Hamilton which can and must play a significant role for the expansion of residential development opportunities on the Island. The City of Hamilton Plan recognises that residential development is an essential component of revitalising the city. Yet, its potential is not being leveraged at present. The Amendment Bill aims to enable the opportunity to grow the residential population in the Island's capital. Increasing the resident population of the city will help transform it into a vibrant economic hub where persons can live, work and play.

Mr. Speaker, by way of background, in 2019, the Economic Development Act 1968 was amended to include providing for approved residential schemes. The aim and objectives of the 2019 amendment was to encourage economic activity and development in all EEZs, primarily in northeast Hamilton. It also permitted a restricted person to hold and acquire one or more residential valuation units in an approved residential scheme without any of the restrictions that would otherwise be imposed by the Act. This specific amendment seeks to further facilitate foreign direct investment in the EEZs by removing restrictions around ownership of residential real estate.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill provides for a new definition for an approved Hamilton residential scheme and municipal area. It is intended that an approved Hamilton residential scheme will mean an approved scheme consisting wholly or partly of residential units situated within the municipal area which does not include any residential valuation unit in an EEZ and the municipal area will mean the municipal area of the City of Hamilton as shown on the map in Schedule A1 of the Municipalities Act 1923.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill makes provisions for the proposal to be subject to a sunset clause and new section 2ABA inserted by the Amendment Bill limits the provision of approved EEZ residential schemes to applications submitted on or before 31 March 2028. The Minister can extend the deadline by applying for approval by order subject to the negative resolution procedure.

Mr. Speaker, the concessions available under section 3 and section 3A of the Act will continue to apply to the development of approved schemes, but these concessions will not be extended to the new approved Hamilton residential schemes. Such concessions provide for approved businesses and property owners in an economic empowerment zone to apply for certain concessions.

Mr. Speaker, by widening the scope of potential investment beyond designated EEZs, this Government aims to stimulate growth in Bermuda's economy so that overall . . . all of Bermuda can benefit.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments are significantly important to us increasing our residential housing stock, primarily in the City of Hamilton. The city plans over the years have indicated that there is significant capacity for us to increase the number of residents in our city. This amendment seeks to entice further development in our EEZs and the wider City of Hamilton. The approved schemes which are currently in place . . . the model which is currently in place will be extended to the wider City of Hamilton and that is significantly important because when investors are looking

for how they can make returns from their developments, they now know that they have a wider pool of individuals that they can market and sell their properties to. It also would allow for many of our expatriate workers to participate in purchasing properties within the City of Hamilton. This is a win-win for the City of Hamilton and the wider Bermuda, as if we have more persons residing in the City of Hamilton it frees up the capacity in the housing market throughout the entire Island, Mr. Speaker.

When we start to talk about the work that we have done with our Economic Development Strategy, we now see significant initiatives that arise from that Economic Development Strategy. I came here and I brought a Bill to extend the EEZs to southeast Hamilton. Now you see another Bill in place that looks to how we can entice and encourage foreign direct investment in the city. Both of those Bills together are to generate more economic activity within the wider City of Hamilton. And so we are extremely deliberate with our efforts on that particular front, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will invite other Members to weigh in.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Does any other Member . . . MP Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is sometimes helpful just for the purposes of the Hansard to talk about what a Bill is seeking to achieve and in effect this Bill is doing three things.

Firstly, it is creating two separate categories for the development of residential units—those that are in the EEZ only, and those which are in the Corporation of Hamilton municipality, but not in a place designated as an EEZ. So there are these two buckets, if you will, where we can have residential development: the EEZ, and then the rest of the municipality that is not that designated.

Secondly, it is allowing for restricted persons to buy in either bucket, either category, at least until March of 2028, four years from now. And thereafter, unless the Minister intervenes and extends that date, they can only buy in the EEZ, not in the municipality.

Third and finally, it restricts concessions so that they are only available to the EEZ residential units and not to those in the municipality. And I presume that that restriction on concessions is effective together with an effective date of the Bill, the 1st of April and that it is not retrospective. But that would be the question I have for the Minister, Is there any retrospectivity or are we just stopping concessions from the 1st of April onwards for any non-EEZ residential development?

Leaving the Bill to one side and just speaking to the point the Minister made, obviously, we live on a very small Island. And if there is an opportunity for residential . . . in Hamilton, you know, that is a good thing. We have seen people take that in the past and drive it forward, and I think it was positively received all around. Also, the Opposition Leader did speak specifically in his Reply to the Budget [Statement] about how, if we are going to go up somewhere, or we are going to have environmental impact, the best place for that is really the City of Hamilton where we can go up and should go up. And it would be much better as a residential city or a mixed-use city. From that perspective, in terms of the principle behind it, we very much agree with the Minister that it would be good to see more residential units in Hamilton.

Beyond that, we do not have anything in Committee. I don't know if others have to speak, but I think that is all we have on our side.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None?

Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, the Member is spot on in terms of summarising the three main areas of the Bill.

The sunset clause is important. What we did not want is long-term ongoing competition with the expansion of development within the economic empowerment zones. And so we put a window in place where we will encourage development in the wider City of Hamilton for a four-year period. And that is why that 2028 date is placed in the Bill. Obviously, we will monitor and track performance and make a determination on whether or not we can continue with this particular provision.

The concessions that were mentioned in the Economic Development Act are concessions which are specific to the economic empowerment zones. There was no desire to extend concessions outside of the economic empowerment zones. The economic empowerment zones we believe to be special zones with a special purpose and as a result we are going to continue to treat that different from the wider City of Hamilton and development within the wider City of Hamilton. And so we are happy to encourage restricted persons to participate in the schemes in the wider City of Hamilton, but we did not want to disadvantage the benefits of operating within an EEZ. So we did not extend the concessions beyond the borders of the economic empowerment zones.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 8:03 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2024

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in [Committee of] the whole House for consideration of the Bill [entitled] the Economic Development Amendment Act 2024.

Minister Hayward, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, the Bill seeks to amend the Economic Development Act 1968 (the "principal Act") in relation to certain approved residential schemes within the City of Hamilton area.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to move clauses 1 through 9.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Clause 1 provides for the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 1 of the principal Act by amending the definitions of "approved residential scheme" and "economic empowerment zone" and also by inserting new definitions for "approved Hamilton residential scheme" and "municipal area."

Clause 3 amends section 2AB of the principal Act to make reference to the revised definition of an "approved EEZ residential scheme."

Clause 4 inserts new section 2ABA into the principal Act. Section 2ABA applies section 2AB to residential valuation units in an approved Hamilton residential scheme as section 2AB applies to units in an approved EEZ residential scheme, but only if the application for an approved Hamilton residential scheme is submitted on or before the specified dates. Section 2ABA provides that the Minister can extend the deadline for submitting an application for approval by order subject to the negative resolution procedure.

Clause 5 amends section 2AC of the principal Act (approval of residential scheme shall not be withdrawn) by inserting a reference to both approved EEZ residential schemes and approved Hamilton residential schemes.

Clause 6 amends section 3 of the principal Act (concessions to undertakings) by inserting a new subsection (2) which provides that the concessions provided for in section 3 do not apply to approved Hamilton residential schemes.

Clause 7 amends section 6 of the principal Act (Minister may approve lease of land required for approved schemes) to make reference to the revised definition of an "approved EEZ residential scheme" and an "approved Hamilton residential scheme."

Clause 8 provides a consequential amendment to section 74A(2) of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956 and consequential amendments to sections 120(7)(b) and 129(1AB)(b) of the Companies Act 1981.

Clause 9 provides for commencement.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Any further speakers?

There appear to be no further speakers. Minister, you want to move these [clauses], the preamble?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move clauses 1 through 9.

The Chairman: The clauses 1 through 9 . . . any objections to that?

There are no objections.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 9 passed.]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move the Schedule?

The Chairman: The Schedule has been . . . moved to be approved. Are there any objections to that?

Hon. Jason Hayward: I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. The Schedule I was referring to is in the Municipalities Act. It does not . . .

The Chairman: I was wondering.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I thought the map would have been contained in this one. So, that is not necessary, but I would like to move the preamble.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

There appear to be none. No objections.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none. The Bill will be reported to the House as printed.

Thank you. Mr. Speaker?

[Motion carried: The Economic Development Amendment Act 2024 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendments.]

House resumed at 8:08 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2024

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Economic Development Amendment Act 2024 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none. The Bill has been reported as printed.

That brings us to the end of the business of the day. We are going to do the third reading and then the rest.

Minister, would you like to do your third reading?

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Economic Development Amendment Act 2024 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Continue, Minister.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Economic Development Amendment Act 2024 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Members, I am going to seek the indulgence of the House to allow a matter from the Ministry of Finance to be tabled which we will deal with later this week as a Bill. And on behalf of the Minister of Finance, the Attorney General will present it.

Any objections? None.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 14

Hon. Kathy Lynn Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 14 be suspended to enable me to introduce a Bill to the House.

The Speaker: Any objections?

Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]

BILL

FIRST READING

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) (NO. 2) ACT 2024

Hon. Kathy Lynn Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting: the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you, Attorney General.

Members, that should be in your email as we speak. It should have been sent out to you now.

[Pause]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, with your leave, the Bill itself is already on the Order Paper. Is this a new Bill? Or is this a substitution? The Bill was tabled a couple of days ago.

The Speaker: It is No. 2 Act.

Mr. Scott Pearman: It is No. 2 . . . thank you.

The Speaker: No. 2 Act.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Grateful for the clarification.

The Speaker: And both, I think, will be done at the same time. Yes.

All right, Deputy Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Speaker, good evening to you and all here and all listening.

I do move that we now adjourn until March 6 at 10:00 am.

The Speaker: Any objections?

No objections. We all rise. Thank you, Members.

Members thank you for your participation today and we look forward to returning on Monday . . . on Wednesday.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Have yourself a good evening and we will see you on Wednesday.

The House now stands adjourned.

[Gavel]

[At 8:11 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Wednesday, 6 March 2024.]

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
6 MARCH 2024
10:01 AM

Sitting Number 13 of the 2023/2024 Session

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

The Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Acting Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 1 and 4 March 2024]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of March 1 and March 4 have been circulated.

Are there any amendments required?

There are none.

The Minutes will be printed as confirmed.

[Minutes of 1 and 4 March 2024 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

APOLOGY

The Speaker: MP Dunkley has indicated his absence today. And Minister Wilson will be out in bereavement of her father-in-law, who will be funeralised today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: The Junior Minister has a paper this morning.

Would you like to present your paper, Junior Minister?

TOURISM INVESTMENT (AZURA BERMUDA) ORDER 2024

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024, as made by the Minister responsible for Tourism under section 3 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017, together with the written agreement of the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 5 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: There are two such Statements this morning. The first is in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

UPDATE ON THE TAX REFORM COMMISSION

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to provide an update to this Honourable House on the ongoing work of the Tax Reform Commission [TRC or the Commission]. Under the Tax Reform Commission Act 2017, the Tax Reform Commission is tasked with examining Bermuda's tax system and advising the Government of any measures to advance Bermuda's system of taxation and revenue collection.

Since the update given to this Honourable House last year, Terms of Reference have been agreed upon by myself, as Minister of Finance, and the [Commission] Chairman, Mr. Darren Johnston. These Terms of Reference, supported by commissioners,

include the mandate, principles, and a realistic deliverable deadline.

The mandate agreed requires the Tax Reform Commission to incorporate potential revenues that may accrue to the Government of Bermuda due to the implementation of the Corporate Income Tax Act 2023 and to make policy recommendations to the Government for the establishment of a revised Bermuda tax system. These recommendations of a revised tax system must achieve the following:

1. Complement the CIT [corporate income tax] by making recommendations on how qualified refundable tax credits and other permissible tax reductions or incentives might be implemented to ensure that corporate income tax payers continue to contribute to and find Bermuda to be a fiscally attractive jurisdiction.
2. Revise the tax system to enhance Bermuda's competitiveness from local and international perspectives.
3. Reduce the impact of taxes on the cost of living in Bermuda and to consider how earners below a threshold of income might benefit from reduced taxes.
4. Broaden and balance the tax base, reduce the variability of revenues, given the corporate income tax, and consider alternative forms of taxes.
5. Consider how the government's revenue and reserves management can be improved, and to recommend appropriate legislative or constitutional guardrails and/or policies to engage and build trust with stakeholders to support the design and acceptance of the Tax Reform Commission's policy recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, the Commission also upholds principles that will guide its work in making recommendations. These principles include

- appropriate government revenues;
- competitiveness;
- equity and fairness; and finally,
- simplicity.

The complete recommendations and findings that address the extensive mandate are due to be completed by the end of October 2024.

Mr. Speaker, the Tax Reform Commission recognises the importance of being focused, of leveraging skills and of working collaboratively. This is being achieved by separating workstreams and allocating members to specific principles set out in its Terms of Reference. The three main workstreams include

(1) Competitiveness;
(2) Equity and Fairness; and
(3) Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation.

Bermuda's Competitiveness as a Business Location

Hon. E. David Burt: The goal of workstream 1 is to recommend a fair and sustainable framework for the generation of tax and other revenues derived from businesses in Bermuda, within the wider objectives of the Commission. The work plan for this workstream includes enhancing Bermuda's global competitiveness by focusing on two main areas: First, develop a business tax framework that is both attractive to businesses and compliant with OECD requirements. Second, evaluate financial and other incentives that may improve Bermuda's competitiveness as a business location. This workstream will consider the impact of regulatory, service and cost of living issues on costs and business conditions in Bermuda.

Equity and Fairness

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the work plan for workstream 2 includes enhancing equity and fairness in Bermuda's tax system through a comprehensive analysis of revenue sources. The scope includes developing proposals for a balanced tax base, review of existing domestic taxes such as customs duties, land tax, company registration taxes and stamp duty, to name a few, with a view to reduce the cost of living and the cost of doing business for those in Bermudian.

Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation

Hon. E. David Burt: The work plan for workstream 3 includes stakeholder engagement and consultation. The scope includes facilitating meaningful dialogue and collaboration with key stakeholders including government agencies, businesses, industry associations, advocacy groups and the public. By soliciting input, feedback and insights from a diverse range of perspectives, the Commission aims to ensure that proposed tax reforms reflect the needs, concerns and aspirations of Bermuda's various stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, when I announced the commissioners last year, I noted that there was yet a member to be named. I am pleased to share with this Honourable House that I have appointed Dr. Claudette Fleming to serve as a Tax Reform Commissioner. Dr. Fleming holds a PhD in Diplomacy/Political Economy, and a Master's and Bachelor's degree in Social Work. She also has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, and is an APMG certified Strategy Implementation Professional.

Dr. Fleming spent 22 years of her professional career building Age Concern into one of the most impactful charitable organisations in Bermuda. During her 22-year tenure as Executive Director at Age Concern, she worked collaboratively with many public and private sector stakeholders, influencing several significant public policies and legislation. She led the oversight of several co-collaborative public sector research and task force initiatives inclusive of the first draft of the Ageing Well Bermuda Plan, the Paratransit Initiative and the Seniors' Test for Ageing Trends and Services. Dr. Fleming has also been a member of several

government and nonprofit boards and committees and will lend her voice based on her experience to ensure that the needs of the third sector and our ageing population are duly considered by the Tax Reform Commission.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all Honourable Members welcome the appointment of Dr. Fleming and will join me in thanking all commissioners for agreeing to serve Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister Hayward.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

NEW PROCESSING TIMELINES FOR SPOUSAL LETTER APPLICATIONS

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I rise before this Honourable House today to share that the Department of Immigration has established improved processing time for spousal letter applications. It is expected that this change will be welcomed by applicants.

Spousal letters are issued by the Department of Immigration to assist spouses of Bermudians who, by the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968, are deemed to belong to Bermuda. An application for a spousal letter is not mandatory legally or otherwise. But more often than not, spouses of Bermudians do apply for it as other institutions request it. The process has proven quite beneficial to those who need it. Once issued, the letter can be used for confirmation of the right to be landed and employed in Bermuda. Over the years, airlines, British High Commissions, embassies, local banks and other local agencies have come to rely upon the letter as an accepted document in order to grant individuals unhindered passage and access to key services in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, some of the requirements for the application process include a completed Application for Residence form [https://www.gov.bm/online-services/apply-residence], a police certificate, medical clearance, passport-size photos, proof of citizenship, the marriage certificate and a birth certificate. Although spousal letters are not issued with an end date, applications for new letters are submitted because the original letter was damaged, lost or destroyed.

Mr. Speaker, the processing times were three months for new applications and one month for renewals. Based on the Immigration Department's continued efforts to streamline processes, recent considerations were given for improving the timeline for those applications. I am pleased to advise that effective February 12, 2024, new spousal letter applications are now being processed within a one-month time frame, and renewals within 10 working days.

Mr. Speaker, dating back to March 2023, I presented to this Honourable House timelines for processing passport and work permit applications, and changes to the front-facing interactions with clients who attend the Department of Immigration to submit applications and/or to make inquiries. Although the department's timelines were impacted by the cyberattack in September 2023 (as with other government departments), all of these changes are a testament that the team is constantly reviewing and adjusting its processes. I am pleased that spousal letter applications have now been added to the list.

In the coming months, I expect to provide further updates of improvements in the department.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to the end of the Statements for this morning. And we will move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are no written questions today. But based on the Statements that were just given, there is an indication that a Member would like to ask questions on the second Statement.

Let me just adjust our timeline. And then, Minister Hayward, we will have the questions put to you for your Statement.

The Opposition Whip would like to put a question to you, Minister.

MP Cannonier.

QUESTION 1: NEW PROCESSING TIMELINES FOR SPOUSAL LETTER APPLICATIONS

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you very much. And again, this is a great Statement to hear this morning, I am sure, for most folks finding themselves needing a spousal letter.

Just curious. How many a year, annually, do you have of spousal letters being applied for, approximately?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I will endeavour to provide the Honourable Member with the exact numbers.

The Speaker: Okay.

Honourable Member, that is not something that he carries with him, but he will get it for you.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Definitely.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Supplementary or any further question?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: No, thank you.

The Speaker: MP Jackson.

QUESTION 1: NEW PROCESSING TIMELINES FOR SPOUSAL LETTER APPLICATIONS

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, of the applications that do come in, can the Minister please provide, what is the current turnaround time for the letters to be issued?

The Speaker: Minister.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No. What the *current* time is. I know what the hopeful time is. But I would like to know what the real time is.

The Speaker: Okay.

Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: As indicated in the Statement, there was a three-month processing time for a new application and a one-month processing time for renewals. Since February, mid-February of this year, we have amended the processing times. So there is a one-month processing time for new applications and a 10-day processing time for renewals.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

So of those, under what circumstances then would an application take over a year to process?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am fairly confident in saying that if an application takes a year to process, it means that the application was received incomplete, and the department is waiting on information to process that application. It is very, extremely rare to have a spousal letter take over a year to process.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No. That is fine, Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

No further supplementaries? No further questions?

Ministers, Members, we draw the Question Period to a close and we will move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to speak to this?

None?

Oh! MP Lister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning to all of the listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to first start off by sending congratulations to the Bermuda Muay Thai team. They have recently been competing overseas, and they have done well representing Bermuda. Out of the four members, all of them received or won medals, and there were three silver medals. So, it goes to show that in every discipline where Bermudians are competing, they are winning awards and showing that as small as Bermuda is, we are mighty when we come together. And we do what we can to achieve our goals.

Next, Mr. Speaker, on a sad note I would like to send condolences, and I will probably associate most of the House or the whole House, to the family of Mr. Leon Place of Places Gombeys.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Growing up in Bermuda, you know, you follow the Gombeys—Christmas, Boxing Day, 24th of May, every holiday.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: So, to Mr. Place of the Places Gombeys, I would say [this] is probably one of the longest-established Gombey troupes. So, they have lost their leader, but the tradition will continue on. And Gombeys are a tradition in Bermuda. And we look forward to seeing it continue. But condolences to the family of Mr. Place.

And before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, you know I would not even have dinner tonight if I left this out, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: But I would like to send birthday congratulations to none other than your wife and my mother. Today is her birthday.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I will not say the age, Mr. Speaker. But it is her birthday, and I would like to send her well wishes. And I will associate the House, too, Mr. Speaker. With that I will take my seat.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MP Simmons, I recognise you being quick on your feet next.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Oh, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I of course have to associate myself with the remarks wishing birthday wishes to your wife, Sister Miranda. I want to thank her for all that she does in our constituency and our community. She is an asset and a treasure, not just to you and your children, but to us as well.

On a sad note, I rise today to give my condolences to the Martin family for the recent passing of Movita Martin. A number of MPs are wishing to be associated with that. It is some testament . . . the funeral was held last Saturday and standing room only, packed, outside the door. And I think that is a testament to the impact that she has had on many people's lives and on our community.

Also, I would like to be associated with the condolences for Brother "Sparky" Place, who is actually the great-grand-uncle of my stepson. The contributions to our culture, the contributions to Gombeys and the legacy that is in place, instilled in that family and keeping it strong to this day is something to be cherished. And we thank him and his family for all that they are doing to keep that cultural icon going.

Finally, on a positive note, Mr. Speaker, some of my colleagues know that I am a big nerd, and I am a big "Dr. Who" fan, the television show "Dr. Who." And a Bermudian actress, Genesis Lynea, is set to have an appearance on that show. And we wish her much success, much happiness and even greater stops in her future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy Premier, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to certainly be associated with the birthday well wishes to Mrs. Miranda Lister.

And I would also like to be associated with the condolences to the Place family on the passing of Mr. Leon Place. Definitely have to stand and give note of that as almost all of the original Gombey troupes were founded in my district, on the area in my district in the North Village. One of them still exists. One of them is the H&H Gombeys, still alive and kicking there. And of course, the Places group, one of the last original ones as well is still in existence. And Mr. Place grew up on St. Monica's Road, and I know I share St. Monica's Road with the Honourable Member from constituency 16.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: So, I cannot *not* mention my honourable colleague, Minister Weeks, whenever I mention anything about the village. So, we share the village together in our representation. But the families who were the original cornerstone of the Gombeys come from the areas that we represent. And I know the Place family well, went to school with Leon's son, also named Leon Place and a very well-known cricketer, and other members of the Place family. And the Place family continues to be a foundation of the North Village area. So, condolences to them. He was an icon of culture, an icon of Bermuda, and we will all miss him.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other.

Before we move on, I am sure Mrs. Lister will appreciate the remarks expressed to her this morning on her birthday. I will make sure she knows.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: For the listening audience again, it is the resumption of the annual Budget Debate. This morning, today, we have two ministries that will be debated. They will be the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, which is this morning for four hours. And after that, the Cabinet Office for the remaining four hours, for a total of eight hours as are set aside daily for the annual Budget Debate each day.

Again, for the listening audience, once we resume into Committee, the Speaker will be out of the House during that process. And the proceedings of the House will be in the hands of the Panel of Chairs led by the Deputy Speaker. And I believe this morning the first Chairman will be MP Scott Simmons. So once the Premier leads us into Committee, MP Simmons will take the Chair and the House will be in his hands for the start of the session.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

MP Simmons.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to Honourable Members.

House in Committee at 10:25 am

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for the further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Today we will be looking at Heads 86, 23 and 55 under the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

I am going to recognise the Honourable Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, the Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert, JP, MP.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Good morning.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I move the following Heads: 86, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters; 23, Child and Family Services; and 55, Financial Assistance now be taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads [86,] 23 and 55 be approved.

Is there any objection to the motion?

There is none, go ahead, Minister.

MINISTRY OF YOUTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SENIORS

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am pleased to present the 2024/25 budget estimates for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors which comprises the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters, inclusive of Ageing and Disability Services, the K. Margaret Carter Centre, the Office of Youth Affairs, the Department of Child and Family Services and the Department of Financial Assistance.

Mr. Chairman, four hours has been allocated for this Ministry, and I will do my best to give time for the Opposition to ask questions or seek clarification on the fiscal year 2024/25 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 budget allocations for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors will demonstrate that there is a continued commitment with funding to support Bermuda's population during their lifespan, which includes our most vulnerable and cherished population groups—that is, our children (including youth), persons with disabilities and our seniors. To this end, Mr. Chairman, we have ensured that the services and programmes offered by the Ministry will directly impact and improve their overall well-being and quality of life.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry focused on numerous national priorities during the last budget year which are ongoing and will continue in the upcoming 2024/25 budget year. I will briefly highlight these as follows:

Mr. Chairman, ensuring the best interests, protection and safeguarding of our children is critical. As such, the National Child Safeguarding Committee, which falls under the remit of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, finalised its National Child Safeguarding Policy entitled "Working Together to Safeguard Children." Children's needs should be at the heart of a safeguarding system; therefore, a child-centred and coordinated approach to safeguarding children was adopted. This approach, which is reflected in the policy, encourages the collaboration of multiple agencies through the sharing of information and the undertaking of robust risk assessments.

Mr. Chairman, the main objectives of the National Child Safeguarding Policy are to strengthen

- the legislative framework;

- the collaboration framework; and
- the community protection framework.

The policy provides a guide for the National Child Safeguarding Committee, stakeholders and the community to further enhance child safeguarding measures in Bermuda, which places the country in a better position to report on compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors remains steadfast in providing our children with the protections that are necessary to safeguard them so they feel safe and can flourish to become productive members of our community.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year 2023/24, the Ministry also released a five-year National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families [National ID Plan]. To facilitate and underscore meaningful inclusion for persons with disabilities an accessible easy-to-read version and an audio recording of this version of the national plan are available in the public domain. This national plan aims to examine our services and support for adults with intellectual disabilities to ensure that they are at the standard or moving toward key standards identified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Chairman, this approach allows for gaps within the community impacting the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families to be addressed and ultimately enhance existing areas of services and support. These improvements will ensure that the human rights of adults with disabilities are respected and promoted so that this vulnerable sector within our community is empowered.

Mr. Chairman, the National ID Plan identifies five priority areas of action:

1. Quality Support and Services.
2. Training and Education for Support Workers.
3. Policy, Regulation and Accountability.
4. Financing.
5. Advocacy and Communication.

These priority areas are guided by the principles of rights, independence, choice and inclusion.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry established the National Intellectual Disabilities Plan Steering Committee so that a coordinated approach is undertaken when working through the action tasks. This cross-ministry steering committee includes 13 members inclusive of the chair, who represents various sectors in the community—that is, government ministries, departments, organisations, non-profits and persons with disabilities. Mr. Chairman, the Steering Committee will focus on working through the priority areas or objectives while seeking to educate the public and to improve the quality of services and supports to guarantee a more inclusive community so that adults with intellectual disabilities can have happy, healthy and meaningful lives.

Mr. Chairman, last year you may recall that I established Bermuda's first-ever Gender Affairs Council comprising 10 members who collectively bring a depth of knowledge, skills and experience relevant to gender issues in Bermuda, and who represent non-profit civil society organisations and entrepreneurs. Mr. Chairman, the Council has completed its Terms of Reference that sets out the purpose, role, expectation and duties of the Council to further the advancement of gender affairs in Bermuda. The Council has also submitted recommendations to the Ministry on what could assist the advancement of gender affairs in Bermuda and a work plan that will guide the Council in achieving their intended deliverables during the upcoming fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, to raise further awareness in our community and educate the public about gender-based violence, in November 2023 the Ministry participated in the observance of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and organised its second awareness campaign for gender-based violence with information tables set up at Washington Mall in Hamilton. The United Nations theme was *UNITE! Invest to prevent violence against women and girls*.

Mr. Chairman, this collaborative partnership between the Government and key agencies representing women advocates such as the Centre Against Abuse, One Love Foundation and the Women's Resource Centre is to address and prevent violence against women and girls. At the campaign, the Ministry distributed safe sound personal alarms used as a form of protection if someone should feel threatened or in danger. The Ministry endeavours to continue to educate the public about matters concerning gender affairs to empower our women, girls, men and boys to eliminate gender-based violence within our community, which many times gets overlooked.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry continues to be involved in the United Nations Joint Sustainable Development Goals [SDG] Fund Programme entitled Building Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The joint programme aims to diversify Bermuda's economy by supporting the growth of new opportunities for small businesses. This approach aims to empower women, youth and persons with disabilities to engage in key economic industry sectors.

Mr. Chairman, this fiscal year 2023/24, a delegation from the UNDP Multi-Country Office in Jamaica and UN Women Caribbean made two mission trips to Bermuda. The first visit in October 2023 involved the following:

- The re-engagement of project partners and stakeholders to progress continued buy-in and successful implementation of the programme.
- Validation of the draft curriculum and implementation plan for the Gender Equitable Finance and Accelerator Programme.
- Meetings with ministers for cross-ministry initiatives.

- Training for public sector officers and financial institutions.
- Meetings with the Ministry to explore other programming opportunities in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, the second mission trip in February 2024 was highly targeted in that three consultants as hired by UN Women engaged in several meetings in their efforts to conduct assessments of Bermuda, focusing on businesses owned by women, youth and persons with disabilities. The data collected will feed into the work of the joint programme. These assessments included the following:

1. a feasibility assessment on financing mechanisms for gender equality;
2. a needs assessment of financing tools and instruments; and
3. a training needs assessment on climate- and shock-resilient needs of businesses.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry continues to partner with the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation [BEDC] which is the government's expert agency in the areas of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) as we work with our UN Women and UNDP partners to undertake these assessments and progress this joint programme project, which is a momentous opportunity for Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year 2023/24 the Ministry engaged the community through various platforms—that is, YouTube, Instagram, CITV, radio, education sessions, live-stream panel discussions and expos—to ensure members of the public were aware of Ministry initiatives, services and programmes that are beneficial to them. Some of these included Nurturing our Nation: Parenting Expo, Let's Get Social and The Golden Hour.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to share some of the core initiatives the Ministry has been working through in collaboration with other entities for the social betterment of the community.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Ministry collaborated with the charitable organisation HOME and the Homelessness Advisory Panel to review a work plan to end homelessness in Bermuda. On World Homelessness Day, 10 October 2023, a community survey was launched to gather data on the public's views about homelessness in Bermuda, which would feed into strengthening the homelessness work plan that had been developed. Subsequently, the Homelessness Advisory Panel undertook a thorough review of the draft Plan to End Homelessness in Bermuda. [The draft plan] was later made public from December 2023 to February 2024 for the general public to review and give their views on the recommended action items for ending homelessness. This work will continue into the 2024/25 fiscal year.

The Ministry also collaborated with the Bermuda Health Council to develop a National Seniors Strategy for Bermuda. The National Seniors Strategy team have been working [assiduously] since last year August consulting with key stakeholder groups. Consultations were held from October 2023 to February 2024 with public sector ministries and departments, non-profit agencies, seniors clubs, private sector entities and our seniors themselves.

The strategy maps out nine pillars or goals to coordinate comprehensive strategic actions across the government, the third sector and the community to meet the needs of Bermuda's ageing population. These engagements provided an opportunity to have meaningful conversations about the challenges seniors face, how these challenges can be addressed and opportunities facing Bermuda's ageing population. The feedback provided and the data gathered will help to lay a solid foundation on which the National Seniors Strategy will be developed. This work will also continue into the upcoming fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry is committed to putting in place solutions to bridge the gaps in services for our seniors. While the National Seniors Strategy is still being developed, in October 2023 the Ministry launched a six-month Dementia Care Services Pilot Programme to ensure persons living with dementia who are uninsured or under-insured have access to the core dementia care community support services. In monitoring the dementia care services provided to date, the pilot programme is meeting a definite need as the number of clients has steadily increased. Therefore, funding has been secured in the upcoming fiscal year to continue the pilot programme which will be ultimately sustained as the National Seniors Strategy is implemented.

Mr. Chairman, as per the Children Act 1998, litigation guardians are appointed by courts to be the voice of the child. In essence, litigation guardians serve in a statutory role of safeguarding the interest of children. As of December 2023, there were 29 active litigation guardian cases. Of this total, 27 were new cases for 2023 and 20 cases were closed by the end of the year. The closure of cases within 12 months is evidence of the strengthening of the Ministry's Framework for Litigation Guardians. For this upcoming fiscal year 2024/25, the Ministry has set aside $150,000 to support the framework, which will cover the cost of litigation guardian services and the appointment of legal counsel by the courts for children.

Mr. Chairman, during the past budget year, the Ministry was directly associated with social protection efforts through proclamations, Ministerial Statements, guest speaking events and press releases. Some of these include the following:

- International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2023;
- World Homelessness Day;

- International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women;
- Human Rights Day 2023; and
- International Women's Day 2023.

Mr. Chairman, the monies budgeted for this Ministry for the past fiscal year have been invested in steering programmes and initiatives that have and will directly impact for the better our vulnerable populations across their lifespan.

Mr. Chairman, I will now move on to the summary of the fiscal year 2024/25 current account budget estimate for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, which is found on page B-287 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Ministry's total budget estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $85,295,000. Mr. Chairman, this represents an increase of $4,735,000, or 6 per cent, compared to the original estimate of $80,560,000 for fiscal year 2023/24. Mr. Chairman, the breakdown of the Ministry's current account budget estimate for 2024/25 by head as shown on page B-287 is as follows:

- Head 86, Ministry Headquarters, $11.494 million, 51 per cent increase;
- Head 23, Child and Family Services, $19.680 million, 5 per cent increase;
- Head 55, Financial Assistance, $54.121 million, no increase; and
- Ministry total, $85.295 [million], increase of 6 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, this summary shows that the 2024/25 current expenditure allocations for both Head 86 and Head 23 have increased, while remaining the same for Head 55. I will explain the details of these changes further in this budget presentation.

HEAD 86—MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the current account expenditure for Head 86, Ministry Headquarters, will now be presented and can be found on pages B-287 to B-292 of the Estimates Book. The Ministry Headquarters is responsible for the budget of nine business units, as follows:

- 96000, Administration;
- 96040, Ageing and Disability Services;
- 96050, K. Margaret Carter Centre;
- 96060, Policy Development;
- 96070, Grants to the Third Sector;
- 96080, Youth Development Administration;
- 96090, Youth Grants and Investments;
- 96100, Youth Community Centres; and
- 96110, Before, After and Out of School Programmes.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters found on page B-288 is *The protection of all individuals during their lifetime and facilitation of well-being*. The objectives of the Ministry Headquarters are to

- collaborate with Ministry departments in order to ensure overall policy objectives are met;
- create partnerships that will allow for better coordinated services that are more synergistic with Government's social initiatives;
- help facilitate or improve social supports for Bermuda's at-risk populations;
- ensure all stakeholders have safeguarding and child protection policy statements; and
- advance Government's social policy initiatives with an emphasis on social cohesion.

Mr. Chairman, page B-289 shows that the total budget allocation for the Ministry Headquarters for fiscal year 2024/25 is $11,494,000, distributed amongst the following business units:

- 96000, Administration, $1,352,000;
- 96040, Ageing and Disability Services, $1,332,000;
- 96050, K. Margaret Carter Centre, $1,890,000;
- 96060, Policy Development, $155,000;
- 96070, Grants to the Third Sector, $3,105,000;
- 96080, Youth Development Administration, $516,000;
- 96090, Youth Grants and Investments, $100,000;
- 96100, Youth Community Centres, $1,578,000; and
- 96110, Before, After and Out of School Programmes, $1,466,000.

Mr. Chairman, the total budget allocation represents a net increase of $3,869,000.

Administration Budget

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I will now share details of each of these business units commencing with business unit 96000, Administration, page B-289.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 budget for the Administration business unit 96000 of $1,352,000 compares to the $1,815,000 originally budgeted in fiscal year 2023/24. This reflects a decrease of $463,000, or a decrease of 26 per cent, as shown on page B-289. The decrease in budgeted funds reflects the following:

- the shift of $70,000 to grants and contributions for the charitable organisation HOME which is now budgeted for correctly under the third sector;
- less monies budgeted for the National Seniors Strategy of $125,000 which is being undertaken locally instead of hiring overseas consultants; and
- less monies budgeted for the overseas treatment of vulnerable youths of $286,000, *[sic]* as

one youth is no longer under the care of the Director of Child and Family Services.

Ageing and Disability Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now present the budget for business unit 96040, Ageing and Disability Services (or ADS) which can be found on page B-289. Mr. Chairman, the mission of Ageing Disability Services is *To support and protect seniors and persons with disabilities who are at risk of abuse, neglect or self-neglect through providing compliance, programme delivery, education and stakeholder collaboration*.

ADS has a budget allocation of $1,332,000 for fiscal year 2024/25. This allocation is 36 per cent, or $352,000 more than the budget allocation in fiscal year 2023/24, reflecting the budgeting for three new posts—two social workers and a policy analyst—who were approved during the year as a result of a Management Consulting Services organisational review.

Mr. Chairman, the primary focus of the Office of Ageing and Disability Services is on adult protection through their case management programme; however, ADS also develops and implements public education and awareness initiatives to enhance the community's understanding of its services, actions and issues pertaining to seniors and persons with disabilities.

The United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities is recognised worldwide each year on December 3; however, the day was acknowledged in Bermuda on December 4, 2023, inclusive of a proclamation. The day aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all realms of society and helps to increase awareness of the challenges they face. The 2023 theme for the International Day was *United in action to rescue and achieve the SDGs for, with and by persons with disabilities*. SDGs [sustainable development goals] are a set of 17 interconnected goals established in 2012 by the United Nations and adopted by world leaders in 2015. They are designed to address global challenges and promote sustainable development. The benefits of these goals are multifaceted and impact various aspects of society, the economy and the environment.

As an ex officio member of the Disability Advisory Council [DAC], ADS remains committed to supporting disability initiatives. As such, representatives from DAC continue to support community organisations by advocating for the advancement of works to help improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

Mr Chairman, another key collaborative area for ADS is the support of clients with complex support needs due to intellectual disabilities, their diminished capacity resulting in their inability to consent, safety risks due to their behaviours and minimal to no family support. For the past three years, ADS in conjunction with Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute continue to support one client overseas due to the absence of appropriate services on Island. In the coming weeks, the aforementioned entities, along with the overseas facility, will identify and develop a plan to transition the individual back to Bermuda. However, this will take time as we need to ensure the appropriate structure, with the required resources, is developed locally to meet their needs in alignment with the scale of care they are receiving overseas.

Mr. Chairman, Bermuda requires a centralised repository for the collection of accurate and current data regarding persons with disabilities. In this regard, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors is committed to developing and introducing a formal database for persons with disabilities. The data gathered through a disability database can inform the development and implementation of inclusive policies and programmes. Government and organisations can use this information to tailor their initiatives to better address the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, promoting inclusivity in areas such as education, employment, health care, and accessibility. This provides a means of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and programmes aimed at supporting persons with disabilities.

By tracking the progress of individuals registered in the system, authorities can assess whether the implemented measures are making a positive impact, and identify areas that may require further attention or improvement. Further, the existence of a disability register can serve as a powerful advocacy tool, as it can help advocates and organisations working for disability rights and inclusion to demonstrate the impact of policies and practices on individuals with disabilities. Empowering persons with disabilities through accurate data representation is crucial for promoting and encouraging their active participation in society.

Mr. Chairman, a previous function of ADS was to provide guidance to community individuals and government partners to ensure accessible building and environmental design. To that end, the office conducted accessibility assessments and consultations where the accessibility officer reviewed planning applications and provided advice to developers on accessibility requirements and best practices relevant to building code requirements in relation to the built environment. However, the former accessibility officer retired on September 30, 2023, and conducted 39 accessibility/consultation assessments before [departing]. Conversely, this service will not be lost, as the planning application review process transferred to the Department of Planning on October 1, 2023, ensuring that the continuum of amenity remains.

Additionally, under this remit ADS is also responsible for processing duty relief exemption requests for materials to facilitate persons ageing at home. To that end, ADS received and approved two duty relief exemptions this year compared to five in 2022/23.

Mr. Chairman, I now take this time to segue to an important initiative that is currently underway, as the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors has

advanced steps to fulfil its platform promise of developing and implementing a National Seniors Strategy [NSS] for Bermuda. In September 2023 Ageing and Disability Services, in conjunction with the Bermuda Health Council, inaugurated a plan to engage with community stakeholders to obtain feedback from seniors and other members of the public about what should be included in a National Seniors Strategy, as their collective ideas are instrumental in shaping policies that promote positive ageing, ensure access to health care and needed services, foster social interconnectedness and safeguard seniors' rights.

The Ministry's goal for the strategy is to produce a framework that guides comprehensive, coordinated and cost-effective actions for addressing the diverse and changing needs of our ageing population. We recognise the invaluable contributions seniors make to our community, as their wisdom, experiences and resilience enrich our lives in countless ways.

The Chairman: I will allow the Minister just to pause for just a brief second. And I will remind Members that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Minister is currently in Head 86 under the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. And she is on page B-289, and she was just referring to the Ageing and Disability Services.

Minister, you may go right ahead. You have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

During January and February 2024, ADS and the Bermuda Health Council held small group consultation meetings with various senior groups across the Island. This was to allow seniors to communicate in spaces where they were comfortable to share their thoughts and views on what they believe should be included in any National Seniors Strategy, and identify challenges and plausible solutions to aid in the development of an effective framework. On February 7, the Ministry hosted a National Seniors Strategy Forum at the Bermuda National Sports Centre Pavilion. The theme for the event was *Collecting Wisdom*. Two sessions were held, one in the morning and one in the evening, and approximately 70 persons of varying ages were in attendance. The purpose of the forum was to obtain data from the public/seniors about their preferences related to housing (assisted living, senior communities), health care, ageing in place, transportation, age-friendly services and environments, et cetera. This was undergirded by guiding principles, a vision, mission and helping to identify what ageing means for all.

Education and Awareness

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, education and awareness is an important component to ADS's mandate that has been limited in recent years due to ongoing resource challenges and COVID-19. However, during this fiscal year ADS increased its outreach and stands at 17 presentations to date. This includes ADS's first Seniors Tea. This successful event hosted nearly 100 seniors and was supported by organisations such as the Bermuda National Library, the Department of Archives, Age Concern, the Bermuda College Life Long Learning Centre and the Bermuda Police Service. The programme for the Seniors Tea included presentations on how to prevent and protect oneself from abuse, and information from community partners that encourage social engagement. The feedback from participants and partner agencies was extremely positive and resulted in invitations to seniors clubs for more presentations on abuse awareness and prevention.

Mr. Chairman, other community awareness activities included the following:

- radio interviews for abuse awareness;
- presentations to bank staff and clients;
- professional development training to KMCC [K. Margaret Carter Centre] staff; and
- disability awareness and inclusion presentations to RUBiS.

We would like to take this time to acknowledge RUBiS, who embraced International Day for Persons with Disabilities by inviting ADS, in partnership with the Disability Advisory Council Chair, to present to all of their staff.

Mr. Chairman, ADS continues to engage with community partners on key issues impacting our seniors, such as financial exploitation, cybercrime, client welfare and receivership.

Case Management

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, case management continues to represent the largest staffing component and primary programme of ADS. Case management clients include seniors and persons over 18 years old with long-standing disabilities. General case management services include needs and service identification, system navigation and support coordination. Adult protection pertains to ADS case management clients at risk of abuse, neglect or self-neglect, which include but is not limited to senior abuse cases.

Over the past year, despite the complex cases that have arisen, the case management team has done well serving our vulnerable persons, particularly when the individual lacks the capacity to make decisions for themselves. During fiscal year 2022/23, ADS opened 287 new cases (an increase of over 10 per cent from the previous fiscal year).

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: I apologise.

Honourable Shadow, do you think you can put a question to the Chair? But I would rather that the Minister continued. Is there a need to interrupt?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, please. Can the Minister just repeat that number again, please?

The Chairman: Not customary, but, Minister, would you repeat the number for the Honourable Shadow?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: During fiscal year 2022/23, ADS opened 287 new cases (an increase of over 10 per cent from the previous fiscal year).

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

These included the following:

- 33 case management referrals for persons under 65 years of age with disabilities, with eight of these including reports of abuse;
- 165 case management referrals for persons over 65 years of age; and
- 89 reports of alleged senior abuse:
    - 35 per cent were for financial exploitation;
    - 25 per cent were for physical abuse;
    - 24 per cent for psychological abuse;
    - 12 per cent for neglect, and
    - 5 per cent were for sexual abuse.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to note that ADS provides these services with a very small team resulting in a worker-to-client ratio that averaged 1:52, whereas best practice standard is 1 worker per 25 clients and should be substantially less with cases of high complexity and risk which many ADS cases are. Furthermore, with our ageing population, this number will continue to grow. Accordingly, a 2022 Management Consulting Services review recommended that ADS be resourced with two additional social workers. As a result, social worker job descriptions were updated and re-graded, and the recruitment of two new social worker posts were completed this year.

Also, a policy analyst post was approved as a recommendation stemming from the Management Consultancy Services office review. Recruitment for this post is ongoing. The sourcing of these three posts will better align social worker to client ratios and improve the development of further policy needed for this office.

Policy and Programme Development

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Policy and Programme Development within Ageing and Disability Services supports the planning, development and coordination of policies and programmes for seniors and persons with physical and intellectual disabilities. Further, policy support is expected to bring targeted policy work within ADS to address key gaps and needs facing adult protection and support for vulnerable adults.

Mr. Chairman, I think it is important for us all to understand the challenging work of adult protection. Adult protection demands the rights of the adult be held paramount while working to reduce risk and provide support. Ageing and Disability Services is faced with situations that include self-neglect; strained, unhealthy and abusive family dynamics; and also limited family resources. Therefore, to advance the protection work undertaken by Ageing and Disability Services, the Ministry is committed to implementing a committed and consistent approach to ensure vulnerable adults are protected from abuse. The Senior Abuse Register Act 2008 is currently being reviewed with the aim of amending the legislation to protect seniors from the prospect of financial abuse. Further work is in progress to design the required framework needed for an Office of the Public Guardian.

I want to thank the ADS team for their efforts to reduce risk and promote the quality of life amongst very difficult circumstances, as well as their commitment to supporting individual, agency and system-wide solutions.

The ADS's Case Management programme has made significant advances this year, many of which highlight the strength and importance of collaborating with community partners:

- ADS continued its National Adult Protective Services Association [NAPSA] core competency training for social workers and supervisors, which were opened to our collaborative partners including the Bermuda Police Service, Department of Health Social Workers and KEMH social workers. Expanding adult protection knowledge and skills is essential in our community to ensure best practice is known and implemented across our agencies to protect persons at risk and ensure their rights are upheld.
- ADS continues as a core member of
    - MARAC [Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference], the multi-agency team for high-risk domestic violence cases; and
    - the Transition Team, established to help identify and plan for service needs for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- As a result of the Ministry's commitment to dementia support services, a dementia pilot managed by ADS was started in October 2023 that provides assessment and case management, including dementia navigation and support services, to persons in the community. This pilot is being provided by NorthStar Dementia who, as of the end of January, has served nearly 40 persons. This service is not only critical support to families and individuals with dementia, but

also to the ADS case management section whose high caseloads limit the support for clients and families.

- Finally, the 2023/24 budget provided ADS with funding for the first phase of a Structured Decision Making Framework approved by Cabinet. A Structured Decision Making Framework (or SDM) is an evidence-based method to identify and define populations served, service priority and response times, servicing planning and closure. This framework will not only help staff with consistent decision-making, but also generate the necessary data to develop ADS programmes for further office development.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, ADS has led and supported work toward systemic solutions and changes. This includes

- consultation and development of the National Seniors Strategy in collaboration with the Bermuda Health Council;
- consultation and development of the first phase of the Senior Abuse Register Act 2008 amendments to address in particular financial exploitation, but also to start developing the wider legislative framework needed for adult protection;
- advocacy and support to the development of an Office of Public Guardian and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- the development of a National Disability Register which commenced alpha and beta testing phases in February of 2024 with the aim to roll out the voluntary registration process during the first quarter of the new fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, I want to take this time to acknowledge the committed efforts of the ADS team. Adult protection work is innately challenging. With an ageing population, the workload is steadily increasing, the complexity of the cases is rising, but despite this the team remains focused and supportive of their clients with the goal to reduce risk and support the rights of the client, which they keep central.

K. Margaret Carter Centre

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the K. Margaret Carter Centre (or KMCC) provides direct support for persons with intellectual disabilities in the community through day programming services and case management. For the fiscal year 2024/25, K. Margaret Carter Centre has a budget allocation of $1,890,000, which funds 16 staff in delivering direct client services to 44 service users, participating in six different programmes (as shown on page B-289).

The Chairman: Page B-289. Yes, Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, we are now moving beyond the previous restrictions associated with COVID-19 and the impact they had on services offered at the K. Margaret Carter Centre. As of April 1, 2023, KMCC has been back to full capacity and able to provide up to five days a week of programmes for all clients. This year has largely been spent on refurbishing programmes to expand the opportunities for clients by exploring other local and overseas programmes to glean better insight to missed opportunities for engagement. KMCC plans to continue to deliver high-quality, person-centred programmes that allow clients to have a better quality of life. Overall, KMCC has increased the number of clients participating in onsite programmes to ensure more individuals are having access to high-quality programmes.

A total of 41 per cent of clients currently have access to physical therapy, occupational therapy or psychological therapies through continued partnership with the Community Intellectual Disability Team [CIDT]. The partnerships with community stakeholders have grown from 12 in 2022/23 to 13 this year, 2023/24. This increase includes re-engagement with WindReach Bermuda and Summerhaven, as well as a new partnership with Meals on Wheels. We continue to engage with other organisations with overlapping remits, yet these partnerships enable us to better collaborate to create events and opportunities for our clients who would otherwise not have the opportunity. These collaborations allow for further development of social connections and better programming, leading to clients having a more fulfilling quality of life.

Mr. Chairman, over the past year, KMCC provided the following services and improvements:

- Development of a multi-disciplinary meeting on a monthly basis with the community intellectual disabilities team in order to better determine the needs of clients and ensure they are being met.
- Re-instatement of the transition team who meet to identify clients who are going through transitional periods at various stages of their life cycle and implement supports to ensure the move from the education system to KMCC is a smooth one.
- Continuation of a client-led hot lunch programme on a weekly basis to 50 per cent of the clients attending the programme and ensure they have the opportunity to receive a well-balanced meal.
- Successfully hosted the annual Valentine's dance, inviting community partners to attend along with other community clients. This was a huge success.
- Expanded support to Special Olympics Bermuda. This enabled six clients to attend the 2023 World Games in Germany, as well as two staff who attended as coaches.

- Increasing the community in-house work contract from seven community partners in fiscal year 2022/23 to eight in fiscal year 2023/24, adding on a partnership with Summerhaven.
- Expanded the client fitness initiatives over the past year to include water aerobics, a walking programme, access to a fitness centre, track and field practice, chair yoga and aerobics to ensure clients are maintaining their fitness.
- Developed a working relationship with a local business who has supported KMCC with the development of their very own beauty supply programme. Clients are involved in pricing goods, collecting consumer feedback and selling the finished products on site and to the local community.

Mr. Chairman, as clients' needs change and develop, KMCC has worked hard to ensure programmes expand and evolve to enhance the lives of adults living with disabilities in the community. It is anticipated that over the next year we will have to further develop and evaluate the success of KMCC programmes while potentially expanding services to include a more diverse and complex client group. To facilitate the growing demand for services, the Ministry will look to do the following:

- improve the existing facility infrastructure for additional space to better meet the needs of current clients as well as incoming clients; and
- remodel the existing day programme for individuals age 55 years and older to help improve overall service delivery to clients while increasing the number of individuals who can receive day programming services.

Overall, it is anticipated that KMCC clients will re-engage in community work programmes across local businesses and have access to meaningful employment while relationships are being built with key partners.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors will continue to implement the measures needed to improve the quality of life of the KMCC clients, to increase their independence and ensure clients are receiving high-quality care at all times.

Policy Development

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will move on to business unit 96060, Policy Development, page B-289. For fiscal year 2024/25, a total of $155,000 was allocated for policy development. This is an increase of $1,000 represented by a $5,000 salary uplift offset by decreased telephone, stationery and subscription expenses totalling $4,000. The Policy Development section has one full-time equivalent, as shown on page B-290. This policy resource supports the Ministry's policy commitments which include Throne Speech initiatives and the Government's platform promises.

Mr. Chairman, $3,105,000 has been allocated for the fiscal year 2024/25 for business unit 96070, Grants to the Third Sector, as shown on page B-289. This is an increase of $165,000, or 6 per cent, reflecting the inclusion of a grant for the charitable organisation HOME and an increase in funding for nursing homes.

Youth Affairs

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, for fiscal year 2024/25 the allocation was $516,000 for business unit 96080, Youth Development Administration, and $100,000 has been allocated for business unit 96090, Youth Grants and Investments, as shown on page B-289. Mr. Chairman, the remit of the Ministry expanded in November 2023 to include the Office of Youth Affairs whose mission is *To form a unified approach to tackle issues faced by Bermuda's young people and provide them with the support to have positive and productive futures*. Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 objectives for the Office of Youth Affairs are to

- provide funding/support for youth organisations and groups;
- manage and maintain Government Community Centres;
- provide Before, After and Out of School programmes for school-age children;
- provide recreational programmes and activities to surrounding communities;
- prepare and manage the budget to ensure intended deadlines are met; and
- meet and fulfil the objectives of the National Youth Policy.

Mr. Chairman, the Office of Youth Affairs administers three programmes and four business units.

Programme 8602, Youth Development

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Business unit 96080, Administration, has a budget allocation of $516,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, page B-289. This reflects monies budgeted for salaries, training, recreational services, supplies and other funds to ensure efficient and effective administration. Mr. Chairman, this programme is responsible for overseeing and executing of the National Youth Policy activities. The working group for the policy just completed its first year of implementation of the eight policy goals focusing on developing and empowering Bermuda's youth. The working group consists of representatives from government ministries and departments, youth organisations and groups, youth activists, youth creatives, youth entrepreneurs and youth working in corporate Bermuda, all supported by an ex officio officer from the Office of Youth Affairs.

Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget (found on page B-289) for business unit 96090, Youth Grants and Investments, of $100,000 provides funding to youth service agencies working with young people. All youth organisations and groups will be afforded an

opportunity to participate in an introductory safeguarding workshop to be hosted in conjunction with the Department of Child and Family Services. This initiative aligns with Goal 1 of the National Youth Policy.

Mr. Chairman, a total of 14 grants were distributed to youth organisations and groups during fiscal year 2023/24 who continue to invest countless hours into the social development of our youth and are committed to making positive change. These organisations include the following:

Albina Vision Trust. This programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 2, 3 and 5 in that participants can achieve educational goals, be provided mentoring and support to at-risk youth and engage in sport.

Bermuda Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Delta NetFest Tournament. This programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 5 and 6 in that it engages young girls in sport and connects them to physical and mental health professionals.

Bermuda Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Get Literary Book Club. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goal 2 in that it supports young people to be well prepared socially, emotional and academically for post-secondary success.

Bermuda Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. GEMS [Growing and Empowering Myself Successfully] Mentoring Programme. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goal 7 in that its young people are able to provide feedback on public policy.

Bermuda Sloop Foundation *Spirit of Bermuda* educational programmes. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 2, 4, 5 and 8 in that their programmes support young people socially, emotionally and academically; develop skills and competencies in line with Bermuda's needs; is a developmentally appropriate sport and recreation activity; and ensures equal access to opportunity and resources.

Big Brothers and Big Sisters. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goal 3 by providing mentoring and support to at-risk youth.

Devonshire Colts Youth Leadership Development Programme. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goal 5 as it is a developmentally appropriate sports and recreation programme.

Dibia DREAM Bermuda. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 2 and 5 in that it supports young people to be well prepared for post-secondary success and provides support to a STEAM-based programme that also has sport within its foundation.

The Family Centre Youth Leadership Academy. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 in that it provides a safe place for young people to socialise and develop; supports young people to be well prepared socially, emotionally and academically for post-secondary success; and mentors and supports at-risk youth. It also provides a mechanism through which young people can contribute public dialogue and voice opinions on proposed and existing Government policies; and creates a safe environment where young people are free from discrimination, stigma and disadvantage.

North Village Community Club youth programmes. The programmes align with the National Youth Policy Goals 5 and 6 by offering a developmentally appropriate community sports programme and supports young people to engage in physical activity and emphasises its connection to and impact on mental health.

Raleigh International Bermuda. The programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 3 and 5 by providing mentoring and support to at-risk youth to encourage them away from antisocial behaviours and crime and providing training to impart knowledge and skills to young people and their families.

Skills Development Programme. This programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 2 and 4 in that it supports youth to be well prepared socially, emotionally and academically for post-secondary success and ensures that young people have access to increased tertiary education and vocational training.

Bermuda Autism Early Intervention Centre. Tomorrow's Voices. This programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goals 5 and 8 by providing training for persons to impart their knowledge to young people and create safe environments where they are free from discrimination, stigma and disadvantage, ensuring equal access to opportunities/resources.

WindReach Bermuda. This programme aligns with the National Youth Policy Goal 8 by creating a safe environment where young people are free from discrimination, stigma and disadvantage while ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources.

Mr. Chairman, the Office of Youth Affairs provided one youth investment during the year to a senior school student who was given the opportunity to participate in the UN's Climate Change Conference on COP28 Business and Philanthropy Forum in Dubai from November 28 through to December 12, 2023. COP28 Business and Philanthropy is an international forum where global heads of state, business CEOs and philanthropists meet to discuss ways and means to progress climate action and industry transition. The senior school student attended as a Youth Climate Ambassador alongside the Bermuda delegation participating in the YOUNGA 2023 global festival, which focused on climate change and management. The event was geared toward intergenerational collaboration and innovation.

Mr. Chairman, this investment award aligns with the National Youth Policy Goal 5, Youth Sponsorship Programme, providing short-term sponsorship to

young people who wish to pursue their recreational passions in areas including arts, oration, culinary arts, science, technology, engineering and math [STEM].

Programme 8603, Youth Outreach

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation of $1,587,000, *[sic]* found on page B-289, supports the operational activity of three community centres. The funding will provide clerical and office support, administrative guidance and staffing for all community centre operations, [as well as] fire safety and security improvements. The three locations are the Eastern Zone Community Centre located in St. George's, the Sammy Wilson Central Zone Community Centre in Hamilton and the Western Zone Community Centre in Sandys. Mr. Chairman, the Youth Outreach full-time equivalent [FTE] count is 20 for fiscal year 2024/25, page B-290. These staff facilitate a wide range of programming for seniors, adults, youth and children while providing engagement and participation opportunities for families whilst promoting the philosophy for the section's mission.

Mr. Chairman, the three community centres provide safe, structured programmes with trained staff and an opportunity to build positive and long-lasting relationships. The programming provides a wide range of recreational and social experiences year-round that reflect the needs and interests of the community. Residents and visitors in the community, both young and old, are provided with the opportunity to work on special projects such as cultural, recreational and educational programmes, activities and services in a volunteer capacity, thus promoting civic pride and unity. The maintenance of robust, diverse and inclusive relationships among members of the community, private businesses, public authorities and organisations/groups fuels progressive communities.

Programme 8604, Youth Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, business unit 96110, previously Youth Programmes, is expanding to meet the needs of parents and guardians. The Office of Youth Affairs maintains its commitment to keep young people protected from harm. This business unit aims to provide safe spaces during out-of-school time to facilitate engagement during the school mid-term breaks, infusing developmentally appropriate recreation activities. In support of education reform, experiences have been carefully crafted to focus on areas such as career exploration and promoting healthy social, emotional and physical growth. This unit is slated to open its first pilot Before-School Programme in September of 2024.

Mr. Chairman, the Before, After and Out of School programmes increased their average number of participants from the prior year with supplementary funding from the Department of Education to open spots to wait-listed students. The Before, After and Out of School programmes are aligned with the public school calendar year to support the working parent and guardian. We are pleased to be able to serve the community in this way, providing safe, fun and local recreation year long.

The Chairman: As the Minister continues on the Head 86 under the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors under programme 8603, Youth Services, business unit 96110, I just want to remind Members that we remain in Committee, that the debate began at about 10:26 and that we have expended about an hour of that time. I will ask the Minister to continue.

Minister, under programme 8603. You have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 budget allocation for business unit 96110 is $1,466,000, found on page B-289.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: This funding level provides for staffing, communications, materials and supplies for 16 youth programmes.

Mr. Chairman, currently Youth Services supports approximately 550 preschool, primary and middle school age participants in after-school programmes, 1,650 preschool, primary and middle school participants in out-of-school programmes across 16 sites throughout the Island. These programmes employ over 60 seasonal workers of whom just under half are local college students, along with two full-time Programme Senior Supervisors. There are also modifications made available for students with exceptionalities.

Mr. Chairman, to support the growth of this programme, the Office of Youth Affairs advanced the National Youth Policy Goal 4 which is to Increase Employment and Entrepreneurship opportunities. In this regard, a Leadership in Training [LIT] programme will be launched during the 2024 summer break. Senior school students will learn the basics of leadership through childcare, infusing safety and executing general day camp management. They will gain an increase in knowledge of camp activities while learning how to work with children and rotate through different age groups and activities where they will use their skills as a counsellor.

Mr. Chairman, the Office of Youth Affairs also serves youth organisations and groups across the Island with training opportunities. To date, six organisations, namely, the Family Centre, Footy Promotions, the Bermuda Sloop Foundation, Bermuda Sea Cadet Corps, Phenomenal People and WindReach Bermuda completed Safeguarding Across All Borders, which is an introductory course to assist youth organisations with drafting internal child safeguarding policies.

Mr. Chairman, on January 25 and 26 this year the National Youth Policy Working Group hosted a youth conference that was held at the Botanical Gardens for senior, middle and primary-aged students. The National Mini Youth Conference is deemed a first, as such an event has not been held for almost three decades. Several young creatives and entrepreneurs presented at the conference in support of the National Youth Policy Goals.

Mr. Chairman, the Community Centres completed the pilot year for community enrichment programming that supports the social development of the whole family. These programmes will continue to run in all three community centres with seniors, adults, youth and children's programming.

Mr. Chairman, I take this opportunity to extend appreciation for the dedicated staff at the Office of Youth Affairs for their commitment to youth, their families and our community. The team is steadfast in their mission to guide youth to become productive citizens who positively contribute to the quality of life for all in Bermuda. Lastly, it is important for me to recognise the significant contributions made by our youth organisations and groups and the critical role they play in inspiring our youth to achieve their full potential.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the presentation on the fiscal year 2024/25 budgetary allocation for Head 86 for the Office of Youth Affairs.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Go ahead.

Grants

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the breakdown of the budget allocation for the Ministry grants can be seen on page C-21 of the Estimates Book. In fiscal year 2024/25 the following charities and organisations will receive a grant from the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors to provide our community with the resources and social services needed to support our vulnerable population groups:

- A Grant to External Bodies has been allocated $20,000 for ad hoc requests made by social services organisations during the year.
- Voluntary youth organisations that provide youth services and programmes in alignment with the goals of the National Youth Policy will receive in aggregate $100,000.
- Age Concern programmes consist of information, advice and referral services via their call centre. Other support and services provided are financial support for groceries, prescription drugs and minor home repairs. A grant allocation for $25,000 will be provided.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: We are in Committee, Members. We are in Committee.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: [Continuing]

- To uphold the Ministry's commitment to our senior population, grants totalling $1,170,000 has been allocated to nursing homes Matilda Smith Williams and Lorraine Rest Home.
- A grant of $75,000 has been allocated to the Women's Resource Centre to enhance the lives of women in Bermuda, and its vision is to be the leading resource and voice for women in Bermuda.
- The Centre Against Abuse will be allocated a grant of $150,000 as they continue to provide crisis support services for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault.
- Care of the Blind, now known as Vision Bermuda, is the only organisation on the Island to provide a full range of specialist services for persons within our community with low or no vision. They will receive a grant allocation of $15,000.
- A grant of $50,000 has been allocated to Meals on Wheels, which supports vulnerable persons in our community through the lunch services of Meals on Wheels.
- Salvation Army. The Government is committed to our homeless population and to ensure they have accommodations and services. A grant for $550,000 will be given to Salvation Army Shelters.
- The Summerhaven facility provides residents of our community who have physical disabilities the opportunity to live independently and will be given a grant of $600,000 to support their operational costs.
- The Packwood Nursing Home has been allocated $350,000.
- The charitable organisation HOME will receive $70,000 to continue its work with the homeless.
- Tomorrow's Voices provides services to individuals in our community who are diagnosed with autism or on the autism spectrum. A grant of $30,000 has been allocated as financial support.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now present the combined subjective analysis of current account estimates for the Ministry as found on page B-289 of the Estimates Book.

The Chairman: Go right ahead.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated for salaries is $4,209,000 *[sic]* for fiscal year 2024/25, an increase of $2,018,000. This salary allocation covers the Ministry's 80 full-time equivalents (found on page B-290). The salary increase reflects four new posts approved for Ageing and Disability Services and Community Centre Supervisors and Community Workers employed by the Office of Youth Affairs.

Mr. Chairman, the increase in the budget allocation for wages of $1,577,000 supports the employment of caretaker, grounds-persons, youth programme supervisors, programme coordinators and programme workers for the community centres which fall under the operation of the Office of Youth Affairs.

Mr. Chairman, $13,000 has been allocated to facilitate quarterly professional training for recreation workers at the community centres.

Mr. Chairman, the budgeted monies for transport increased by $3,000 to cover expenses paid by the Office of Youth Affairs for transporting materials and supplies to the community centres. The increase of $29,000 for travel is budgeted to cover overseas travel for conferences and technical meetings.

Mr. Chairman, communications, inclusive of phones, courier and postal costs, are budgeted at $121,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, which represents an increase of $69,000. The increase reflects the additional expenses for telephone rentals and cell phone for the Office of Youth Affairs and community centre workers.

Mr. Chairman, advertising and promotion costs increased by $4,000. This minor increase is attributable to the Youth Development Administration section, budgeted funds for promotions related to the National Youth Policy initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, professional services of $1,143,000 for fiscal year 2024/25 decreased by 32 per cent, or by $543,000. This lower level of funding reflects the re-allocation of grant monies, decreased funding for the National Seniors Strategy and less monies budgeted for overseas treatment of vulnerable persons.

Mr. Chairman, $234,000 was budgeted for rentals, an increase of $131,000. This rent increase accounts for the rental cost of venues used by the Office of Youth Affairs for workshop sessions, camps and mid-term break programmes.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2024/25 repair and maintenance has been allocated $168,000, or $54,000 more than the budget allocation for 2023/24. This increase in funding covers the cost of a variety of repair and maintenance expenses anticipated by the Office of Youth Affairs including but not limited to office cleaning, office and copier machines, grounds, equipment, air conditioning, pest control and minor common area maintenance. Also, additional funds have been allocated to maintain an ageing vehicle held by the K. Margaret Carter Centre.

Mr. Chairman, $114,000 was budgeted for insurance costs for clients at the K. Margaret Carter Centre who do not have insurance. A nominal insurance amount of $1,000 has been budgeted for Youth Development Administration in relation to vehicles.

Mr. Chairman, energy costs increased by $63,000 to $154,000. This increase includes the costs of electricity, gas and diesel for the Office of Youth Affairs, as well as an increase in electricity costs for the K. Margaret Carter Centre.

Mr Chairman, costs for clothing, uniforms and laundry account for $11,000. The increase of $8,000 will cover the costs to replenish uniform shirts, jackets and protective wear for the caretaker, groundsman and community programme staff.

Mr. Chairman, $257,000 has been allocated for materials and supplies for fiscal year 2024/25. This represents an increase of $132,000 which reflects the extra costs of office supplies, cleaning supplies, food, water and recreational supplies for the Office of Youth Affairs.

Mr. Chairman, equipment expenses have an allocation of $42,000. This is primarily supporting the refurbishment of fire and safety equipment at the three community centres, in addition to minor audio-visual equipment.

Mr. Chairman, $20,000 has been allocated for other expenses, which is an increase of $12,000. This is due to the Office of Youth Affairs budgeting for the provision of food and beverages for parenting events, open houses, holiday activities, as well as working group meetings.

Mr. Chairman, grants and contributions were addressed earlier in my presentation. The allocation increased by $265,000. The increased budget accounts for grants offered by the Office of Youth Affairs, an increase in monies for nursing homes, and the shift in the HOME grant which was budgeted under Administration, business unit 96000, in the prior year and is now shifted appropriately to grants.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Page B-290, the majority of the $634,000 in revenue earnings reflects after-school vouchers purchased by parents and guardians to have their children participate in the after-school programmes offered by the Office of Youth Affairs.

Employee Numbers (full-time equivalents or FTEs), page B-290. Mr. Chairman, on page B-290, you will note that there are 80 full-time equivalent positions for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters for fiscal year 2024/25. This covers four full-time equivalents for Headquarters Administration, 11 full-time equivalents in Ageing and Disability Services, 16 full-time equivalents employed with the K. Margaret Carter Centre and 49 full-time equivalents for the Office of Youth Affairs. The increase in the number of FTEs compared with fiscal year 2023/24 reflects the four new full-time equivalents in Ageing and

Disability Services and 49 FTEs from the Office of Youth Affairs.

Performance Measures

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, performance measures for sections in the Ministry Headquarters are outlined on pages B-291 through B-292. Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ministry Headquarters team for their diligence and for remaining committed to delivering the requisite services for our community.

Mr. Chairman that concludes my budget presentation for Head 86.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

HEAD 23—DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I now wish to present fiscal year 2024/25 estimates of expenditure for Head 23—the Department of Child and Family Services.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: These are found on pages B-293 through B-300, C-8, C-16 and C-21 of the Estimates Book. Mr. Chairman, as found on page B-293, the Department of Child and Family Services [DCFS] mission is *Protecting children by strengthening families*. The objectives of the Department are to

- minimise and eliminate those social, psychological or other conditions known to cause or contribute to physical and emotional illness and sometimes socio-economic problems;
- promote growth and directional change in people and their social situation;
- assist in facilitating or improving social supports for those in our population who are at risk;
- provide treatment or curative services to address dysfunction and thereby assist people to function better in society; and
- restore individuals to a healthy condition or useful capacity.

The department carries out its objectives by providing investigative services; day care services; care and protection services for children; residential and home-based services for families; and assessment, intervention and counselling services for children, adolescents and families.

Mr. Chairman, the current account estimates for Head 23 begin on page B-294 of the Estimates Book. A total of $19,680,000 has been allocated for Head 23 for fiscal year 2024/25. This represents an increase of $866,000, or 5 per cent. Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services continues to focus on developing an integrated service that allows children, adolescents and families to receive services that are appropriate and coordinated, and that meet the challenges they face. These challenges can include but are not limited to uninvolved parenting, limited parenting capacity, social and life skills, housing, employment, budgeting, abuse of some substances, antisocial behaviour, cognitive debilities, education, mental health conditions and anger management.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services is responsible for promoting and protecting the best interests and social well-being of children, adolescents and their families. The Department of Child and Family Services meets these responsibilities via the operations of five programmes:

1. Programme 2301, Services to Children and Young Persons;
2. Programme 2302, Services to Individuals and Families;
3. Programme 2303, Residential Treatment Services;
4. Programme 2304, Administration; and
5. Programme 2305, the Mirrors Programme.

Mr. Chairman, the US Council on Accreditation has approved the Bermuda National Standards, which is used locally for accreditation of entities including the departments who manage children. The Bermuda National Standards Committee provides that review and accreditation. I am happy to report that, in accordance with the requirements from the Council on Accreditation standards, five sections within DCFS (Intake and Investigations, Assessments, Counselling and Life Skills, Family Preservations and Foster Care) all are accredited.

Mr. Chairman, service improvements have been achieved by the Department of Child and Family Services implementing a strategy that begins with the enhancement of a structured decision-making tool designed specifically for Bermuda, taking into account our cultural identity and social norms. Mr. Chairman, since the introduction of its use in 2013, the Structured Decision Making Assessment tool allows staff to objectively determine safety and risk for all children and their families who are referred to the Department of Child and Family Services.

This tool utilises a comprehensive assessment that ensures clients receive the appropriate support and/or services from the appropriate agency. This process reduces referral duplication, closes previously identified gaps in service delivery and increases overall efficiency and effectiveness of programmes. Utilisation of this tool has resulted in an improved, comprehensive service delivery system that has increased response time to initial referrals. Also, this tool further enhances appropriate prioritising of referrals according to risks and ensures that the highest risks are addressed first, resulting in better responses and positive outcomes for clients.

Mr. Chairman, as we are all well aware, the Government experienced a cyberattack in September 2023. This attack has negatively impacted the data collected by the Department of Child and Family Services, as they were unable to access their database from September 2023 until January 2024.

Mr. Chairman, I will now address each programme and business unit for the department as set out on page B-294:

Programme 2301, Services to Children and Young Persons

The Happy Valley Child Care Centre

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Found on page B-294, Happy Valley Child Care Centre, business unit 33010. Mr. Chairman, the Happy Valley Child Care Centre is in business unit 33010 and has an estimate for the fiscal year 2024/25 of $1,094,000, an increase of $33,000, or 3 per cent. The output measures for the Happy Valley Child Care Centre are found on page B-297 of the Estimates Book. Mr. Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre is the only government-operated child care facility on the Island, which provides high-quality child care for a maximum of 44 children whose ages range from three months to four years of age. Priority is given to children referred by helping agencies such as the Department of Child and Family Services, Teen Services, the Department of Health, the Child Development Programme and the Department of Financial Assistance. These agencies, along with families experiencing various challenges, account for 60 per cent of the centre's intake.

Mr. Chairman, each year there is a consistent demand for childcare placement at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre. For the school year 2023/24, 172 applications were received for the 16 available spaces, as follows:

- infant spaces, six;
- toddler spaces, five; and
- preschooler spaces, three.

The application process for the 2024/25 school year begins on April 1, 2024.

Mr. Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre monthly fee is now $400 for all children enrolled. However, if a child is in the care of the Director of Department of Child and Family Services, they do not qualify for the Child Day Care Allowance and as such their costs are absorbed by Department of Child and Family Services.

Mr. Chairman, the estimated revenue for the fiscal year 2023/24 school year, page B-295, is $192,000. It is important to note that the actual cost per child is approximately $2,009 per month so that a subsidy is also built into the fees, which are considerably less than private child care services. Despite the low cost to parents, Happy Valley Child Care Centre is a first-class facility that is specifically designed to meet the comprehensive needs of young children. [The centre] provides an extensive curriculum of high academic standards with trained teachers who are continuously involved in professional growth and development. The centre offers enrichment programmes that encourage family and community involvement and build upon child development.

In 2023 Happy Valley received a five-star rating certificate for day care centres from the Childcare Regulation programme star rating licensing requirements. Childcare Regulation officers score the day care establishment on items such as health, safety, supervision, developmental activities, and parent and family engagement using a standard inspection form. Five stars equates to 90 [per cent] to 100 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, comprehensive services offered at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre include music and movement, creative arts, literacy, writing, science, math, technology, community service, field trips, strider bike riding, gardening, gymnastics, tennis and swim classes, along with other curriculum activities that are designed to assist in the overall development of the children attending the centre. A full nutritional programme monitored and approved by the Health Department's Public Health Nutritionist includes a morning, lunch and afternoon snack.

The centre also has, if needed, an intervention programme that includes mandatory parenting classes, a programme for two-year-old assessments, the Health Department for Occupational and Physical Therapy as well as speech services.

Mr. Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre consistently utilises child assessment outcomes for classroom planning and individual intervention activities. The HighScope Curriculum and Assessment tool reflected outstanding results that validate Happy Valley Child Care Centre's commitment to an inclusive learning model. The results for infants, toddlers and preschoolers mapped steady improvement in all areas of developmental growth with 13 of the 15 preschoolers graduating school-ready in accordance with HighScope's third term assessment results.

Mr. Chairman, in July 2023, there were 15 children who graduated from the programme and were all well prepared to attend preschool. Their accomplishments were celebrated with a school-leaving ceremony at BUEI. (Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute).

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2024/25 Happy Valley Child Care Centre will continue to uphold its commitment to partnering with community resources including the Child Development Programme [CDP], the Department of Health, Fire and Life Safety Associates, S.C.A.R.S, SunSmart and Open Airways. Happy Valley Child Care Centre will continue to serve as a community service site for public and private school students and Workforce Development Summer Placement for university students.

Mr. Chairman, during this fiscal year, Happy Valley Child Care Centre was painted inside and out by

the Department of Works and Engineering and received a five-star licence rating status from the Health Department's Child Care Regulation Programme. Happy Valley Child Care Centre endeavours to maintain a first-class facility while educating children in a safe, healthy and caring environment.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Department of Public Lands and Buildings in the Ministry of Public Works for maintaining the physical facility of Happy Valley Child Care Centre throughout the year.

Mr. Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre continues to operate at best practice standards. This fiscal year Happy Valley Child Care Centre staff were nominated for the Public Service Excellence Award. Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre, the Centre's active Parent Teacher Association [PTA], volunteers and community partners for their continued dedication to Bermuda's most valuable treasures—*Our Children, Our Future*.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to programme 2302, Services to Individuals and Families, found on page B-294.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Programme 2302
Services to Individuals and Families

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The activities covered in programme 2302 are as follows:

- business unit 33020, Investigating and Screening (formally known as Family Services);
- business unit 33030, Foster Care;
- business unit 33200, Counselling and Life Skills (formally known as Bermuda Youth Counselling Services); and
- business unit 33250, Child Safeguarding.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for these business units for fiscal year 2024/25 is $6,235,000. This represents an increase of $176,000, or 3 per cent, compared to the fiscal year 2023/24 budget allocation.

Investigating and Screening

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Intake, Investigation and Assessment section of the Department of Child and Family Services is responsible for providing comprehensive investigations and services to children who are referred for services. The budget estimate for business unit 33020 for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $2,512,000. This represents an increase of $239,000, or 11 per cent, over the 2023/24 budget.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services provides services and support for children and families referred for abuse or neglect. The department is committed to partnering with stakeholders to promote the safety and health of families while protecting children from abuse and neglect. Mr. Chairman, when a referral is made to the Department of Child and Family Services, a screening is conducted to determine if it meets the threshold for abuse and/or neglect. The Structured Decision Making assessment tool is utilised to designate the timeframe required to initiate contact with a child and/or their family. The performance measures for intake and assessments can be found on page B-297 of the Estimates Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Screening, Investigations and Assessment teams have a combined total of 13 staff. The Screening team comprises of five social work assistants who are on duty each day to receive new referrals via email, the Kids-line or from members of the public or professionals who walk into the department. The Investigations team includes five social workers who are responsible for conducting enquires on all cases screened in to be investigated. The Assessment team includes three social workers who conduct assessments on all children who are referred from sections within the department.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services is mandated to provide services and operates 24 hours a day. Coverage is provided after work hours, weekends and on public holidays on a crisis basis to the police, the hospital and members of the community. The department responded to 18 on-call or call-out referrals in 2023. Mr. Chairman, the Investigation team received 1,006 new referrals in 2023. This is an increase from 2022, when 984 new referrals were reported to the Department of Child and Family Services. Mandated reporters referred 865, and 141 were referred from other sources in the community. The department has one central screening system, which allows investigations to be processed and assigned in an expedited manner. All mandated referrers are provided immediate feedback on whether the referral meets the threshold for investigation, and they are given the designated response time.

Mr. Chairman, the Investigation team utilised the structured decision-making screening assessments to determine the required response times. A total of 222 cases were screened out, as they did not meet the threshold for child abuse investigation or were duplicate referrals from another source; 741 were screened in for investigation; and 43 were screened directly to the Counselling and Life Skills section for substance education.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, if I can stop at that moment to get my colleague to continue reading for me?

The Chairman: That would be fine, Honourable Minister.

Members, just so that you are aware, the Minister has applied and advised that she has another appointment and unfortunately will not be able to continue with her brief. Her brief will be handled by the Minister with responsibility for the Cabinet Office. And he will be the Acting Minister to take over for the Minister's brief.

Honourable Members, you will be reminded that we are still in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Honourable Minister was in Head 23, the Department of Child and Family Services.

I recognise the Honourable Minister, Vance Campbell.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services ensured that the children and their families were referred to other supportive services within the community where necessary if they were screened out for an investigation. Referrals were received for the following types of abuse:

- Neglect, 322;
    - 157 of the neglect referrals were for children exposed to family violence, 65 were for inadequate food, shelter and hygiene, and 28 were for lack of supervision;
- Sexual abuse, 175;
    - 122 sexual abuse referrals were for child-on-child inappropriate sexual interactions or child-only matters;
- Physical abuse, 112;
- Behaviour problems, 1;
- Emotional abuse, 56;
- Service requests, 21;
- Suicidal ideations and/or attempts, 6;
- Family in need of assistance, 44; and
- Welfare check, 4.

Mr. Chairman, of the 1,006 new referrals in 2023, the total number screened-in for investigation was 741. The total number of referrals represents 704 children and 564 families for 2023. The number of children referred to the Department of Child and Family Services for the first time was 283. Mr. Chairman, the referral numbers by age and sex are as follows:

- 0–4 years, 161;
- 5–9 years, 183;
- 10–14 years, 229;
- 15–18 years, 131.

A total of 351 males, 349 females and 4 gender unknown [in utero] equals a total of 704 children.

Mr. Chairman, the department is required to respond . . . And if I can go back, the gender unknown were in utero.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the department is required to respond within 24 hours, five days or ten days depending on the nature of the referral and the designated timeframe. The department received 232 referrals that required a 24-hour response, 462 referrals required a five-day response and 47 referrals required a ten-day response.

Mr. Chairman, social workers conduct thorough, objective investigations that include interviewing children, their parents and other witnesses or collateral contacts who may be relevant sources of information. Social workers must observe the child and their living conditions and the parent–child interactions and relationships, conduct further record checks and obtain all relevant medical and assessment reports when applicable.

Mr. Chairman, the second purpose of the investigation is to conduct an assessment of the immediate service needs of the child and their family. This involves assessing the child's safety and risk or future risk of neglect and/or abuse within the home and determining the family's need for intervention, counselling and/or support services. The Department of Child and Family Services collaborates with the Bermuda Police Service on referrals received for physical abuse, sexual abuse, severe neglect and behaviour problems. The MASH (Multiagency Safeguarding Hub) was established between the department and the Bermuda Police Service to review all referrals received each week. In these meetings the team determines the investigation approach that is needed for each case.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services is also required to investigate mandated professionals such as but not limited to doctors, daycare providers, teachers, coaches, religious officials and youth leaders if an investigation identifies them as an alleged perpetrator. A total of 23 investigations were conducted, which required the investigation social workers to conduct interviews with the children, their parent or guardian, the mandated professional and all relevant witnesses. These investigations may also involve the Bermuda Police if a criminal offence may have occurred. This is a decrease from 2022 when there were 41 investigations of professionals. After each investigation, an outcome report is provided to the organisation or employer of the investigated professional. The outcome report includes recommendations that are a result of the investigation findings.

Mr. Chairman, during an investigation, once initial contact has been achieved, the Department of Child and Family Services is required to complete a safety assessment to determine imminent risk in all in-home abuse cases. The primary goal of the safety assessment is to ensure the child or children are safe in a household and that the parent or guardian has agreed to the established plan. If a safety threat has been identified, the objective of both the safety assessment and the plan is for the department and the family to work together to reduce risk without seeking a court order.

Mr. Chairman, the investigation social workers completed 445 safety assessments. This engagement with parents allows the Department of Child and Family Services to ensure that the child or children are safe while working to preserve the integrity of the family. Risk assessments are always completed after conducting a home visit and prior to a case being transferred or closed. The team completed 480 risk assessments. Investigations that are referred for abuse outside of the home do not require the Structured Decision Making Assessment tools, as the alleged perpetrator is not living in the home and therefore the household is deemed safe.

Mr. Chairman, the Investigation Team provided 14 Presentations on Mandatory Reporting to the Bermuda Police Service recruits and all watches, private and public schools, Youth and Sport after-school programme, and Bermuda College students. These presentations provide professionals with education on the Children Act, their duties as mandatory reporters and the reporting process for child abuse matters.

Mr. Chairman, the Investigation Team participates in multiagency team meetings such as the Sexual Abuse Response Team (SART), the Child Protection Team (CPT) virtually, and the MARAC team.

Mr. Chairman, the Assessment Team consists of a Clinical Supervisor and three social workers whose role is to be assessors. This team is responsible for conducting comprehensive assessments on children and families who are experiencing issues inclusive of cognitive challenges, domestic violence, substance abuse, behavioural problems, trauma symptoms and mental health concerns. The purpose of the assessment process is to produce a comprehensive report that provides recommendations for the referrer to use to empower the family and enhance family functioning.

Families or individuals are provided an overview of the assessment process and are made aware that this is voluntary unless court-ordered. Families can decline services or withdraw from services at their discretion at any point in time during the assessment process.

Mr. Chairman, the timeframe for the completion of assessments ranges from a minimum of 45 days to a maximum of several months, depending on the time required to build rapport; the complexity of the case; the degree and consistency of client engagement; receipt of the requisite information from collateral sources; and the length of time it takes to administer, score, interpret and write the assessment report. A feedback session is held after the assessment process with parents; the child/adolescent (as appropriate); and if consent is given, with case management workers from other departmental teams; as well as schools.

Mr. Chairman, the Assessment Team additionally conducts individual assessments on all new clients who are either entering foster care or residential treatment [RTS] so that baseline data can be obtained regarding the child or adolescent who has not had prior involvement with the Department of Child and Family Services. Assessment referrals initiated by the court social worker on behalf of the Family Court or Supreme Court must be presented to the weekly leadership meetings for them to be accepted for services.

Mr. Chairman, the Assessment Team mainly receives referrals internally from within the Department of Child and Family Services and externally from the Family Court and Supreme Court. Service provision entails three main areas:

1. individual assessments (child and/or adult);
2. family assessments; and
3. consultations.

Mr. Chairman, there were 45 clients serviced which include 14 cases carried over from 2022. In 2023, there were 31 new referrals received including 25 male clients and 20 female clients. In 2023, there were 21 clients closed. The closures included 10 males and 11 females.

Mr. Chairman, the sources of referrals to the Assessment Team from within the Department of Child and Family Services included the following:

- Investigations Team, 20 cases;
- Family Preservation, 7 cases;
- Foster Care, [1] case;
- RTS, 3 cases.

Mr. Chairman, the ages of the children within the families serviced are as follows:

- zero–four years, 2;
- 5–9 years, 15;
- 10–14 years, 17; and
- 15–18 years, 11.

There were 14 assessment reports completed for the year. Three clients declined services. Based on data collected for 2023, several trends were identified and similar to trends reported on last year. Mr. Chairman, there is a continuing increase

1. in domestic violence, mental health concerns, and substance abuse issues;
2. in the number of adolescent clients requiring substance usage assessments;
3. in the number of younger clients (under 10) requiring assessment services who are being serviced within the school setting by the Department of Child and Family Services;
4. in referrals for multiple assessments;
5. in the number of clients requiring concurrent assessment and counselling services [CLS]; and
6. due to complex family dynamics, requiring case consultation/collaboration with other Department of Child and Family Services teams.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Screening and Investigations Team and the community stakeholders for their commitment to being the first response in promoting the safety and health of families while protecting

children from abuse and neglect. I would also like to thank the Assessments Team for empowering the family and enhancing family functioning through the comprehensive assessments they completed on at-risk children and families.

Foster Care

Hon. Vance Campbell: Now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move on to Foster Care, business unit 33030. They have a budget of $2,384,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the foster care section of the Department of Child and Family Services is responsible for providing alternative living arrangements for children under the age of 18 years old who need *out of home placement*. The budget estimate for business unit 33030 for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $2,384,000. This represents a decline of $257,000, or 10 per cent, and reflects a decrease in foster care fees and the non-funding of a temporary relief post.

Mr. Chairman, during the 2023 calendar year, a total of 58 children occupied foster care beds. The team was also responsible for case management duties for the children's birth families and foster families. This represents a numerical decrease by five from the prior year. As was stated last year, the team remains concerned about the complexity of the cases, which has magnified in terms of mental health, behavioural issues and school difficulties.

During the last budget year, the Foster Care Programme serviced a total of seven therapeutic foster children. The children in this category have a variety of physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural challenges. Therapeutic Foster Parents are compensated at a higher rate than traditional foster parents. They sign contracts that outline the levels of care expected based on the children's needs. Out of those seven children, one was referred to an overseas facility for a comprehensive assessment and was recommended for further overseas placement.

By the end of 2023, a total of seven children left the Foster Care Programme. Two were placed into the full custodial care with relatives. One was deemed to be in need of overseas inpatient care. One was placed into a pre-adoptive placement, pending finalised adoption. And three were reunified with their parents.

The year 2023 was a very busy year for foster parent recruitment. DCFS in partnership with the Department of Communication were able to advertise using all forms of media. Three major highlights for 2023 were the foster care recruitment advertisements placed on our local buses, the informational table display at Gorham's and the Foster Care Team information booth at Harbour Nights. The Foster Care Coordinator interviewed 13 interested persons for foster parent recruitment. Out of those, six were approved and became foster parents. Despite the constant addition to the pool of available foster parents, the department continues to remain hard-pressed to recruit enough foster parents to be open, available and suitable for emergencies and for hard-to-care-for children.

And as a former foster parent for 17 years, Mr. Chairman, I would encourage people to sign up and be evaluated. It is rewarding beyond your imagination.

The Chairman: Yes. Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: In May 2023, Foster Care Month, the Foster Care Team held its Annual Appreciation Tea for Bermuda's foster parents. The keynote speaker was Ms. Sierra Reid, who spent time in foster care as a youth and is now a Master's Degree-level Special Education Teacher. This event was held at the Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club.

The Foster Care Programme ended 2023 with Christmas gift donations for all foster children. Items were generously donated from anonymous members of the public, the RenRe Insurance Company and the Pembroke and Hamilton Rotary Clubs. Each child was gifted with multiple items for the holiday season. The organisation of gift donations from members of the public was fully arranged by the executive of the Foster Parent Association, which is a registered charity. The Angel Tree was publicised and was on display at Rosa's. Members from the public selected angels from the tree which had the wish list items of foster children on them.

Mr. Chairman, the department would like to acknowledge the foster parents of Bermuda. These are our unsung heroes who provide loving, stable homes to children who have experienced significant trauma as a result of abuse and/or neglect. Every day they make a foster child's life better by their numerous acts of care and kindness.

Appreciation and recognition must also go out to the Foster Parent Association registered charity. They work in partnership with the Foster Care Team. They provide extra support to foster children and foster families in the form of financial support for educational trips, specialised recreational programmes, laptops for senior school and tertiary education scholarships for foster youth post high school completion.

The Foster Care Team is to be commended as well for working through some very serious, complex and challenging cases.

Counselling and Life Skills

Hon. Vance Campbell: Now, Mr. Chairman, to move on to Counselling and Life Skills, business unit 33200.

The Chairman: Absolutely, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: They have a budget of $1,189,000. Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the

Counselling and Life Skills (CLS) business unit within the Department of Child and Family Services is to advance and promote the emotional well-being of youth up to 18 years of age and their families. The budget estimate for business unit 33200 for fiscal year 2024/25 is $1,189,000. This represents an increase of $43,000, or 4 per cent, compared to the original budget for fiscal year 2023/24. This is due to an increase in salaries charged to the business unit.

Mr. Chairman, CLS offers services that are strength-based, solution-focused and client-centred for the purpose of strengthening the knowledge and skills of individuals and families with the intent for them to make healthy life choices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that the complexity of families' needs regarding mental health increased. Individual and family issues include but are not limited to domestic violence, parent–child relationships, grief and loss, communication, co-parenting, trauma and adolescent substance abuse.

Mr. Chairman, CLS provides individual, family and group counselling. Since post COVID-19, the CLS team has resumed back to in-person sessions and used other modes such as Cisco Webex, Zoom, WhatsApp, telephone and email when clients cannot do in-person sessions. The CLS's counsellors through these methods were able to complete specific assessments or screening tools required for the formulation of services plans.

Mr. Chairman, referrals are mainly received from external entities such as the Department of Education, Child and Adolescents Services [CAS], and the public. These referrals are screened through the department's Investigation/Screening Section, and decisions on appropriate interventions are determined by the use of the SDM [shared decision-making] tool and then assigned for services. There is a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and the Department of Child and Family Services that all substance-related incidents that occur in schools are referred to the department for either a substance assessment, substance education or both. Mr. Chairman, the number of referrals that were received for 2023 was 126, an increase compared to 2022. Out of this number, 120 received services and 6 were denied. The referrals that were denied were based on clients being involved in external services prior to the referral. There were 68 females and 58 males.

Mr. Chairman, the ages of the children within the families serviced are as follows:

Female clients—

- 0–4 years, 4;
- 5–9 years, 14;
- 10–14 years, 22; and
- 15–18 years, 28.

Male clients—

- 0–4 years, 4;
- 5–9 years, 14;
- 10–14 years, 27; and
- 15–18 years, 13.

Over the years, the highest age group for males and females were children/adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 years old, and 15 and 18 years old; however, for males there was a shift. Males between the ages of 5 and 9 were higher than males 15 to 18.

Mr. Chairman, the sources of referrals to the CLS team in 2023 are as follows:

- DCFS Teams (Investigations, Foster Care, Family Preservation, RTS and Adoptions), 96 cases;
- Court Social Worker, 2 cases;
- Schools, 22 cases; and
- Other (Police, KEMH, CAS), 7 cases.

Mr. Chairman, the CLS team noticed that in 2023 vaping is still a trend continuing amongst adolescents, along with CBD edibles/gummies. And this trend has moved to younger children experimenting with vaping as well as edibles and gummies. Substances such as marijuana and alcohol are still also prevalent among adolescents. The data for 2023 revealed that young people are still choosing to use substances as a coping strategy for dealing with life stressors, trauma and grief. The complexity of their family systems also showed in 2023 that co-parenting support and coping strategies and skills for parents need to be implemented so that children and their families can effectively deal with their mental health issues.

Mr. Chairman, several trends were identified in the year 2023 as follows:

1. an increase in substance referrals about vaping, marijuana and edibles;
2. grief counselling for children who lost parents;
3. parents needing co-parenting;
4. children being referred are getting younger and their behavioural presentations are complex and requiring a multidisciplinary team approach (locally and overseas);
5. an increase in internal referrals from other DCFS teams through leadership meetings;
6. parents requiring therapy support for themselves;
7. parent–child relationships needing strategies to enhance healthy communication;
8. younger children requiring therapy outside of talk therapy—i.e., play and movement;
9. co-parenting/parenting skills services; and
10. counselling for mental health.

These trends continue to demonstrate that there is a growing need for resources for parents, children and adolescents.

Child Safeguarding

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move on to Child Safeguarding, business unit 33250.

The Chairman: Minister, I just want to remind you if you do not mind that we are just about five minutes shy of the lunch hour. It is 12:25. The debate did begin about 10:26, so that would complete two hours. If you wish, we can pause now and go to lunch. Or would you like to continue, Minister?

Hon. Vance Campbell: I am at your will.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. It is so, Shadow.

I am going to acknowledge the Deputy Premier.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Good afternoon.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I do move that we adjourn for lunch until 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: So moved.

Adjourned until 2:00 pm.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:26 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:00 pm

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

MINISTRY OF YOUTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SENIORS

HEAD 23—CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: I trust everybody had an enjoyable lunch?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. We are going through the [items] under Head 23 of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, which are now to be debated.

I call on the Minister in charge to proceed.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year of 2024/25, $150,000 will fund a new Child Safeguarding Programme. As per the Child Safeguarding Act 2019, children who are victims of sexual offences or who are convicted of sexual offences and serious personal injury receive both physical and psychological services which translates to costs incurred for psychosexual assessments and counselling services. Currently, two children are being serviced for sexual offences.

Residential Treatment Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to programme 2303, Residential Treatment Services, found on page B-294. Mr. Chairman, the activity covered in programme 2303 is Residential Treatment Services. These services include Family Preservation, Brangman Home, Youth Development Centre, Observatory Cottage (also referred to as Oleander Cottage), Psycho-Educational Programme and Youth Residential Treatment. For financial year 2024/25, this programme has a budget allocation of $8,770,000. This represents an increase of $987,000, or 13 per cent, over the financial year 2023/24 budget allocation.

Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for business unit 33060, Family Preservation, for fiscal year 2024/25 is $1,735,000. The estimate is a $227,000, or 15 per cent, increase over the original budget for fiscal year 2023/24. This increase is related to a realignment of staff within the organisational structure.

Mr. Chairman, DCFS's Family Preservation team operates under a sound case management and assessment model, which comprehensively assesses family and child needs and develops service plans with the family, child and stakeholders to maximise intervention and positive outcomes for children and their families. The team is responsible for providing ongoing intervention to monitor and ensure the safety of children at risk of abuse or neglect, assist families to improve family functioning, increase child well-being, reduce the need for placement in out-of-home care, and to enable children in out-of-home care to return safely to their families.

I draw your attention to the reference to out-of-home care, which refers to children in Foster Care, Residential Treatment Services and Psycho-Ed Services. Mr. Chairman, the ultimate goal is to reduce or eliminate the circumstances in the family that have been or are causing abuse or risk of abuse (emotional and/or physical) to the child, and to maintain the child in the home environment.

Mr. Chairman, Family Preservation Services are provided to clients of the Department of Child and Family Services either via consent of the parents or under the authority of a court order. If a child's safety is an assessed concern as per the Children Act 1998 and its revisions, Family Preservation Services will be mandated if deemed so, via the courts.

Mr. Chairman, in order to achieve its goal, Family Preservation Services requires its social workers and social work assistants to manage cases in compliance with the Council on Accreditation Child and Family Services standards, the policies and procedures of the department and the structured decision making (SDM) assessment system for child protective services. The social worker's frequency of contact with a family is determined by the family's assessed risk level. The higher the assessed risk for future abuse or neglect, the higher the level of intervention and engagement required monthly.

Mr. Chairman, the Family Preservation Section has now been accredited by the Bermuda National Standards Committee in accordance with the Council on Accreditation Standards from 2018 to present. Being accredited means that the Bermuda National Standards Committee has determined through a rigorous assessment of evidence that the DCFS Family Preservation Service meets Council on Accreditation standards and that they follow best practice and provide quality service to the community. Mr. Chairman, the Family Preservation Team currently consists of two coordinators, eight social workers, eight social work assistants and one administrative assistant.

Mr. Chairman, I will now highlight the performance of the Family Preservation team and the client outcomes for the calendar year January through December 2023. Mr. Chairman, the following data provide an overview of the statistical outputs and outcomes for the family preservation team:

- For the calendar year January through December 2023, the Family Preservation team has served a combination of 136 families and 240 children. Caseload complexities and risk levels remained high throughout 2023, thus requiring a high number of face-to-face contacts, multiple court appearances, family conferences and consultations with community and government stakeholders.
- [The year] 2023 saw 81 new cases referred to Family Preservation. Throughout the year a total of 37 cases were closed. All closed cases were void of child safety or child protection issues at closure. Eight cases were transferred to out-of-home services (Foster Care and Residential Treatment Services) due to the increased safety risk in the home.

To summarise, Mr. Chairman, Family Preservation workers attended 87 court hearings over the year. This is an increase of 20 hearings over 2022. The court appearances were for domestic violence protection orders, protection intervention or emergency protection orders, custody/access matters, supervised visitation, Juvenile Court, supervision order applications and reviews, and care order applications, reviews and discharges.

Mr. Chairman, all families involved with Family Preservation receive Family Strengths and Needs Assessments and are reassessed every three months. These assessments help to identify the areas of need or development required within a family (both parents and children), as well as strengths within the family unit in order to reduce risks within the family unit that have placed or have the potential to place a child at risk of abuse or neglect.

Mr. Chairman, needs assessments completed on parents during 2023 have identified the following as the top four areas of need affecting our parents/caregivers. Interventions must be targeted to improve outcomes in these areas:

- coping skills, mental health, cognitive functioning;
- parenting skills;
- household relationships/family violence; and
- resource management.

Mr. Chairman, needs assessments completed on children during 2023 have identified the following as the top three areas of need affecting our children; interventions must be targeted to improve outcomes in these areas:

- Emotional/Behavioural challenges. This is defined as limited emotional adjustment. The child has occasional difficulty in dealing with situational stress, crises or problems, which impairs functioning. The child displays periodic mental health symptoms including but not limited to depression, running away, somatic complaints, hostile behaviour or apathy. The child has episodes of extreme acting out, which may include an inability to accept limits on or consequences for behaviour, or severely limited emotional adjustment. The child's ability to perform in one or more areas of functioning is severely impaired due to chronic/severe mental health symptoms such as fire-setting, suicidal behaviour or violent behaviour toward people and/or animals. Child has a pattern of dysfunctional behaviour that limits child or family activities.
- Educational Concerns/Needs. This is defined as academic difficulty. The child is working below grade level in at least one but not more than half of their academic subject areas, and/or the child is struggling to meet the goals of the existing educational plan. The existing educational plan may need modification for severe academic difficulty.
- Family Relationship Challenges. This is defined as strained relationships. Stress/discord within the family interferes with the child's sense of safety and security. The family has difficulty identifying and resolving conflicts and/or obtaining support and assistance on their own or harmful relationships. Chronic family stress, conflict or violence severely impedes the child's sense of safety and security. The family is unable to resolve stress, conflict or violence on their own and is not able or willing to obtain outside assistance.

Mr. Chairman, in 2023 the Department of Child and Family Services hosted Visit Coaching training facilitated by the developer of the programme, Ms. Marty Beyer. An invitation was extended to the Coalition for the Protection of Children to also attend this valuable training. Visit coaching is an intervention method used for court-ordered supervised visits between parents and children. Visit coaching supports families to make each visit fun for their children and to meet the unique needs of each child. Visit coaching includes

- helping parents articulate their children's needs to be met in visits;
- preparing parents for their children's reactions;
- helping parents plan to give their children their full attention at each visit;
- appreciating the parent's strengths in caring, meeting each child's needs; and
- helping parents cope with their feelings so that they can visit consistently and keep their anger and sadness out of the visit.

Mr. Chairman, at the core of Family Preservation is the understanding that if we can improve the functioning and circumstances of the parents/adult caregivers of the children, we can reduce the risk of abuse and neglect of children. As such, it is vital that we equip our staff to increase their skills in engaging and providing intervention services to our families.

Mr. Chairman, the Family Preservation Team continues to strive to provide effective service to children and families. Performance improvement is an ongoing endeavour, thus enhancing the opportunity for improved client outcomes. The data gleaned from 2023 have been utilised to establish annual plan goals and objectives for 2024, striving toward increased positive client outcomes. The Department of Child and Family Services commends the Family Preservation Team and its coordinators for their commitment to families throughout 2023.

Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to the following:

- Brangman Home, business unit 33070;
- Youth Development Centre, business unit 33080; and
- Observatory Cottage (referred as Oleander Cottage), business unit 33090.

Mr. Chairman, the financial year budget allocation for business unit 33070, Brangman Home, is $1,257,000. This is an increase over the 2023/24 budget allocation of $44,000, or by 4 per cent, which mainly represents an increase in salaries due to the realignment of the department's resources.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 33080, Youth Development Centre's allocated budget for financial year 2024/25, is $288,000. This is an increase of $42,000, or 17 per cent, in comparison to the budget allocation of fiscal year 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, Observatory Cottage, which comes under business unit 33090, has an allocated budget for 2024/25 of $1,483,000, which is an increase of $115,000, or 8 per cent, in comparison to financial year 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, Residential Treatment Services (RTS) provides group living intervention services to children between the ages of 12 and 18 years. These are adolescents who are deemed to be at risk in the community and requiring care and protection in a safe and structured residential environment. All children placed in this service have had their situation and circumstances considered by the Family Court, where it has been deemed appropriate for them to be placed on a care order and as such become the responsibility of the Director of Child and Family Services.

Mr. Chairman, the RTS programme provides 24-hour, 365-days-a-year services. The young ladies are located at the Brangman Home while the young men receive services at Oleander Cottage. The Youth Development Centre is utilised to provide one-to-one and special management of residents based on their needs as indicated by ongoing evaluation, and if they are placed in care of the director as a result of criminal behaviours.

Mr. Chairman, the inclusion of family is paramount to the healing process of the children receiving our services. The involvement of family at all levels of the continuum of care is the goal. We endeavour to strengthen relationships by responding to the family through a reintegration plan or, if necessary, using other community-based relationships when the family cannot respond to the child's needs. The RTS programme allows for collaboration with the family and the community to understand the child's cultural experience through a trauma lens.

Mr. Chairman, we continue to see the impact of complex trauma on the adolescents whom we serve. Complex trauma is caused by the children's exposure to multiple traumatic events. This impacts the goal of having children transition within 12 months. As a result, the services provided by RTS remain under a trauma responsive lens. And this is translated into the intake and assessment process, family engagement practice, crisis intervention, and both individual and group counselling.

Mr. Chairman, during budget year 2023/24, RTS provided case management and intervention for children in transition in the community, as well as those ready for discharge. The case management was comprehensive, as it included working with both the internal and external multi-agency teams involved with the children and families to ensure a seamless trauma-responsive transition. The families involved welcomed the partnership and requested continued engagement after the three-month after-care phase. Mr. Chairman, the RTS program was faced with many challenges in financial year 2023/24 in relation to services received by children in care. Some required closer observation and monitoring with therapeutic interventions to prevent escalation. Moreover, some needed to be separated from within the facility and required additional support.

Mr. Chairman, in the last fiscal year, clients' services included crisis intervention and referrals to both internal and external services to respond to critical incidents. Both genders demonstrated externalising and internalising problem [behaviours] at RTS. Strong case management of children was essential through crisis management meetings, ongoing individual assessments and service plans. Client profiles for 2023 indicated that 100 per cent of children had come from single parent households. Additionally, both male and female profiles continue to reflect 100 per cent of the children experiencing trauma that included abandonment, abuse, grief and domestic violence. Eighty per cent had learning challenges. These data demonstrate the wide range of specialist services required for dealing effectively with children and families.

The DCFS were committed to striving for the success of our children in the education system and responded to the learning challenges. One professional tutor was hired, and partnerships with the educational psychologists, paraprofessionals and social workers in the educational system were also strengthened.

Mr. Chairman, substance use and self-injurious behaviours have been a challenge and reflect the social acceptance of vaping and use of marijuana among adolescents. The international data state that self-injury amongst girls has increased in the past three years. Girls are three times more likely than boys to present with self-injurious behaviours. Those who are involved in this behaviour are at much greater risk of suicide. Safety precautions have been put in place with risk assessments and referrals to Child Adolescent Services [CAS] and King Edward VII Memorial Hospital [KEMH]. The boys presented 90 per cent delinquent behaviour and substance use.

Mr. Chairman, RTS met the performance targets with 100 per cent of residents having independent treatment plans, 100 per cent having service plans and 100 per cent of residents having individual crisis management plans. Over 200 coordinated services were provided with community partners, over 260 individual counselling sessions, 277 groups were held, and [over] 152 family engagements. RTS held seven joint family group activities to build connections while engaging in prosocial activities.

Mr. Chairman, RTS implemented client satisfaction surveys over the past year and received 100 per cent positive feedback responses from residents and their families about home visits. A full 80 per cent of the residents indicated they feel emotionally safe, and 100 per cent reported feeling physically safe at the last check-point in December 2023.

Mr. Chairman, over the past four months the resident responses fluctuated between 80 per cent and 100 per cent regarding the statement, "I feel the staff members care for me." Responses fluctuated between 70 per cent and 90 per cent [to the statement], "My social worker or case manager takes the time to answer my questions and listens to me." Young people's overall satisfaction was a new question asked and is moving in the right direction to 55 per cent positive responses. The voice of the child is important, and two client rights groups were held in the latter part of the year.

Mr. Chairman, RTS engaged in a few trainings to support the growth and development of the team. They participated in *Your Voice, Our Future: Resetting the Standard* with an overseas expert in residential treatment services [with Discovery Ranch team], Code of Conduct, Ethics, Investigation and Mandatory Reporting and a Quantum Learning Workshop to name a few. All staff participate in Relias training weekly.

Mr. Chairman, with a primary focus on establishing trauma-responsive environments for the children in our group homes, we continue to ensure review and amendments are made to our policies and procedures to reflect the principles of group home living. During the 2023/24 budget year, the DCFS administration continued its partnership with the Ministry of Public Works, specifically the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, in enhancing RTS physical structures. These buildings utilised by RTS have received several maintenance upgrades that include roof repairs, replacement of ceiling, ceiling tiles in the bathroom, painting, replacement of security cameras, door replacements for additional security, and air conditioning issues were addressed.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Residential Treatment Services and the community stakeholders for their commitment in providing trauma-responsive services to the residents of group living with the aim of restoring hope and building resiliency in their lives.

Psycho-Educational Programme

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Psycho-Educational [Psycho-Ed] programme was developed to clinically address children who could not be effectively treated in Bermuda or those who had exhausted all available local therapeutic/treatment services. The budget estimate for business unit 33100 for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $2,114,000. This represents an increase of $6,000 for the fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, our local psychologists, psychiatrists and educational therapists have demonstrated an improved ability to diagnose various psychological, behavioural and educational problems. However, more Bermudian children are being identified with various psychological, social/emotional and psychiatric conditions beyond the ability of our local service providers. The Psycho-Ed programme allows the Department of Child and Family Services to have external input concerning clinical therapeutic intervention and after-care services.

Mr. Chairman, the overseas therapeutic programmes utilised by the Psycho-Ed programme are selected based on specific areas of expertise and specialised services they are licensed to provide. After reviewing a child's local clinical reports, the Psycho-Ed Committee decides on an overseas therapeutic placement that provides the best clinical fit for the child. For several years, the department has sought additional accredited therapeutic programmes in the United States' East Coast to meet our children's needs.

Unfortunately, only a limited number of overseas therapeutic facilities have been found to meet the clinical therapeutic needs of our Bermuda children. Also, after arduous research, it has been identified that providing our Bermuda children with specialised clinical assessments and therapeutic interventions on the Island, similar to those provided in overseas therapeutic facilities, is cost prohibitive. Mr. Chairman, the Psycho-Ed programme provides children with protection, care and nurturance by licensed and accredited therapeutic overseas facilities.

The Psycho-Ed Committee comprises representatives from the following:

- the Child and Adolescent Services;
- the Ministry of Education;
- the Department of Child and Family Services; and
- the Ministry of Health.

The Psycho-Ed Committee met virtually twice a quarter during the three quarters of the year to review the status and make decisions on children referred for overseas placement or clinical assessment.

Mr. Chairman, in 2023, the Psycho-Ed programme had a total of 15 clients who received services in overseas therapeutic programmes for a complexity of issues identified across the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)* Criteria of Mental Disorders. The purpose of the *DSM-V* is to provide clear descriptions of diagnostic categories to enable clinicians to diagnose and treat various mental health disorders. Each child received an assessment from local service providers that determined an individualised treatment plan and intensive interventions as per the diagnostic categories defined by the *DSM-V*.

Mr. Chairman, in the best interest of the child, the Psycho-Ed Committee utilises an overseas service provider that specialises primarily in providing clinical neuropsychological assessments at Huntsman Mental Health Institute [HMHI]. Implementing the neuropsychological assessment at HMHI assisted DCFS in obtaining a clear and comprehensive understanding of the specific needs of clients referred for an assessment. The majority of our Bermuda children who were referred for a neuropsychological assessment were current Psycho-Ed clients who did not have an identified diagnosis or who did not engage with our local service providers. The comprehensive neuropsychological assessment assisted in developing the client's individualised treatment plan that facilitated the most appropriate match of local community resources or identified an overseas therapeutic placement that matched the child's specific needs.

Mr. Chairman, 15 children participated in the Psycho-Ed Programme in 2023. One child received local case management and after-care planning. One child received a substance abuse assessment from an overseas therapeutic facility and returned to the local jurisdiction for case management and after-care planning. Of the remaining 13 children in the Psycho-Ed programme, 4 completed an overseas neuropsychological assessment at Huntsman Mental Health Institute and 1 received a psycho-sexual assessment at Harbor Point Behavioral Health Center.

Recommendations from the completed neuropsychological assessments at HMHI resulted in three children being referred for a long-term overseas therapeutic placement. One child who completed a psychosexual referral at Harbor Point Behavioral Health Center was recommended for a long-term overseas therapeutic placement. Three children who were referred to Psycho-Ed completed a 90-day wilderness placement at RedCliff Ascent Wilderness Therapy Programme. One child who was referred to Psycho-Ed was admitted directly into an overseas therapeutic facility for a long-term placement of nine to eighteen months, and four children were already currently enrolled in a long-term overseas placement.

All Psycho-Ed clients serviced overseas received the Global Assessment of Functioning [GAF] with a scoring range of 20 to 50. A score of 50 is defined as having serious symptoms or serious impairment in social, occupational or school functioning, and 20 is defined as having a danger of hurting self and/or others. Psycho-Ed clients receive intensive clinical treatment with a longer duration of treatment options coupled with one-to-one staff interventions, psychotropic medications, frequent team meetings, psychiatric hospitalisations, family intervention programmes and overseas therapeutic visits.

Mr. Chairman, due to COVID-19, in the previous years there was increased virtual contact including clinical treatment team sessions, family sessions and individual clinical client contact. To date, virtual contact with clients is utilised as a primary form of communication, with each client having virtual contact with DCFS staff weekly.

Mr. Chairman, the vetting of new facilities occurred prior to placement, and all other facilities have been vetting during the 2023 period.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Education [MOED] and the Bermuda Hospitals Board's [BHB] Child and Adolescent Services [CAS] have limited resources and/or are not equipped to service clients who are diagnosed with conduct disorder, experiencing severe mental health challenges or those who are high-risk in the community. Consequently, several applications are made to the Psycho-Ed Committee requesting an overseas therapeutic placement for a young person

who cannot be serviced in our local school environment or within the current therapeutic milieu at CAS.

The Chairman: Honourable Members, if we could use our dulcet undertones when having conversations, that would be most appreciated.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, large demands continue to be placed on the Department of Child and Family Services due to CAS's lack of resources and the Education Ministry's inability to service children with severe behavioural challenges and intellectual disabilities. Despite DCFS having the High-Risk Intervention Committee (THRIC), the department lacks an adequate response to the increased complex referrals from MOED and CAS. Of urgency relating to our ability to address non-acute mental health/psychiatric needs, there remains the ongoing challenge of addressing our children's clinical needs for all partners involved.

Youth Residential Treatment

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, business unit 33110, Youth Residential Treatment, budget allocation for fiscal year 2024/25 is $1,243,000. This reflects a $97,000, or 7 per cent, decrease in funding. This decrease is a result of the realignment of staff within the Department of Family Services organisational structure. Mr. Chairman, Youth Residential Treatment is the administrative and professional services section that provides all of the necessary accounting, management, counselling and clinical services to all of the residential homes and programmes. It is the responsibility of this business unit to identify all of the training needs of staff, clinical needs of all of the children involved in the programme and management of repair services with all facilities, and report them to the Director for action. This unit is also responsible for all performance quality improvement and making sure all of the programmes within Residential Treatment Services meet and maintain accreditation standards.

Independent Living Programme

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, in the 2022/23 budget, capital funding was allocated for the establishment of an Independent Living Housing regime. The Independent Living Programme [business unit 33240] is the first of its kind in Bermuda whereby we are providing a lifeline/safety net to young adults ageing out of the care of the Director, affording them the best opportunity for success as they transition into adulthood. The programme is housed at the Garrison View in St. George's and can accommodate up to 10 young people, six females and four males.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit has been allocated $650,000 for the 2024/25 budget year. This programme was implemented in March 2023, at which time its funding was embedded within the department's Administration, business unit 33120. This programme now has its own business unit with increased funding for operational activity.

Mr. Chairman, the Independent Living Programme has been developed in alignment with the Accreditation Council's Youth Independent Living Services Standards. The programme offers dormitory-style living and development of independent life skills that include but are not limited to money management, educational goals, job sustainability and knowledge of community resources. Support services of counselling will also be provided within the department. To participate in the programme, young persons must have been clients of DCFS who have aged out of the care of the Director without a reunification plan and referred by one of the social workers of the department. During the last fiscal year, there have been a total of 10 referrals, three males and seven females. Of these referrals eight were approved and two were declined.

Out of the eight approved, six moved into the programme. The Independent Living Programme housed two males and four females. Two were terminated from the programme, one due to non-compliance, and the other due to pregnancy and was referred to the appropriate agency.

Mr. Chairman, three residents were employed before their move-in date, but two lost their jobs during their probationary phase. Five residents enrolled with Workforce Development. Two obtained employment through Workforce Development. Two residents had employment through other means. At the end of 2023, three of four residents were employed, with the fourth beginning in January 2024.

Mr. Chairman, the coordinator, support staff and client travelled to the 35th Annual National Independent Living Conference in August 2023 to participate in workshops and network with other agencies who are providing this support to young people. This conference provides resources and training to professionals around a variety of evidenced-based practices and how to promote improved outcomes for our young adults.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the Independent Living Programme expanded its reach and introduced the Level-Up Programme for 17- and 17-and-a-half-year-olds providing an opportunity for this age group, as they approach 18, for exposure to the different aspects and expectations of adulthood while providing first-hand experience of what the Independent Living Programme has to offer.

Mr. Chairman, as the Independent Living Programme approaches its first anniversary of providing a safety net to our young adults, we have much to celebrate. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Independent Living Programme and the community stakeholders for their commitment in providing a lifeline/safety net to young adults ageing out

of the care of the Director, with the aim of them becoming independent and self-sufficient contributing members of our society.

The Mirrors Programme

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to programme 2305, the Mirrors Programme, found on page B-294. Mr. Chairman, the 2023/24 budget year has been one of embedding the Mirrors Programme within the Department of Child and Family Services as a substantive permanent programme. Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated to the Mirrors Programme for 2024/25 is $699,000. This represents a decreased allocation of $53,000, or 7 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, Mirrors continues to focus on life coaching, social-emotional development and the elements of transformation, especially with the follow-on impact of COVID-19. More than ever before, young people can benefit from a deeper awareness of who they are, how to communicate authentically, how they impact the world around them and how they can contribute to elevating outcomes in this rapidly changing environment. Mirrors continues to focus on the whole person and cycle of impact to support youth well-being. Mr. Chairman, Mirrors has transitioned into the Department of Child and Family Services as its prevention and life coaching arm.

The programme continues to produce results in the short, medium and long term to build a resilient community of youth with positive life outcomes in education, employment and lawfulness. The two-year post data of the core programme remain consistent, with 93 per cent of clients served demonstrating lawfulness (not offending or reoffending), 82 per cent of students connected to education (graduating or currently in school) and a slight increase in employment from 39 per cent to 42 per cent of students currently employed at the last check-point in 2023. Mirrors mid-term outcome markers provide the necessary check-point for measuring the success of the programme for the overall societal benefit.

Mr. Chairman, Mirrors cancelled the Super-Camp Senior Forum in October 2023 to focus on the transition process into the department. Cohort 18 completed their coaching in June 2023, and Cohort 19 is expected to begin in October 2024. To date, Mirrors has served 8,224 youth and trained 7,721 adults including parents, teachers and volunteers in positive youth development.

Mr. Chairman, 566 middle school students participated in the "All In! 8 Keys of Excellence" character development programme at Sandys Secondary Middle School, Dellwood and Whitney Institute. Thirty-one middle school students participated in the combined prefect leadership training to support peer leadership at their schools, and teachers delivered the All In! curriculum at least twice weekly in advisory periods. All trainings received 100 per cent positive experience in content and experience this year. Mirrors is projecting to service all public middle school students in the 2024/25 fiscal year with a focus to increase parent engagement. The team is engaging with the schools to explore serving the upper primary school age levels (primary 7 and 8) in school reform.

Mr. Chairman, PeerForward Bermuda travelled overseas with a team of 15 peer leaders, four advisors, two college coaches and two support staff for the Mirrors-endorsed college and career readiness programmes at Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy. Thirty peer leaders attended the fall training in student engagement to execute the PeerForward journey which moves from self-awareness and self-agency to community service. Service is about leading their peers to build a college-going culture in their high schools with the ultimate goal of raising college enrolment and degree attainment.

All trainings have received 100 per cent positive experience in content and experience. A total of 91 students are expected to enrol and attend college this year. Schools have noticed an increase in complete applications and enrolments at the Bermuda College from Berkeley and CedarBridge students. Eighty-nine parents and students have signed up to attend the Finding Funding for College webinars. PeerForward is projecting to service Berkeley and CedarBridge in the 2024/25 school year with the PeerForward programme.

Mr. Chairman, 178 students provided art submissions and 22 students entered digital pieces in the 7th Annual Art and Digital competition themed "My Happy Place." Students won prizes for themselves and their schools to support the arts in school.

Mr. Chairman, Mirrors continues to find ways to engage parents to attend training to build skills for positive youth development. Seventy-three parents participated in programming. The target was reduced based on transition activities and vacant posts. Mirrors has a secondary focus of building social-emotional development in adults serving youth. Seventy-five educators and youth workers attended the World Summit 2024 powered by Mirrors and Quantum Learning Global with the world partners who travelled from across the globe, the USA, Argentina, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Dominican Republic and Taiwan. The team was thanked for bringing the Elevate and Summit workshops to our shores.

Mr. Chairman, 140 people participated in the Mirrors Field of Learning providing 540 community service hours in the garden. Students were able to take some vegetables home, and the majority was donated across the Island to seniors. The Mirrors Alumni and Friends Association will continue to support Mirrors in the upcoming year through the volunteer recognition scheme, the annual Bermuda themed art competition, community service project at Southlands, PeerForward and other community engagements.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the corporate Bermuda, the

Alumni Board members and the Mirrors team for their commitment to the development of Bermuda's youth.

Administration

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to programme 2304, Administration, found on page B-294. Mr. Chairman, the activities covered in programme 2304, Administration, are business unit 33120, Administration, and business unit 33130, Grant funding. The budget estimate for fiscal year 2024/25 is $2,882,000, reflecting a budgetary decrease of $277,000, or 9 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Administration section of DCFS is responsible for the general supervision of the sections within the department and the oversight of the Psycho-Educational Programme and the Mirrors Programme. The budget estimate for business unit 33120 for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $2,336,000. This represents a $277,000, or 11 per cent, reduction under the budget for fiscal year 2023/24. Mr. Chairman, all staff development and training are delivered via this section, and as previously highlighted, training in all sections of the department has been purposefully aligned with the overarching goal of providing a comprehensive and seamless continuum of services that meet the complex needs of our client population.

Mr. Chairman, to ensure that the staff at DCFS remain skilled and current with best practice standards, the Administration Section has continued their membership with Relias Learning Systems as the core training vehicle for staff professional development in the field. Relias has webinars on their platform, and they conduct regular reviews and training updates to remain current with new research and developments in the field. Relias courses are endorsed by numerous professional bodies including the Council on Accreditation (COA) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). This training solution also has customisable elements that allow for DCFS policies and procedures as well as legislation training to be built into the system. This allows for consistency and accessibility to necessary training for all staff.

The Solution Focused Advocacy Committee was created by a core group of workers across sections of the department. The purpose of the Solution Focused Advocacy Committee (SFAC) is to address concerns impacting the ability of frontline workers to perform optimally by offering solutions and enhancing communication between upper management and frontline staff. The suggested solutions may also assist in preventing employee burn-out.

Subcommittees that were borne out of this effort include a Training Committee, Policy and Procedure Committee, Social Committee, Public Relations Committee and Staff Wellness Committee. The overarching goal of these committees is to systematically review the varying complex and demanding needs of the department and its employees, and to action any areas that support and promote the operational practices and environment of DCFS. This is done with the support of the Senior Leadership Team.

Mr. Chairman, DCFS Administration continues to look for opportunities of performance quality improvement. Mr. Chairman, during the last fiscal year, staff of DCFS received training in forensic interviewing with children with disabilities that has assisted these professionals in being more effective and therapeutic when interviewing special needs children. The introduction of the child safeguarding legislation, an amendment to the Children Act 1998, requires that the administration section of DCFS develop a training programme that will certify counsellors to assess and provide counselling to all children accused of and victims of sexual offences.

Mr. Chairman, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was established in keeping with the 2022 Speech from the Throne to address the myriad of issues arising from domestic abuse and family violence on the Island. In 2022 the focus was on a systems-wide assessment of the current local landscape, to identify opportunities for improving the response, early intervention, and prevention of domestic abuse. As stated in the 2023 Speech from the Throne, one of the most significant outcomes of the 2022 review was the need to establish a Domestic Abuse Strategy for Bermuda. This is now a priority for the MARAC team for the 2024 reporting year.

Mr. Chairman, one of the recommendations of the SafeLives review was the hiring of a domestic abuse specialist. The required approvals for this position have been granted with the expectation that recruitment for this specialist will occur within the upcoming months. In collaboration with the Centre Against Abuse, this individual will promote education and community awareness about domestic abuse and offer case management, support, crisis intervention and safety planning.

Mr. Chairman, one of the key priorities for the MARAC is the commitment to increasing domestic abuse awareness amongst professionals, focusing on developing a shared understanding and language around domestic abuse and ensuring that survivors feel believed when they seek support. Mr. Chairman, this will be achieved through facilitating annual domestic abuse awareness training with agencies on the Island. In 2023 the department hosted a series of workshops on Domestic Abuse and the impact on children co-facilitated by the Centre Against Abuse and the Bermuda Police Service. In attendance were stakeholders from the department, magistrates, the panel members, the Coalition for the Protection of Children and the Bermuda Housing Corporation. With the onboarding of the domestic abuse specialist, we will be able to increase the number of workshops for professionals and the community through the year.

Mr. Chairman, the core MARAC team consists of representatives from the Department of Child and Family Services; the Bermuda Police Service, Domestic Violence Liaison and Vulnerable Persons section; the Centre Against Abuse, and Ageing and Disabilities Services. The team has been meeting weekly since April 2023 reviewing, assessing and implementing safety plans for high-risk domestic abuse and family violence cases referred to the team. Mr. Chairman, from April 2023 to January 2024, there have been 96 families referred to MARAC for review.

Mr. Chairman, it should be noted that of the Department of Child and Family Services total number of investigations for the year, 157 were for child exposure to family violence/domestic abuse. This is an increase from year-end 2022 where there were 139 investigations for child exposure to family violence/domestic abuse. Mr. Chairman, as a community we must be seriously concerned about these increasing numbers. Evidence from our cases and vast international research speak to the harmful effects of domestic abuse on the developing child.

Mr. Chairman, in primary school age children you may see some of the same indicators that were just mentioned, but you may also see aggression and difficulty in peer relationships in school, difficulty focusing in class, emotionally withdrawing or even presenting with aggressive behaviour in the home and school environments that parents and teachers are significantly challenged managing. This in turn impacts the learning of other children in the class. Mr. Chairman, in older children and teens you may also see an increase in antisocial behaviour, aggressiveness, depression, anxiety, self-harming behaviour and aggression in their peer/dating relationships. Mr. Chairman, we as a community have to always be cognisant that from birth and even in utero, children learn and are shaped by everything in their environment.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I would like to thank the Administration Section of the Department of Child and Family Services for their leadership during [2023].

Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for business unit 33130, Grant Funding, for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $546,000 which remains unchanged from the 2023/24 budget allocation. Mr. Chairman, the grant funding, as shown on page C-21, provides $375,000 to Teen Services/Teen Haven, $75,000 for a cross-ministry initiative to assist families in crisis and $96,000 to support the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now discuss the subjective analysis of current account estimates for the Department of Child and Family Services, Salaries. Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated for salaries is $10,245,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, an increase of $393,000, or 4 per cent, more than the original budget for fiscal year 2023/24. The increase in salary expenses is largely due to salary uplifts, coupled with a net increase of one full-time equivalent.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for wages is $176,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, compared to just $5,000 for fiscal year 2023/24, representing an increase of $171,000. This is due to the reclassification of expenses related to weekly paid employees. For fiscal year 2023/24 all wage expenses were included within the salaries budgets with the exception of business unit 33200, Counselling and Life Skills. For fiscal year 2024/25 the wages for two BIU posts within Happy Valley Child Care Centre (totalling $112,000) and one post within the Brangman Home ($59,000) are now separated out from salaries and allocated to the respective wages budget.

The budget expenditures for line items Other Personnel Costs, Training and Transport have remained unchanged from fiscal year 2023/24 to fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, total Travel expenses have been budgeted at $246,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, an increase of $39,000, or 19 per cent, over fiscal year 2023/24. This increase is largely due to the new Child Safeguarding programme of which travel expenses account for $31,000. The travel is necessary for children to be escorted overseas for assessments. The Mirrors and Family Preservation programmes together account for the additional $8,000 to cover workshop and training camp facilitators.

Mr. Chairman, Communications, inclusive of phones, courier and postal costs, are budgeted at $188,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, which represents a $4,000, or 2 per cent, reduction of the budget allocation for fiscal year 2023/24. This decrease is due to a total reduction of funding for telephone equipment rental costs and the cost of overseas calls of $11,000 for the Youth Development Centre and Youth Residential Treatment Centre. This reduction in funding was offset by a $7,000 budget allocation for telephone equipment rentals and local calls for the Transitional Living Programme.

The budget estimates for line items Advertising and Promotion remained unchanged from fiscal year 2023/24 to fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, Professional Services budgeted at $4,104,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, which represents an increase of $142,000. This is due to the new Child Safeguarding programme which has been granted a total of $61,000 to hire local and overseas consultants who will provide comprehensive clinical assessments. Also, $50,500 has been allocated to this programme to partially cover the costs of medical services such as medications and specialist services.

Additionally, the Transitional Living Programme has been granted $26,000 to hire a service provider as needed to cover shifts and/or to maintain the client monitoring of a 1:1 ratio. And $6,000 has been allocated for specialist psychological services for clients in fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Rentals for budget year 2024/25 is $1,690,000, an increase of $275,000, or 19 per cent, over budget year 2023/24. This increase will cover the leasing costs of the Garrison Building in St. George's, which houses the Transitional Living Programme.

The budget estimates for line items Repair and Maintenance and Insurance have remained unchanged from fiscal year 2023/24 to fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, for fiscal year 2024/25 the Energy budget has been allocated $304,000, representing a $38,000, or 14 per cent, increase over fiscal year 2023/24. Almost 95 per cent of the increase will cover the costs of electricity at the Transitional Living Programme, with 5 per cent being attributable to small increases to cover electricity expenses by other programmes.

Mr. Chairman, for fiscal year 2024/25, a total of $181,000 has been budgeted for Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry expenses. This is a $6,000, or 3 per cent, increase that will cover the costs of clothing for children within the new Child Safeguarding programme.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Materials and Supplies for fiscal year 2024/25 is $376,000, representing a $6,000, or 2 per cent, increase over the 2023/24 budget allocation. The $5,000 increase is due to additional assessment materials that will be purchased by the Counselling and Life Skills programme. The balance is attributable to very minor increases to cover the costs of office supplies.

The budget estimates for line items Equipment (Minor Capital) and Other Expenses have remained unchanged from fiscal year 2023/24 to fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the amount allocated for Grants and Contributions for fiscal year 2024/25 is $1,136,000, representing a $200,000, or 15 per cent, reduction in funding from fiscal year 2023/24. The decrease is attributable to less funding being allocated to foster care fees. Mr. Chairman, as shown on page C-21, $590,000 has been allocated to cover foster care fees. Average expenditure for foster care fees over the past five years has been roughly $518,000.

Mr. Chairman, Employee Numbers and Full-time Equivalents. On page B-296 you will note that there are 106 full-time equivalent positions for the Department of Child and Family Services for fiscal year 2024/25. This is an increase of one full-time equivalent compared to fiscal year 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our presentation for Head 23, the Department of Child and Family Services. At this time I would like to thank all of the staff within the Department for their dedication and commitment to the children and families of Bermuda. While it may seem to be the most thankless profession, the impact each staff member has when assisting those they come in contact with is priceless.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Is there—

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I have more. I have one more head.

HEAD 55—DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now present the estimates of expenditure and revenue for Head 55, the Department of Financial Assistance, which can be found on pages B-301 through B-304 and C-21 of the Budget Book. Mr. Chairman, the role of the Department of Financial Assistance [DFA] is to ensure that individuals with insufficient financial resources have access to services in order to gain, maintain or regain a minimum standard of living, while encouraging personal and economic independence. The services enable the individual to maintain dignity and self-worth, and encourage the development of personal skills and resources. The department derives its mandate from the following legislation: Financial Assistance Act 2001, Financial Assistance Regulations 2004, Child Day Care Allowance Act 2008 and the Child Day Care Allowance Regulations 2008.

The mission of the Department of Financial Assistance is *To assist vulnerable Bermudians to maintain a minimum standard of living during challenging economic times*, as indicated on page B-301. The department embodies this mission, and the ethos is very clear when delivering its mandate. The Government is committed to reducing poverty and inequality in Bermuda and will strengthen the support to families in an effort to assist them in becoming self-sustaining. Building a stronger community will result in a safer and more confident nation.

Mr. Chairman, Financial Assistance is intended to assist with partial or full financial awards, in accordance with legislation, for such items as

- food;
- rent;
- rest and nursing home fees;
- utilities;
- health insurance;
- disability services;
- home care;
- child day care allowance.

Approval for financial assistance is based on proven need and a *means test*. This means test will assess the basic needs for a household to sustain monthly obligations either in whole or in part. Eligible and qualified clients in receipt of financial assistance and child day care allowance are categorised in one of the following five main categories:

1. Pensioners;
2. Disabled;
3. Earnings-Low Employed;
4. Abled-Bodied and Unemployed; and

5. Child Day Care Allowance.

As of January 2024, the largest category of persons in need of financial assistance pertained to Pensioners and represented 52 per cent of total persons in receipt of financial assistance. The next highest category was Persons with a Disability at 37 per cent, then Persons Employed with Insufficient Earnings at 6 per cent, followed by Able-bodied Unemployed Persons at 5 per cent. There were approximately 218 children being supported in the Child Day Care Allowance Programme during the same period.

Mr. Chairman, the monthly average number of new applications received by the department currently stands at 59. The vetting process for each new application is meticulous and extensive, as information is requested from third parties such as landlords, rest and nursing homes, financial institutions and other government departments to ensure applicants are accurately means tested. The officers of the department adhere to a turnaround timeframe of approximately two to three weeks from the time of receipt of each new application to completion of the vetting process. This strict timeframe ensures that the needs of the public are prioritised and financial assistance relief is provided within the shortest possible time. Whilst vetting new applications, the department continues to successfully service all existing eligible financial assistance and child day care allowance clients without interruptions.

Mr. Chairman, the department objectives can be found on page B-301. The first objective is *To improve operational, financial and legal compliance functions aimed at enhancing efficiencies and detecting financial assistance fraud.* It is the intent that a robust and consistent approach to monitoring risk and enabling compliance will support a sustainable compliance and regulatory framework. This objective is critical to the department, given that legislation guides the core operational and financial activities of the department.

The Department of Financial Assistance must ensure that all actions and transactions as performed by all officers comply with the department's legislation and any other legislation that impacts the nature of the service provided. Based on the nature of the service delivered by the department, there are no known documented typologies or red flags that the department can refer to in identifying corrupt practices except for enhanced *Know your customer* (KYC). Therefore, the department's compliance frameworks (listed next in no specific order) are used as indicators in identifying, understanding, assessing and monitoring potential risks of fraud and abuse of the system:

- department policies, procedures and legislation;
- government contract management practice;
- investigations and legislative compliance;
- audit specific to Office of the Auditor General and Department of Internal Audit;
- a governance structure that reinforces management's message of honesty and integrity;
- recent trends and practices as observed by law enforcement agencies and other professional authorities.

The department will continue to provide training to officers, aimed at enhancing value-added capability to the current system, and aid in robust technical solutions when addressing areas of concern. As a result, the department continues to integrate the management of risk into its strategic and operational management system and to place emphasis on leadership, governance, processes, actions, and controls with positive results.

The second objective is *To sustainably manage operating cost of awards to financial assistance clients.* This compliance process [just described] facilitates the investigative, legislative, financial and operational sections of the department to identify and prevent areas of potential fraud, abuse of the financial assistance system and overpayments to clients. Improvements can be measured by a more efficient turnaround of case referrals to the Attorney General's Chambers, random audit of client cases to detect any areas of concerns, identifying red flags of possible fraud during assessments, and deploying preventative measures to manage the cost of awards in accordance with legislation and budgetary constraints. Evidence of this approach can also be garnered from the recent findings of the Consolidated Fund audit, whereby there were no major audit exit conference point deficiencies as it pertains to the department.

The third objective is *To apply internationally recognised standard of care when managing relationships with financial assistance clients*. The department continues to be guided by the National Association of Social Workers practices when managing relationships with financial assistance clients. In addition, the department collaborates with other licensed and/or accredited entities to provide supportive services such as health care assessments, psychological/psychiatric assessments, substance use disorder assessments and care placements. During the fiscal year 2023/24, the department has made strides in fortifying these collaborations, and this will be explained further in the Financial Assistance Social Workers section of this brief.

The fourth objective is *To leverage collaboration with other government departments in achieving digitisation*. The department will continue to collaborate with the Department of Information and Digital Technology on the introduction of digital forms for persons making an application for financial assistance. The intent is to connect the public service with the people of Bermuda through comprehensive, secure and accessible digital forms. Modern innovative digital technology facilitates internal efficiency and effectiveness and mobile working conditions. It is hoped that data-gathering and reporting are expected to be less onerous in the very near future. This will improve the department's data analytics function and risk management.

Mr. Chairman, Performance Measures for the department can be found on page B-304 and demonstrate to stakeholders and citizens the achievement of public value to a vulnerable population group. These performance measures are deliberately concise and precise, as they focus on measuring outcomes from the department objectives and other business improvements to better articulate the ability of the department in achieving effectiveness and service delivery.

In accordance with page B-304, [some examples follow]:

1. Reduce recoverable debt from prior year. This allows the department to eliminate waste and control budgeted amounts by effectively dealing with financial assistance fraud and to reduce abuse of the system and overpayment of funds. The original forecast for 2023/24 was to reduce recoverable debt by 15 per cent from the prior year, and the revised forecast remains the same. The cybersecurity matter in 2023 prevented access to the department's database which impacted the investigative officers' ability to retrieve and follow up on outstanding debts. However, the investigative officers remain committed and continue to collaborate with Attorney General 's Chambers in the pursuit of legal recourse.

2. Reduce number of able-bodied and/or earnings-low clients from the prior year. The department provides a financial assistance award foundation that allows able-bodied unemployed, and earnings-low clients to become employed or employable without losing all financial assistance benefits. This has led to clients becoming employed, financially independent and not dependent on financial assistance. Additionally, the department will continue to strengthen relationships with external agencies and resource centres as a means to complement the department's goal in addressing any chronic emotional and psychological issues that may contribute to barriers to self-sustainability, psychological well-being and financial independence. Collaboration with the Department of Workforce Development has proven to be successful, whereby the use of personal employment plans encouraged client participation in employment opportunities that led to avenues for recipients becoming financially independent.

The original and revised forecast for 2023/24 was based on the hope that with continual review and formulation of strategy, 10 per cent of clients who fall under the categories of able-bodied unemployed and earnings-low at fiscal year-end will have transitioned out of financial assistance and into sustainable work with independent living conditions. At the time of writing this brief it is anticipated that this target will be exceeded.

3. Reduce the number of legitimate client complaints from the prior year. This is aimed at improving service quality. The department addresses legitimate client complaints in a timely and efficient manner without compromising professionalism. For both its revised forecast 2023/24 and target outcomes for 2024/25, the department will be benchmarked against a 50 per cent reduction of reported legitimate client complaints. Complaints, or in many instances issues, that are either raised at the departmental level or directed toward the Minister's office are responded to in an efficient, fact-based, and timely manner. The department will continue to reinforce a work ethic of customer centricity and aim at delivering consistent and professional service standards toward the delivery of excellence at both the front end and back end, consistently and professionally.

4. Reduce number of Review Board appeals from the prior year. A Financial Assistance Review Board is appointed to hear appeals against the Director's decisions to

- refuse application for an award;
- impose special conditions on an award;
- suspend in whole or in part an award;
- vary an award;
- revoke an award; or
- require repayment of any sum of money in accordance with legislation.

On any appeal, the Board may confirm, vary or reverse the decision which is the subject of the appeal. Notice of the board's determination, together with a statement of its reasons, shall be given to the appellant and to the Director; and unless the board otherwise directs, the determination shall come into operation when the notice is given. Therefore, this performance measure is aimed at improving the overall administration of the Financial Assistance Act, Regulations and policy. The reduction in number of legitimate client complaints, as previously discussed, led to a positive correlation which resulted in only two registered appeals in 2023/24, compared to four from the prior year. In both cases, the review board supported the decision taken by the Director.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25 is estimated to be $54,121,000, as shown on page B-302. This amount remains unchanged from the prior fiscal year's original budget for 2023/24. Mr. Chairman, there is no capital expenditure estimated for fiscal year 2024/25, as shown on page C-16. The capital budget of $29,000 that was appropriated in the prior year 2023/24 was used for its intended purposes. That is, two photocopiers that reached the end of their useful lives were replaced. Replacement was necessary as the lack of efficiency with the current machines impacted the productivity of the department and significantly hampered the processes used for client intake and assessments. In addition, $5,000 of unspent capital budget from fiscal year 2022/23 was requested for carry-

forward into 2023/24 to cover system-related issues with regard to the department's IT software.

Mr. Chairman, the department conducts frequent reviews of resource utilisation so as to identify any structural deficiencies and capability gaps. This House will be aware that the Speech from the Throne 2022 highlighted new Financial Assistance reform initiatives that resulted in amendments to the Child Day Care Allowance Act 2008, Child Day Care Regulations 2008, Financial Assistance Act 2001 and Financial Assistance Regulations 2004. These amendments are aimed at expanding the pool of parents who can qualify for Child Day Care Allowance and provide social protection systems that will guarantee all families, regardless of their current economic standing, access to resources that allow them to meet their basic needs.

In addition, Financial Assistance reform will assist households requiring immediate assistance with expenses to meet short-term needs. As a result, these initiatives will grant easier accessibility and eligibility to Child Day Care Allowance and Financial Assistance. Therefore, it is anticipated that this will result in an even higher number of application submissions. With all of these factors taken into consideration, the department's capacity to deliver its service will need to be managed. As such, Cabinet approved five new positions to manage the increase in service deliverables. These five new positions represent a new Financial Assistance Team that comprises four Financial Assistance officers and one Financial Assistance manager. In addition, Cabinet approved the abolishment of one vacant position to facilitate the creation of these new positions. Therefore, this variance of four as shown on page B-303 is as [just explained]. For fiscal year 2024/25, the total full-time equivalent count is 38 funded substantive positions. These numbers are also shown on page B-303.

Expenditure and Subjective Analysis

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The 2024/25 budget estimates are listed as two business units and are shown on page B-302. They are 65050, Grants Administration; and 65080, General Administration. Mr. Chairman, business unit 65050, Grants Administration, is estimated at $49,643,000, as shown on pages B-302 and C-21. This is a reduction of $365,000, or less than 1 per cent, from the prior year. As the total budget ceiling for the Department of Financial Assistance remains unchanged from the prior fiscal year 2023/24, the Department of Financial Assistance will effectively manage and closely monitor the funding pool as payments are made to its clients. Additionally, every effort will be made to collaborate with the Department of Workforce Development to provide clients access to job opportunities.

Specifically, the funds under business unit 65050 are earmarked for the following financial assistance programmes:

- $46,913,000 will be used to maintain the financial assistance programme;
- $2,100,000 will be used to maintain the Child Day Care Allowance Programme; and
- $630,000 will be used to maintain the Short-Term Relief Programme, for which legislation is currently being drafted and expected to take effect early in the new fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the total estimate for business unit 65080, General Administration, for 2024/25 is $4,478,000, as shown on page B-302. This is an increase of $365,000, or 9 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis is found on the same page as follows and explains the breakdown in expenditure for business unit 65080.

Mr. Chairman, as previously explained under Manpower, Salaries increased by five new positions for a total of $481,000. One position was abolished, causing a decrease of $111,000. Also, a two-year salary upliftment of $159,000 has been factored in. Therefore, the net change in salaries shows an increase of $529,000 from the prior fiscal year.

Professional Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate of $473,000 consists of funding for two service providers to manage the new short-term relief programme—one service provider to manage the anticipated increase in payments and administration, and reserve funding to accommodate the need for additional office space due to an increased headcount. This reflects an overall decrease of $195,000 due to a reduced need to hire local consultants as new positions were created under Salaries.

Materials and Supplies. Mr. Chairman, the increase in materials and supplies of $28,000 from the prior fiscal year is due to anticipated higher operational expenditure to accommodate the Short-Term Relief Programme, Financial Assistance reform measures and overall price increases due to inflation. Specifically, this increase comprises increased costs for office supplies, printing, food supplies and computer software-related expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, the increase in Minor Furniture and Fixtures for equipment of $2,000 will facilitate minor purchases due to ageing and obsolete equipment. Mr. Chairman, the department will continue to identify key levers of success and failures, whilst deploying short-term planning cycles and an agile forecasting tool during this time of uncertainty.

Investigations

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the department's investigative officers continue to conduct investigations and pursue individuals or entities that commit fraud and abuse of the system. For instance, the following two case studies are based on actual events and are

provided to give an inside look on the nature and types of fraud and abuse that are being committed by persons in receipt of financial assistance, and the work required by the department:

Case Study 1, Fraud: Unreported Income

Hon. Tinee Furbert: In 2023, the department was notified by the public of a client that was gainfully employed in the hospitality sector whilst in receipt of financial assistance. In accordance with legislation, any changes to a client's circumstances must be reported to the department. An investigation and examination of the evidence was conducted by the department's investigative officers, and this investigation revealed that the client received in excess of $19,000 under eight months. The client deliberately failed to disclose this income to the department and thereby was in wilful breach of the law. Reporting this income to the department would have had an impact on the client's reassessment and would have changed the circumstances for subsequent awards paid to this client. Recovery of the financial assistance overpayments made to this client is currently being pursued by the department.

Case Study 2, Fraud: Suspicion of Money Laundering

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The department's Investigation and Compliance Unit cooperates with Bermuda's law enforcement agencies and, by extension, other jurisdictions for mutual legal assistance when analysing and investigating suspicious transactions or money-laundering crimes. For example, an eligible financial assistance client was flagged and detained before exiting the Island whilst carrying an undisclosed amount of foreign cash. In accordance with legislation, any recipient of Financial Assistance shall notify the department of their intention to travel outside of Bermuda. An investigation into the client's travel activity determined travel occurred regularly and on multiple occasions. Suspicion of micro-structuring, a method of money laundering, is currently being investigated by Bermuda's law enforcement authority.

Mr. Chairman, at the time of this brief, there were active cases under investigation for which the total reimbursable amount due to the government was $359,466. This comprises 43 active cases that were referred to the Attorney General's Chambers, and six cases that are currently under the remit of the department's investigative officers. Again, these cases are as a result of fraudulent activity or abuse of the system and result in overpayments made to financial assistance clients.

Suspicious activities are brought to the department's attention via certain channels such as investigative officers' field investigations, the department staff observations, internal findings and tips from the public. During the fiscal year 2023/24, the department received on average seven tips per month. Primary and secondary data research is conducted within a compliance framework to ensure evidence gathered can be used for legal redress. The framework used is guided by the department's legislation, policies, and procedures; the Criminal Code; and current trends and practices observed in law enforcement.

Mr. Chairman, the public can report incidents of Financial Assistance fraud on the department's hotline on 297-7867 (STOP).

Financial Assistance Social Workers

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, throughout fiscal year 2023/24, the Financial Assistance [FA] Social Workers continued to streamline internal processes. Specifically, the process for the submission of client progress reports by residential mental health treatment facilities was addressed to ensure continuity of care for clients served, and [to ensure] that the process for a client's *step-down* to a lesser level of care was efficiently facilitated when deemed appropriate.

The FA social workers continued to work collaboratively with the Bermuda Health Council to validate the bed capacity of each of the rest and nursing homes. Through this collaboration, the Bermuda Health Council initiated their inspections of all rest and nursing homes, which commenced in September 2023. The inspections will include addressing any required bed capacity adjustments.

Collaborative Partnerships

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, during the fiscal year 2023/24, the FA social workers continued to reinforce and expand both *intra* and *inter* departmental/agency partnerships and collaboration. Increased collaboration occurred between FA social workers, King Edward VII Memorial Hospital social workers, and Ageing and Disability Services social workers. Partnership expansion and strengthening efforts will continue by scheduling ongoing collaboration meetings on a quarterly or bi-annual basis with respective partners/stakeholders.

The FA social workers collaborated with the Salvation Army to support persons with housing challenges. FA social workers visited the facility to survey the existing accommodations as well as the newly built container homes. In addition, the FA social workers were able to brainstorm with the programme's executive director on potential options for financial assistance support.

The Department of Financial Assistance collaborated with the Department of Child and Family Services [DCFS] as they prepared to open a new residential facility in St. George's. The facility houses those former DCFS foster care clients who aged out of the

system. FA staff toured the facility to assess potential financial assistance that could be provided to eligible programme participants and assist with supportive programming and services to enable the young men and women to become self-sustaining and productive citizens. The FA social workers continued to participate in Drug Treatment Court (DTC) and Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Court-facilitated interagency collaboration.

The department collaborated with the Department of Immigration, Department of Health, Ageing and Disability Services and the Bermuda Government's London Office to coordinate the return of an FA client back to Bermuda. The client, who has intellectual disabilities and chronic health conditions, was successfully repatriated and placed in a suitable facility upon arrival. Other inter-agency collaborations like this one continued throughout the fiscal year, resulting in successful repatriations. The FA social workers participated in monthly collaboration meetings with the Department of Health [DOH] Community Social Workers, the Department of Health Community Nurse and the Case Management Supervisor for Ageing and Disability Services to share general department updates, address any concerns or challenges, and identify common client trends to serve clients more effectively.

Case Referrals

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, FA social workers' workflow trends continue to be highly concentrated on case conferences, case discussions and individual counselling. Overseas medical transfers averaged between five to eight per month, with longer stays due to more acute medical conditions and subsequent care being required. The FA social workers pre-screen support serves as a mechanism to facilitate the application process, specifically for pensioners and individuals with disabilities. Ongoing crisis intervention counselling continued with an upward trend. This crisis counselling provided interim psychological support following an acute or traumatic event. This support aided in stabilising the client's symptoms and facilitated the coordination of long-term care based on the assessed need.

Case conferences and case discussions continued to be utilised as an effective tool to ensure that comprehensive service/care plans were developed and executed. The FA social workers continued to increasingly participate in multidisciplinary complex case conferences with the Health Insurance Department, the Community Social Worker team, Prison Services, BHC [Bermuda Housing Corporation] and other relevant stakeholders to establish comprehensive strategies to address complex, multifaceted issues including clients with chronic mental health disorders.

Community Outreach and Support

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the department attended an open house hosted by Focus Counselling Services to strengthen community partnerships. The open house presentation identified the organisation's objective of supporting men and women with substance use disorder. The FA social workers continued to conduct site visits of rest and nursing homes throughout the fiscal year to survey each of the facilities to ensure that the FA clients served are in safe and healthy environments, are receiving appropriate services/programming and are receiving quality care. During the fiscal year 2023/24, the Department of Financial Assistance purchased school clothing (summer and winter) for over 40 clients with school-aged children. This activity involved the preparation and payments of over 200 purchase orders, the order and collection of clothes and shoes from various Bermuda retail stores and distribution to the parents before the start of the 2023/2024 school year.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Financial Assistance and the Department of Education continue to collaborate on a joint ministerial initiative that was forged to facilitate the transfer of three-year-old children who received financial assistance into the Bright Start Programme. This programme was intended to provide two years of high-quality learning experiences through a progressive 21st century teaching and learning experience and to address one of the five priority areas of Bermuda's Strategic Plan for Public Education. This initiative continues.

The Department of Financial Assistance continues to collaborate with the Department of Parks in providing health insurance coverage for participants in the Skills Development Programme. The programme is intended to provide hands-on skills to promote the enhancement of knowledge, skills and experience to facilitate the possibility of securing employment. This initiative reduces the need for dependency on financial assistance.

Major Legislative Changes

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, as part of Financial Assistance reform, amendments to the Financial Assistance Act 2001 and Financial Assistance Regulations 2004 will take effect in April 2024. The department's staff have been trained, and the department's dedicated software has been configured to accommodate these changes. Also, as part of Financial Assistance reform, legislation for the short-term relief programme is expected to be finalised and will take effect within the new fiscal year of 2024/25. A resource audit is currently being performed to ensure the department is prepared for the implementation of this new programme in 2024/25.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the department will continue to collaborate with the Department of Workforce Development to encourage participation in employment opportunities to create avenues for recipients to become financially independent. The creation and monitoring of personal employment plans will continue to be deployed. The department will continue to improve and reengineer existing systems that will facilitate operational and performance enhancements when conducting investigations, compliance, transaction monitoring and evaluation. The department will conduct and regularise PIPA impact assessments to ensure compliance with legislation. Revisiting and revising policies and procedures to ensure alignment with legislation is ongoing and will continue in 2024/25.

Lastly, documenting Financial Assistance fraud typologies will enable the department's officers to have a point of reference in identifying patterns, trends and red flags of fraud and abuse in the system. In turn, this can reduce overpayments and enable a culture of compliance.

Mr. Chairman, staff at the Department of Financial Assistance continues to demonstrate professionalism and commitment to support disadvantaged and vulnerable Bermudians. For this, I continue to recognise and applaud the hard work and dedicated actions demonstrated by this department.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 55, the Department of Financial Assistance, and my presentation for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

For the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the 2024/25 budget. This is a four-hour debate. We are now on hour three and a half. So, we have 30 minutes left in this debate.

Is there anybody who would like to speak to these heads?

The Chair recognises MP Susan Jackson.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

And before I get started, and I will get directly into questions, but I want to acknowledge a couple of things. One, the very hard work of this Ministry. It is unbelievable the amount of programmes and effort and work that go into it. And I must absolutely give all acknowledgement to the Minister for her hard work in keeping that Ministry going.

I would also like to, on the eve of International Women's Day, just make a note that we have the two women sitting in the House debating today. I just want to acknowledge it. And certainly, it shows that in Bermuda in the House of Assembly we have some semblance of inclusion.

I am going to get right to the questions that I have. I am going to begin on page B-288, Head 86, which is the Ministry Headquarters. I just want to take a look at some of the objectives that are listed here. And two of them that I am seeing are progressing very well. But I would like to ask the Minister a couple of questions. One is the second objective, which is to create partnerships that allow for better coordinated services. And I would like to ask the Minister what is being done now to really start to engage and look at how we can better coordinate the system of social services in Bermuda so that we are being more effective and more efficient in the delivery of our services?

My second question is around . . . and I am not sure it is in the objectives with this. But I am interested in the digitisation and the data collection of all of the departments within the Ministry and what the Minister and the Ministry are doing to make sure that we are able to have computer systems that are able to integrate and speak to each other so that we have a more comprehensive look at what the different activities are within the Ministry and how the case management and the client experience are more comprehensive. What I am really getting at, Mr. Chairman, is that this is our opportunity to do things differently. And I would like to ask the Minister what she envisions doing differently now that she has so many departments that are somewhat coordinated and comprehensive around the social services. And we have that opportunity to do something different.

So, if I move over to . . . I mean, I just keep flipping through because there is not a lot of time. It is going to be a little all over it. But on page B-289, still on Head 86, we have the new services of business unit 96100, which is the Youth Services and the Before, After Out of School programmes. I would like to know whether the Minister, the Ministry, is going to make accommodation to meet an increased demand for, in particular, the After-School Programme. It is a very popular programme. Parents like it. The children like it. But the demand when it is time to enrol in the After-School Programme is wild crazy and can be almost a desperate act for many of our parents.

So now that the [Honourable Minister] has the programme within her department, her Ministry, whether she will be able to take a look at the programme overall and how it may be expanded, or we may be able to increase the number of children who can be enrolled in the After-School Programme.

And then going to move on to page B-292, and this is . . . (one moment please) I am going to move on from the Ministry Headquarters. Before I do, there is not a line item for this. I believe that it came under page B-289, Administration, business unit 96000. And that is the Litigation Guardian programme. I am just curious if the Minister can let us know how many litigation guardians you have in total so far. (And apologies if I missed that in the comprehensive brief.) And how many cases

have used the services of a litigation guardian this past year? I believe that is it under the Ministry Headquarters for now.

And if I may be able to now move on to Head 23, Child and Family Services, which is on page B-293, the Foster Care. It seems as though under the performance measures on page B-297 under Head 23, Child and Family Services, the performance measure under business unit 33030, Foster Care, is showing that the number of active foster parents fell in 2023/24, and it has not necessarily bounced back. And it looks as though we may be facing a trend of fewer foster parents. Might the Minister be able to confirm whether we are seeing decreases?

In actual fact, I did go back as far as 2019/20 where we had 78 foster parents, and then in 2022/23, we had 52 foster parents. And if the Minister may be able to answer why are we finding challenges with foster parents engaging? And I do not know whether foster parents are dropping out or if there is less demand for foster parents. But I would like it if we might be able to get some information on that.

Staying on Head 23, on page B-294, business unit 33110, the Youth Residential Treatment, the Minister mentioned that children are involved in the residential treatment between the ages of 12 and 18. And I am just curious, where do the children under the age of 12 go? And I remembered that we had the Sunshine League, but that is now gone. So, I just did not know what we were doing to support our young children who may need residential living and they are under the age of 12.

On page B-294, the business unit 33140, that is the Mirrors Programme. And if we look at the numbers, there is a minor reduction in their budget. But when we move over to the performance measures on page B-299, the Mirrors Programme has a number, I mean just a long list of programmes and percentage of people, and so on, that are being discontinued. And so I mean, the Mirrors Programme has been such a valuable part of our community. And it looks as though it is slowly being reduced in size. And I would like if the Minister can kind of give some indication as to why we are reducing it so much. It is these kinds of programmes and that form of methodology that really if integrated throughout our social services I believe could have a real marked effect on these performances of our young people, in particular and our parents.

So, I would love to see or know why it seems as though the Mirrors Programme is reducing instead of expanding.

[Pause]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: (Just looking at my notes.)

If we may now just move into seniors, I have a couple of questions which will have to go back to Headquarters because they do not really have multi-page departments as yet. So, page B-289, and this would be line item, business unit 96040, Ageing and Disability Services. There are not that many people working. The employees on page B-290 are showing as an increase of four staff members at Ageing and Disability Services, which brings the total to 11. My question to the Minister is what are we going to do given the very rapid increase in those who are reaching the age of retirement and the age of becoming a senior at 65, 68? And what is the department looking to do to make accommodation for this increase?

Certainly, the Minister gave a very comprehensive list of a number of responsibilities that the Ageing and Disability Services staff have. And so at some point I can imagine that it will become somewhat overwhelming to achieve and really make any progress if they are stretched very thin. So, I am curious to know what will be done to accommodate and make room for additional services with the ageing at home and the National Seniors Strategy and being able to actually . . . as opposed to just having awareness and committees and conferences and . . . but what will be done to actually implement or introduce services?

And in the same regard under Seniors, Head 86 on page B-289, this is business unit 96040 under Ageing and Disability Services, I am very curious [about] the progress of the Office of the Public Guardian. And this has been an initiative that has been in the PLP Administration's Throne Speech for years. It is certainly something that I believe many people in Bermuda would like to see. And yet it seems as though every year we are continuing to plan, continuing to get ready. So how much has actually progressed in this? Has the Ministry drafted legislation? Have there been any real deliverables under the Office of the Public Guardian theme so that we can move this along and actually have it started?

Now, I understand that there was a consultant who was working to help to develop this Office of the Public Guardian. And I am wondering if the Minister might be able to give us some update on what the accomplishments or the achievements of that consultant, any consultant, have been to date and possibly a timeline when we might see some movement on the development of the Office of the Public Guardian.

I am still on Head 86 under Seniors, and it is page B-303, business unit 65080. There is a performance measure on page B-304 (sorry, guys), and it is around fraud. And the statistics are saying that we have a relatively small percentage as far as being able to really capture what is happening there. (Excuse me. I am just moving to that page, moving very quickly through these questions.) And this is actually under Financial Assistance. But for me, I am concerned about seniors who may be involved in this. So, I may have that one a little out of context, so I will leave that one alone. (Sorry, Minister and the Chairman.)

And I am going to take my seat and see whether there are any answers to those questions.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Jackson.

Are there are any other Members who would like to speak to these heads?

With there being nobody else wanting to speak to the heads, Minister, did you want to answer some of these questions?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to my honourable colleague for those questions. And I apologise in advance if I get them out of order in answering the questions.

As far as there was a question to the Ministry objectives which was creating partnerships that allow for better coordinated services which are more synergistic with Government's social initiatives. The Financial Assistance, Department of Child and Family Services, the Mirrors Programme, Ageing and Disability Services and the Office of Legal Affairs do a lot of collaborative work that I have mentioned throughout the budget brief in regard to the collaborative work that they are doing.

But also, I did want to mention that the Ministry has taken the initiative to meet quarterly with the third sector in our community. We started off meeting quarterly as when this Ministry was initiated. And we are actually meeting bi-annually to get an idea, as regard to our social services sector, in regard to what the third sector is doing and how we can best meet the community of our social ills. So as Financial Assistance has now come on board, it has followed the Mirrors as well as the Office of Youth Affairs, we expect more collaborative work to be occurring in cohesion with moving initiatives forward.

There was a question in regard to accommodation [in response] to increased demand for the After-School Programme. The After-School Programme has increased the numbers of placements available at existing sites. Though we have provided for an increase, additionally the Office of Youth Affairs is currently working with the Commissioner of Education and her team to identify and commence services at schools that do not have a programme. And this will also include preschools. I did also mention this in the budget brief as well.

There was a question in regard to digitisation of . . . I think we spoke about it as it related to Financial Assistance, as well as ADS [Ageing and Disability Services], where we spoke about the Financial Assistance forms. We are currently working on that so that they can be accessible to persons who are applying for Financial Assistance online. With ADS, our case management system is being digitised. And last year we integrated the KMCC [K. Margaret Carter Centre] client.

Additionally, the Department of Health leveraged ADS case management systems approximately three years ago when ADS was under Health where we also used firewalls that had been installed between ADS and the Department of Health. And as we have the ability to share client information as needed, so digitisation is being made available for our clients to access forms online, but also when ministries are having to talk to each other as well.

There was a question about the Litigation Guardians. I did mention in the brief that with the last budget year we had about 29 cases. And currently we have three litigation guardians. We have a consultant who works with us through the FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] who actually mentioned that we have more litigation guardians than we do have cases. And so, as we feel the need to increase our litigation guardian capacity, we do. But currently at the moment we have enough litigation guardians than we do have cases.

There was a question in regard to what we were doing to increase the staffing at Ageing and Disability Services. I think I also mentioned . . . Well, I know I mentioned in the brief that we recently under a review with Management Consultants, had the ability to . . . Cabinet approved four positions with ADS. They were very cognisant of the caseloads that ADS has, as well as what the ongoing current trends will be with our increased population of ageing persons. That we have been very progressive in making sure that we are budgeting and including the on boarding of staff to be able to deal with the potential caseloads that we may have within ADS.

There was a question in regard to foster parents. Unfortunately, we have been experiencing a reduction in foster families over recent years. This is due to children ageing out and the foster parents keeping the young adults and thus coming off of our active list, and fewer people responding to new foster parent recruitments. Actually in 2023, we held more recruitment drives than ever, and with limited success. The high commitment that comes with fostering and the stresses that people are facing in our community may be factors impacting new persons coming on board as a foster parent.

I will take this opportunity [with] our listening audience to encourage our community to consider being a foster parent.

I would just like to go back to the question in regard to after-school care. Because we have increased our capacity. I will actually give you some figures. Purvis and Francis Patton increased by 30 per cent. They averaged 70 to 75 students, and now both sites have close to 100 registered in both programmes. As well as the Central Zone schools were increased by 20. West Pembroke, Prospect and Paget were increased.

There was a question around, What are we doing with children who are under the age of 12 as it relates to residential treatment? Foster care used for children under 12 who require placement is a need. Hence, the urgent need for us to increase our foster parent pool because that is how we actually address having to have

someone to care for those persons who are under 12. We all know that Sunshine . . . we closed them many years ago. And that used to be a resource for us. But now we rely on our foster parents for our children who are under the age of 12. We do know that our children have better outcomes with families. And [they have] the ability to thrive when they are with foster parents.

Mr. Chairman, there was a question in regard to Mirrors when talking about their performance measures. And there was a note that many of the performance measures, deliverables, were discontinued. With Mirrors now coming under the Department of Child and Family Services, it is realigning its work to be more efficient in the delivery of services. And its focus is on building the capacity locally to do the work, which means training teachers, volunteers and facilitators, which means a decrease in the cost of consultants as we build skill sets locally. Community partners have supported in helping to reduce the overall costs. Transition into the new department has also allowed for some of the services (i.e., human resources) to be held at the Child and Family Services Department's head office.

There was a question around the Office of the Public Guardian. And I would just like to share that we have been meeting during this past month regarding this initiative, recognising a legal framework must be put in place which will in turn require legislation. We have been working closely with the Ministry of Legal Affairs, currently looking at an established Australian model to possibly model after. And so right now the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors and the Ministry of Legal Affairs are currently working to progress the Office of the Public Guardian in implementing this initiative. I cannot speak to the consultative work that was done, as that was performed under the Ministry of Legal Affairs. But I do know that our teams have been meeting to discuss the way forward with the Office of the Public Guardian.

There was a question in regard to . . . I can elaborate more in regard to our seniors and what we are doing. As our senior population increases, we are looking to support and accommodate that increase. Due to the increase in staffing that I mentioned before, the current focus of ADS is on improving staff-to-client ratios, as well as undergoing adult protection. To train and help fill the gap and provide support to persons 19 to 64 years. Additionally, ADS has increased their education awareness initiatives and are now reaching more seniors and vulnerable persons and providing them with the knowledge of knowing and understanding the signs of abuse. This in turn will better equip these vulnerable populations and their families with protecting themselves against abuse.

Programme staffing and services will continue to increase as we continue to pursue a phased approach for the 2022 Management Services Office review recommendations. I had also mentioned in the budget brief as well that we are piloting a dementia care services programme. And that is also assisting the Office of Ageing and Disability Services, particularly with more complex cases of persons who are experiencing dementia.

I believe I touched on all of the questions that were put forth.

The Chairman: We have two minutes left in this debate.

Is there anybody who would like to speak?

MP Jackson.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I have just one more question. Thank you.

I believe it was under Head 23, Child and Family Services, page B-294 under . . . I believe it was under programme 2304, Administration. You mentioned that there will be a domestic abuse specialist who will be brought on board. And I am just wondering. You had mentioned that the specialist would promote awareness and will be meeting with others within a larger group such as the police, et cetera. But I am also curious whether they will be involved with the drafting of any legislation, legislation to help define domestic violence in Bermuda.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Honourable Member, for that question.

The domestic violence liaison officer. In the brief it was pretty spelled out what they will be responsible for. They are actually going to be working closely with the Centre Against Abuse in dealing with case management, providing education in the community. They will not have policy analyst sort of role. So they will be working with, like again I said, with the Centre Against Abuse.

As it relates to legislation for domestic violence, that also will come under the Ministry of Legal Affairs. But we work closely. And we provide support to one another.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. If you can move your heads, as we have come to the end of this four-hour debate.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move that Heads 86, 23 and 55 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 86, 23 and 55 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

As there are no objections, agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Heads 86, 23 and 55 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.]

The Chairman: And that brings us to the end of our debate on Youth, Social Development and Seniors, which was a four-hour debate.

And I will recognise the Minister responsible for the Cabinet Office, who will enter into a four-hour debate for Heads 9, 13, 32, 43, 51, 61 and 80.

CABINET OFFICE

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads: Head 9, Cabinet Office; Head 13, Post Office; Head 32, Department of Planning; Head 43, Department of Information and Digital Technologies; Head 51, Department of Communications; Head 61, Department of Employee and Organizational Development; and Head 80, Project Management and Procurement be now taken under consideration.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

The Chairman: Very well, Minister. We will now place it into consideration.

If there is no objection to that motion?

There is none.

Go ahead, Minister.

HEAD 9—CABINET OFFICE

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Cabinet Office operates at the centre of the public service providing leadership, advice and guidance to ensure delivery of the Government's policies and services. This leadership continues to be seen in the fiscal discipline within the Cabinet Office and, Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 9, the Cabinet Office, found on pages B-42 through B-47 of the Budget Book. Mr. Chairman, the total expenditure as seen on page B-43 is estimated to be $12,171,000 for 2024/25 and represents a decrease of $19,592,000, or approximately 62 per cent, from the original budget of 2023/24. This decrease is mainly due to the transfer out to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport of the tourism grant of $19 million, the cultural and entertainment support grant of $540,000, as well as the Regulatory and Policy Hotel Administration unit of $386,000. The only increase for the department's budget not readily seen due to the significant decrease consists of salary uplifts in the amount of $334,000.

Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis for the Cabinet Office can be found on page B-44 of the Estimates Book. Please allow me to highlight the material object code increases as well as decreases.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Salaries, line item 1, estimated at $6,773,000, shows an increase of $24,000. Mr. Chairman, while not a material amount, the variance is worth mentioning to simply highlight that despite the mentioned salary uplift of $334,000, the transfer out of the Regulatory and Policy Hotel Administration unit minimises the increase.

Mr. Chairman, within wages, line item 2, there is an increase of $102,000, or 68 per cent, compared to 2023/24. This does not represent an overall increase to the department, but merely a transfer out from salaries to that of student employment wages to categorise internship within the London Office correctly.

Mr. Chairman, within Professional Services, line item 9, there is a decrease of $151,000, or 5 per cent, compared to 2023/24. The reduction was achieved through minor cuts throughout the various sections of the Cabinet Office. Mr. Chairman, although decreased, please allow me to briefly outline the main budgeted fees that contribute to the $2,711,000 we see stated here.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, digital transformation is essential to ensure that the Government of Bermuda can take fuller advantage of technology to better serve the public. The funds that were reserved for the implementation team will be used to support digital transformation within the government. And $750,000 remains budgeted within the Cabinet Office to commit to the engagement of specific resources to advance the digital transformation agenda that was outlined in the Budget Statement.

Mr. Chairman, the Foreign Consultancy contract included our [Washington,] DC lobbyists of $240,000; our Middle Eastern Affairs budget, which remains at $240,000, which will support increased engagement in the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] region. Our representative at the Brussels Office, $157,000, as well as the fees paid to Firehouse Communications and Dods within both the London and Brussels Offices.

Mr. Chairman, Firehouse Communications is a business and brands consultancy firm, and Dods is a political, intelligence and policy consultancy firm and is the UK's leading parliamentary monitoring firm. Mr. Chairman, Firehouse Communications continues to assist in proactively managing the Government's global public relations and international media engagement. As a reminder, in relation to Dods, the services that they provide relate to monitoring of the UK and European Parliament. In total, the fees for these services average about $178,000 annually.

Our foreign contracts also include our [Washington,] DC Office consultant, who receives an annual allocation of approximately $133,000. Mr. Chairman, regarding the mention of the Middle Eastern Affairs

consultancy, the engagement of which began in April of 2023, I would like to take a moment to present a quick summary of the completed UAE [United Arab Emirates] engagements to date.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: They are as follows:

- Established economic, cultural and trade ties, as well as laid the foundational relationship for commercial engagement with the UAE and Qatar.
- Positioned the recognition of Bermuda, relatively unknown in the UAE due to a lack of diplomatic presence, and this was built via outreach and Government bilateral engagement, including the organisation of media appearances such as the Premier's announcement on Dubai TV, as well as the Deputy Premier's podcast with Bloomberg.
- Arranged the UAE Government's first official delegate visit to Bermuda, organising both the agenda as well as planned site visits.
- Hosted bilateral meetings with the high-ranking Government Ministers across the UAE Government and associated entities.
- Developed a Foreign Direct Investment Strategy aligned to the Economic Development Strategy.
- Initial advancement and groundwork drafting made for the signing of the required international instruments between Bermuda and several GCC countries. And, Mr. Chairman, GCC stands for Gulf Cooperation Council, which was established by an agreement concluded on the 25th of May 1981 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, between Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- Developed and published the creation of an investment brochure targeting GCC- and COP28-related interests on behalf of the Ministry of Economy and Labour and the Bermuda Business Development Agency. And also, Mr. Chairman,
- Organised the MOU [memorandum of understanding] between the Ministry of Economy and Labour and the Emirates Family Office Association, which is in the process of setting up a Bermuda branch for 2024 for the four delegation visits.

Mr. Chairman, also included with Professional Services is the $125,000 set aside for the Wellness Programme, which we will touch on further within the brief, contained under those initiatives falling under the umbrella of the head of public service.

Mr. Chairman, finally, $120,000 has been set aside to fund the Public Sector Negotiating Team [PSNT]. These are non-public officers who represent the government at the negotiating table with our union partners. The PSNT is supported by senior public officers who are not members of their respective unions. They are charged with negotiating. Relatedly, in the industrial relations space, former industrial relations programmes and partnership activities will be strengthened to build on the successful round of negotiations concluded in fiscal 2023/24 with the Bermuda Industrial Union, the Bermuda Public Services Union, the Prison Officers Association, the Fire Services Association and the Bermuda Union of Teachers. Agreements were reached with all of these bodies in the best interests of the employees and the government.

The formal industrial relations activity planned for 2024/25 will include

- the identification of working groups to advance commitments reached as a part of the negotiations process; and
- formalising the Central Consultative Committee process and, where applicable, adding members who might add valuable contributions in partnering on employee programmes designed to reach specific members of various bargaining units.

We are committed to a productive and harmonious workplace.

Mr. Chairman, returning to the variances. The remaining material variance is seen in Grants and Contributions, the last line item which shows an allocation of $75,000 decreased by $19,540,000 from 2023/24. As mentioned earlier, this is due to the transfer out of the tourism grant of $19 million, along with the cultural and entertainment support grant of $540,000, now both more suitably housed with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Mr. Chairman, as highlighted on page C-17 of the Budget Book, the Cabinet Office continues to maintain the Natural Disaster/Hurricane relief fund, now at $25,000, as well as two youth grants amounting to $50,000 [which comprises] $25,000 to Future Leaders and $25,000 in education grants.

Mr. Chairman, also on page B-43, please note that the $114,000 increase being under programme 0902, Economic Policy and Foreign Affairs, is a result of minor operational increases throughout the foreign offices.

Overall reductions seen under the Subjective Analysis line items on page B-44 such as Professional Services, Rentals, and Repair and Maintenance lessen the impact of the Foreign Office increases and ensure no effect to the bottom line.

Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-45 in relation to employee numbers, we see a total decrease of three full-time equivalents in 2024/25 compared to the original FTE estimate of 2023/24. This results from the net effect of the transfer out of five FTEs, four within business unit 19065, Regulatory and Policy Hotel Administration transferred to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport; and one relating to the defunding of a vacant post within business unit 19015, Policy and Strategy.

These five reductions are netted against an increase within the General Administration business unit 19000. The funding of two vacancies, one PS post as well as one administrative assistant, resulted in the bottom line decrease of three FTEs.

You will note, however, that General Administration showed an increase of three as opposed to the stated two FTEs. Mr. Chairman, this additional FTE is merely an internal result of a transfer in of a post currently housed under business unit 19040, Ministry Administration, to the General Administration business unit, 19000. You will note that this serves as explanation for the decrease in business unit 19040. Again, Mr. Chairman, having no effect on the bottom line. Mr. Chairman, if we quickly turn back to page B-43, the same post transfer-out corresponds to the $90,000 decrease seen under programme 0903, Government Reform, business unit 19040, Ministry Administration.

Mr. Chairman, in relation to capital expenditure, you will note that in accordance with page C-4, there are no funds allocated for capital development for 2024/25 or within capital acquisition, as seen on page C-9.

Mr. Chairman, I shall now turn my attention to Performance Measures.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: The measures developed for the Cabinet Office are found on pages B-46 and B-47. Most of the measures outlined in 2023/24 have been or are anticipated to be realised by March 31, 2024, with continuance throughout the 2024/25 period. Mr. Chairman, kindly allow me to expound upon a few of the measures.

As shown on page B-46 within business unit 19015, Policy and Strategy [PSS], all targets were achieved in terms of response rate to both policy advice and service requests. Mr. Chairman, the unit also provided the following:

- training on making public policy to senior officers participating in the Executive Leadership Development Programme that forms part of the succession planning initiatives led by the Department of Employee and Organizational Development;
- strategic and technical guidance to the Cabinet Office as well as weekly support to the Public Service Executive to ensure proper reporting and ongoing process with public and administrative policy initiatives;
- strategic and technical advice on the development of public policies across ministries;
- training for officers via workshops on writing cabinet memorandums;
- valuable assistance to the Public Service Negotiating Teams during their latest round of negotiation with the six unions and/or associations representing the government workforce. The PSS ensured that negotiations with the Government for two of the negotiating entities were fully and accurately recorded and accounted for and provide strategic support, research and guidance as needed to the PSNTs including the lead negotiators; and
- technical and management support to the Project Management Office, which monitors, records and reports on the progress with the 30 initiatives contained in the Economic Recovery Plan.

PSS also performed the important function of Information Officer for the Cabinet Office, a function that ensured that the public authority, Cabinet Office, was compliant with its legal obligations as outlined in the Public Access to Information Act (PATI). Under the Act, all public authorities are required to report annually to the Information Commissioner's Office on the scope and status of PATI requests, as well as ensure that the information statement is accurate and current.

Mr. Chairman, as seen on page B-43, Policy and Strategy, business unit 19015, has been allocated $666,000 for 2024/25, a decrease of $53,000 below the current price. The decrease is mainly a result of the defunding of an administrative assistant post that became vacant during 2023/24, previously mentioned under the employee numbers explanation. With the 2024/25 allocation, the unit will continue to provide the necessary guidance and support outlined in the 2023/24 highlights.

Mr. Chairman, back to page B-46 under business unit 19020, Safety and Health.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: You will note that in 2023/24 two safety and health audits were undertaken. One audit involved an inspection of the Tynes Bay Facility that included a thorough examination of its past self-inspections, as well as an examination of the systems used to track implementation progress in addressing any identified issues. This review process is crucial, Mr. Chairman, in ensuring regulatory compliance, enhancing operational efficiency and maintaining safety standards at the power plant. The audit also included the following:

- reviewing manuals and operational procedures of the facility;
- reviewing an inventory of all fire equipment on site;
- discussing storm water management, and establishing and implementing practices for outside loading and unloading of liquid materials. This aims to prevent spills and contact between liquid materials and storm water runoff; finally, Mr. Chairman,
- reviewing the Contingency and Emergency Response Plan, focusing mainly on the steps

taken in emergency situations occurring during operations.

Mr. Chairman, looking at the second measure, safety policies and programmes development to enhance safety management systems, I am pleased to report that there has been an increase in safety communications sent out to health and safety committees to help re-energise participation. Feedback from the materials shared monthly has been positive from the departments. For the year 2023, the Drug and Alcohol Procedures and Guidance document was focused on. The Drug and Alcohol policy has been approved, with next steps ensuring that the National Drug Control, the government-led DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] and all unions have reviewed the Drug and Alcohol Procedures document.

This procedures document, Mr. Chairman, will aid in implementation of the policy and training required for public officers. The training material will be produced by DEOD, the Department of Health and the National Drug Control. The training will have a similar rollout such as the Public Service Standards training, utilising in-person training, video- and web-based methods for ensuring all employees have the correct information.

The third measure, level of completion of workplace and building inspections, involved inspections in 2023 of various departments such as Registrar General, Cabinet Building, Devonshire Preschool, Hamilton Health Centre and Southside Government Labs, to name a few.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the last measure, to increase compliance rate. Cabinet Office is pleased to inform that Health and Safety training was continued in 2023 to enhance safety education within the public service. The OSH [occupational safety and health] officer has requested that safety orientation be included in the onboarding process for new employees to help set the tone for the organisational safety culture. This includes the Health and Safety Policy slide at the onset of employee orientation, showing the organisation's commitment to health and safety. The policy helps to foster positive attitudes toward safety and highlights the organisation's direction toward providing and maintaining working conditions that are safe and free from reorganisation hazards and risks to the safety, healthy and well-being of all workers.

Training will continue in 2024/25 to engage staff with the rules and laws that govern health and safety, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1982 and the OSH Regulations 2009. Mr. Chairman, three main courses were provided:

- Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety;
- Accident in Workplace Investigation; and
- The Health and Safety Committee Training.

New courses, such as Chemical Safety, will also be added to the list for 2024/25. You will note that as the health and safety culture increases within the departments, the target number naturally decreases as more employees are engaged in health and safety training.

Mr. Chairman, directly below Safety and Health, you will note that business unit 19035, the London Office, has achieved the ongoing 2023/24 objective set with plans continuous throughout the upcoming 2024/25 budget year. If we turn, Mr. Chairman, back to page B-43, it is seen under Economic Policy and Foreign Affairs that the office has been allocated $1,235,000 for the 2024/25 fiscal year. Mr. Chairman, this year the [London] Office celebrates 15 years of service to Bermuda as the official representative of the Government in the United Kingdom. A pivotal function of the office continues to be the maintenance of our relationship with the United Kingdom through highest-level dialogue with the UK Government and by continued engagement with departments of His Majesty's Government across Whitehall.

The office works in cohesion with governments of the Overseas Territories on shared policy areas and continues to engage with the UK Parliament; the UK Diplomatic Corps such as embassies and high commissions; the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association; the Commonwealth Secretariat; along with all UK-based Commonwealth associations; the general UK public to include the private sector, civil society and those who have a general or vested interest in Bermuda; and finally, Bermudians living in the UK, including students.

Mr. Chairman, the London Office continues to provide the necessary immediate assistance and guidance to its consular function to Bermudians living and studying in the UK and throughout Europe. With the increase of Bermudians relocating to the UK, the London Office has experienced an increased number of consular cases and as such will be looking to increase its level of resources and personnel, starting with the creation of additional posts reporting to the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the Brussels Office is overseen by the Government's Senior Advisor of European Affairs and Policy, and we see that for 2024/25 on page B-43, the office has been allocated $393,000. Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Brussels Office continues to be *The maintenance of relationships with key stakeholders and decision-makers in Brussels while establishing new connections.* The objectives of the Brussels Office for the fiscal term 2024/25 remain as follows:

- maintaining close dialogue with the European Commission, Council and European Parliament and other EU institutions;
- facilitating access of the Premier and Ministers to key persons in upholding the Government's presence in Europe; and
- working in cohesion with the Ministry of Finance to support Bermuda's global position as a robust regulatory financial regime with a primary function to ensure continuous dialogue

with the European Council on the EU List of Non-Cooperative Jurisdictions for Tax Purposes.

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Minister is in Head 9, the Cabinet Office. His programme is 0902 under the Economic Policy and Foreign Affairs. And he is in business unit 19075, which is the Brussels Office. He is on page B-43.

Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, while still on page B-43—

The Chairman: Yes, sir.

Hon. Vance Campbell: You will note that the Washington, DC Office shows an allocation in the amount of $452,000, a minor increase of approximately $26,000, or 6 per cent, higher than the current 2023/24 allocation.

Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to inform the House that the director of the DC Office has effectively restored its operations. By doing so, the office has actively engaged with business and government stakeholders in promoting Bermuda's financial services as well as engaging with political thought leaders in positive dialogue to protect Bermuda's economic interests.

The key objectives for fiscal term 2023/24 focussed on were:

- engaging with key contacts;
- informing thought leaders in the US of Bermuda's role as an international financial services centre and tourist destination;
- executing associated business development functions; reviewing and advising on emerging US policies and legislative measures that may impact Bermuda;
- advising and managing direct engagement by the Premier and Ministers with DC contacts as well as identifying opportunities to promote Bermuda's environmental initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, the DC Office met all key objectives set out for the fiscal term of 2023/24. As a result, the office was able to:

- strengthen Bermuda's relationships with US political leaders thereby safeguarding Bermuda's interests in the US;
- facilitate engagements for the Premier's trips to Washington, DC with members of the US Congress, principals in several US Government agencies, business leaders and also delegates from the Embassy of the State of Qatar to further build up our relationship with entities from the Middle East;
- engage with numerous leaders of various industries and organisations to promote Bermuda's financial services and other business products;
- highlight Bermuda as a premier tourist destination; and also, Mr. Chairman,
- engage with entities seeking further information about Bermuda's efforts to protect its marine environment.

For 2024/25, in the DC Office's recent report, the Washington, DC Office 2024 strategic road map, a set of planned objectives, are denoted. The priority of the objectives are categorised under three key areas which are US political and government engagement, business development and the image and actions of the DC Office.

Mr. Chairman, for 2024 as seen on the bottom of page B-46, the DC Office has set out a list of performance measures that are as follows:

1. Engage with US organisations in the digital asset and FinTech industry that results in having at least one conference hosted in Bermuda.
2. Secure three business leads resulting in meaningful engagement or progression in domiciling companies in Bermuda.
3. Create and maintain an up-to-date database of Bermudian college students residing in the US.

Mr. Chairman, one final note to highlight regarding all our foreign offices is the continuance of our successful internship programme in 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, continuing the measures on page B-47, I would like to turn your attention to business unit 19080, Head of the Public Service.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: The second measure that is intended to track responses to customer complaints within 48 hours continues to be a work in progress. The feedback system went live on the government portal in 2023 and includes an automated response feature which means that receipt is acknowledged 100 per cent of the time. The true measurement however rests in our ability to ensure customer complaints are investigated and resolved in a timely fashion. The timeliness of the resolution and the response to the customer is a measure we will work to ensure is used to determine our performance as we go forward. Our goal is to cause responses to align with our service standards policy in each area of the service.

Mr. Chairman, the policy on service standards was developed and implemented to standardise customer service approaches and provide direction to departments on the expectations of their service delivery. More training in meeting service standards is expected to take place in 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, while the Leadership Development Programme (third performance measure) is

ongoing, the most senior management area requires focused attention. In February, aspiring Permanent Secretaries were specifically invited to register for an accelerated programme to assist with succession planning at that level. This is not a separate programme but rather one that leverages the existing leadership development programme to ensure a healthy talent pool is being prepared to assume roles that will become vacant within the next few years owing to expected retirements.

Mr. Chairman, the action taken to increase the development opportunities at the senior level accords with the policy on succession planning and management wherein the Head of the Public Service must ensure development opportunities are available to prepare officers to compete for vacant posts.

Mr. Chairman, with reference to the fourth measure, the 2019–2023 Government Reform plan has expired. Planning is in progress on the 2024–2027 update with a view to building on the accomplishments of the initial plan. The 2019–2023 plan helped the Government organise administrative policy activities around two specific priorities: its people (that is employees) and its information technology direction. Arguably, greater strides were made in the development and implementation of sound people policies and programmes. However, the foundation from which to build in the provision of digitised services in the IT space was also realised.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to the remaining measures under 19080, please allow me a few moments to highlight a few initiatives.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Quickly becoming a recognised public service staple is the monthly Public Service Excellence Award initiative which recognises service excellence in the preceding month or two and the complimentary annual Public Service Excellence Awards end of year celebration where all nominees for the year are acknowledged and rewarded for their contributions. The programme recognised the Public Officers who consistently go above and beyond in their service to the Bermuda community.

In the calendar year 2023, more than 200 officers were nominated for the award and therefore were recognised at the end of the year. Of those who had received the monthly award, one was selected as the Public Service Employee of the Year. The Public Service Employee of the Year was awarded to Ms. Frederica Lambert, a community health worker from the Department of Health, for using her skills and expertise to deliver exceptional outcomes for her clients. The awardee must show initiative and perform above and beyond his or her role undertaking work or a project and achieving tangible results. Known for working tirelessly within the clinic and providing crucial assistance in patients' homes, Ms. Lambert was recognised for making an impact beyond her immediate team, being a self-motivated learner and her ability to deliver excellence in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Chairman, there are three other award categories. The Rising Star Award was presented to Jahkari Woods, also a community health worker from the Department of Health for the tangible impact he has made on his department and outstanding commitment to his team. The award for Excellence in Supporting People was presented to Mr. Tony (Wayne) DeSilva, a teacher at the Whitney Institute who was commended for extending contributions beyond the curriculum, serving as a beacon of inspiration, and promoting confidence in the public office through his unwavering support for colleagues and programming for Bermuda students.

Finally, the award for Excellence in Project Delivery was presented to the Department of Employee and Organizational Development's Compensation and Benefits Team for providing resilience and professionalism and outstanding collective efforts to ensure the smooth functioning of government processes. The team was commended for their display of exemplary resilience and proficiency in ensuring timely payroll processing for Government of Bermuda employees and pensioners in the months of September and October—in particular, I believe they received the award for October following the cyberattack which disabled networking systems government-wide. Those of us who sit in this House were able to receive our pay as a result of their efforts.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, in 2024/25, the Head of the Public Service programme will continue to evolve to strengthen the administrative policy development and infrastructure of the Public Service.

Mr. Chairman, on that note, it is expected that a Deputy Head of the Public Service will be appointed to assume the role vacated by the now Head of the Public Service. Mr. Chairman, $125,000 has been allocated to the Wellness Programme to continue to provide for activities to support the physical and mental health of public officers. Our aim is to create a culture of health and encourage the development of sustainable behaviours. It is expected that the progress made with the virgin programme will be supplemented with activities and wellness challenges to increase engagement of public officers and leverage local events.

Mr. Chairman, the public sector is increasingly competing for talent and, in some cases, there are in-demand skill sets that are not readily available locally and in some instance internationally. Public sector salaries are not as competitive and there is a general lack of awareness of the rich and varied careers in the public service.

Mr. Chairman, the office of the Head of the Public Service will coordinate a series of actions

designed to retain existing talent, advance succession planning, increase awareness of the benefits of careers in the public service, drive interest in Government sponsored training programmes to prepare our young people for careers in the public service and build support for the impact of the work delivered by public officers. The funding of this multi-faceted campaign dubbed *Re-Imagining Careers in the Public Service* is spread across many programme areas and heads. Funding will be used to support targeted training programmes that extend beyond the traditional bursary programme to include the reintroduction of specific programmes in hard-to-fill areas such as those requiring pilots, engineers, accountants, teachers and mechanics as well as the introduction of new training programmes for emerging areas such as compliance professionals, IT security specialists and more.

Mr. Chairman, a series of internal and external activities including the launch of an online Public Service Careers Guide, online forums and social media activity to promote specific careers and training programmes, partnership with the signature schools to introduce students to the public service with the many career options as well as work taking place under Head 61 to address job evaluation and salaries will all be implemented during fiscal 2024/25.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, allow me to turn your attention to as well as expand on the last business unit under Performance Measures 19085, PATI/PIPA Unit where we see both measures achieved. Mr. Chairman, the PATI/PIPA Unit is responsible for the coordination of the Public Access to Information Act 2010 (PATI) and the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 (PIPA) for the Government of Bermuda.

For PATI, the unit maintains the PATI administrative code of practice, provides advice and guidance to public authorities; offers information officer training and carries out administrative responsibilities as assigned to the Minister in accordance with the Act.

For PIPA, responsibilities of the unit include the development and implementation of the Privacy Programme for the Government of Bermuda, offers privacy programme training and the establishment of the privacy equivalency strategy that would enable the smooth flow of personal information between Bermuda and other international jurisdictions. Additionally, the unit is considering the elements of artificial intelligence governance that overlap with privacy.

Mr. Chairman, the Government of Bermuda interacts with the public, the broader community and international entities regularly. This interaction includes the use of large amounts of information, including personal information by both physical and electronic methods. It is therefore important that the rights of access to information and privacy principles are engrained in the Government's operations and culture.

Mr. Chairman, the unit ultimately supports the Government in creating an environment that underpins our economic ecosystem. The PATI and PIPA Acts further enhance Bermuda's mandate of a trusted jurisdiction that protects personal information. For the Government this is reflected in the adherence to the principles of lawfulness, fairness and transparency. The PATI/PIPA Unit works in collaboration with the Offices of the Information Commissioner and the Privacy Commissioner to protect and promote information and privacy rights in the jurisdiction. The work of the unit is important to the Government's reform efforts and ultimately in how our jurisdiction is seen by others around the world to manage information.

[Pause]

Hon. Vance Campbell: Just getting a bit of water.

Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-43 of the Budget Book, the PATI/PIPA Unit has been allocated $838,000 for the 2024/25 fiscal year. This is a decrease of $79,000, or 9 per cent, as compared to 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-44 of the Budget Book, Revenue Summary following from 2023/24, revenue from these fees is predicted to be $50,000. However, as amendments to PATI are considered the projected revenue level will have to be adjusted accordingly. Once details are determined and tabled, this information will be communicated.

Mr. Chairman, activities of the unit include

- development and implementation of an organisational structure to enable the requirements of the unit;
- administering updates to the Acts as required and facilitating compliance requirements;
- implementing strategic, programme, operational and administrative measures to deliver upon the requirements of PATI and PIPA;
- providing policy procedure, guidance and template administration related to PATI and PIPA;
- advising public authorities on the application of the Acts and their legislative obligations;
- responding to requests from public officers;
- acting as a liaison with the respective regulatory authorities; and
- the delivery of training, awareness and other communications.

Mr. Chairman, the PATI framework is operational and under review to enable the optimal structure and utilisation of resources within the unit. In addition, the unit continues to coordinate the review of PATI legislation for amendment. This activity includes consultation with the regulator, the government and the broader community. In 2023/24, the unit worked in collaboration with the Information and Privacy Commissioners on the PIPA Amendment Act 2023. This Amendment Act harmonised PIPA and PATI legislation ahead of PIPA coming fully into force in 2025.

Mr. Chairman, this harmonisation process also identified elements of PATI that need to be brought into

alignment with clauses found in the Acts of the other regulators such as PIPA and the Ombudsman. These details have been included in the PATI legislation review. Additionally, as per the Throne Speech 2023, an additional component to create a committee similar to the audit committee in section 5 of the Audit Act 1990 has been identified for inclusion into the PATI Act.

Mr. Chairman, when PIPA comes fully into force on 1 January 2025, it will have significant implications for the entire jurisdiction. The Privacy Commissioner has responsibility to provide guidance relating to the implementation of PIPA in the jurisdiction. In January 2024, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner (or PrivCom) launched the Road to PIPA 2024 on their website (www.privacy.bm). It is an online roadmap to assist the community with becoming compliant with the upcoming PIPA legislation. The Privacy Commissioner also publishes guidance notes related to elements of PIPA, as well as best-practice-based advice for implementation. Training on PIPA is also available via the [Office of the] Privacy Commissioner, and many other organisations in the community. Mr. Chairman, the unit also leverages the Privacy Commissioner's guidance in the training they provide on PIPA within the Government of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, the unit has integrated the Privacy Commissioner guidance and international privacy and data protection best practice into the Government's Privacy Programme. A summary of the main implementation steps that will help in the achievement of compliance with PIPA includes:

- completing the PIPA readiness assessment to identify compliance gaps and to codify the necessary steps to PIPA compliance via a privacy plan;
- conducting personal information inventories and classifying or mapping the personal information that is used in their processes;
- documenting in policies and procedures how personal information is to be used in the organisation and how PIPA requirements will be met in the organisation's operations;
- providing appropriate training and awareness to staff and others (like vendors and service providers) who have access to the organisation's data;
- analysing the privacy risk to the organisation, using tools such as Privacy Impact Assessments and Vendor Assessments;
- measuring and tracking key metrics that demonstrate compliance with PIPA and the operational majority of the Privacy Programme over time;
- tracking of the Government of Bermuda's privacy maturity;
- transitioning personal information requests (the process) from PATI to PIPA;
- communicating a PIPA manual for use by the Government of Bermuda as a practical guide to achieve the standards required by PIPA;
- developing the partial exemption process in collaboration with the Privacy Commissioner and the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Chairman, the PATI/PIPA Unit has begun promotion and awareness of PIPA and the Privacy Programme with the Public Service executive and department heads. In addition, monthly training sessions on PIPA and PIPA compliance have been offered via the Government's training programme since July of 2021. The PATI/PIPA Unit has also had focused interactions with select ministries and departments. This has enabled the unit to customise elements of the Privacy Programme to reflect the context of the operation of a government, the nature of Bermuda as a jurisdiction and the requirements of PIPA.

Mr. Chairman, the PATI/PIPA Unit hosts pilots that are ongoing as each step of the plan is tested before rollout. Pilots that have informed the Government's Privacy Programme and tools developed have been in the areas of personal information mapping, privacy by design, privacy officer training and development, web-based privacy training content and privacy notices. We are currently piloting our PIPA readiness assessment step, a questionnaire with a series of questions against PIPA requirements that will be used for gap analysis. The intention is to roll this tool out across the Government shortly.

Mr. Chairman, when PIPA comes fully into force, there will be a requirement to notify the Privacy Commissioner in the case of a security breach that leads to the loss or unlawful destruction or unauthorised disclosure of or access to personal information which is likely to adversely affect an individual. This may then result in affected individuals being notified by the organisation.

Mr. Chairman, I recently had the opportunity to attend the International Association of Privacy Professionals [IAPP] Data Protection Intensive in London with members of the PATI/PIPA Unit. The focus of the conference was on building fundamentally sound data protection systems that can react to change. Additionally, it provided us with access to a global information privacy community. The keynotes this year included the UK Information Commissioner who spoke on the continued evolution of the role of data protection professionals in the face of a dynamic, ever-changing environment while also outlining priorities around the UK's data strategy for the future. The Minister for AI [Artificial Intelligence], within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, who oversees the UK's strategy on artificial intelligence, who is seeking to build possibilities for the UK for the future that can deliver real value to society while identifying risks.

Mr. Chairman, I will be delivering a Ministerial Statement shortly about this conference and the meetings that took place during the London visit. I can say

that participating in such gatherings provides insight into ongoing global activities that will enhance the unit's work both with PIPA and with the Government's Privacy Programme. For example, there were a significant number of sessions on artificial intelligence and privacy enhancing technologies. We benefited from this exposure as the unit is very aware that the adoption of artificial intelligence principles may be a near future step. I will also state, Mr. Chairman, that the personal meetings that I was able to have were quite productive and will be beneficial to Bermuda as we seek to gain adequacy or equivalency in our privacy laws with the UK and Europe.

Mr. Chairman, before concluding Head 9, please allow me to speak briefly on the updates to IP legislation as well as the Alien Land Licensing Programme.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Members of this Honourable House will be aware that modernisation of the legislation governing intellectual property rights is currently in progress.

This Government has embarked on an enormous undertaking to update the country's legislation governing trade marks, patents, registered designs and copyrights. These changes will reposition Bermuda's intellectual property regime to be more fully aligned with global standards and best practices. This initiative is being achieved through the collaborative efforts of the Ministry for the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Registry General and the Ministry of Economy and Labour and the Economic Development Department.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year 2023/24 the Government tabled legislation updating the laws governing trade marks. This includes a new Trade Marks Act 2023, new primary regulations and new fee regulations. Updated forms are also being produced and will soon be published. We will begin using the new trade marks legislation in the upcoming fiscal year. As that legislation is modelled after the United Kingdom's framework, Registry General staff are currently attending training sessions with the UK Intellectual Property Office in advance of the legislation becoming operational. The Government team is also in the process of updating internal processes and exploring options for updating the technology used to administer the trade marks legislation.

Mr. Chairman, this modernisation initiative will make Bermuda more attractive for new businesses and more competitive in the international market. Intangible assets such as intellectual capital and brand recognition are the lifeblood of most businesses regardless of the size of those businesses. Trade marks are intangible assets that help businesses establish brand recognition by distinguishing their products, goods or services from that of other businesses. Likewise a company can harness its intellectual capital to create cutting edge technology products, new medicines or other inventions that need to be protected as trade secrets or that may be eligible for a patent.

Mr. Chairman, these assets can give an organisation both a competitive advantage and revenue opportunities and legal frameworks that feature strong protections for intellectual property are essential to any jurisdiction competing for business in today's global economy. Bermuda is working to meet the requirements of various international treaties that facilitate the registration and protection of intellectual property across various jurisdictions to which the treaties extend. We are looking to increase our competitiveness in this area, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year we will continue the important work of modernising our legislation. The Government will continue its practice of using the intellectual property laws enacted in the United Kingdom as a model for Bermuda's legislation. This will also ensure that there is sufficient legal clarity and case law that can be used by the courts and other authorised parties to determine intellectual property disputes under the updated laws.

Mr. Chairman, the process for updating the laws governing patents is currently ongoing and we look forward to bringing new patents legislation to this Honourable House in the upcoming fiscal year. Additional projects under this initiative include updates to the legislation governing both registered designs and copyrights. We look forward to providing updates on those initiatives in due course.

Mr. Chairman, the Alien Land Licence Programme as detailed in Part VI of the Bermuda Immigration Act 1956 aims to protect land in Bermuda for ownership by individuals who possess Bermudian status and they aim to do this by (a) requiring restricted persons to have licences to hold or acquire land in Bermuda and preventing them from appropriating it; (b) requiring trustees to have licences to hold or acquire land in Bermuda for the benefit of restricted persons and preventing them from appropriating it; and (c) preventing corporations from acquiring or holding land in Bermuda unless they do so in accordance with the legislation.

Mr. Chairman, the Alien Land Licence Programme includes applications by restricted persons to hold or acquire land in Bermuda, to let their Bermudian properties, to take a mortgage or charge on land and to apply for deferral certificates. In 2023/24, the Alien Land Licence Programme earned the Government of Bermuda over $4,400,000 in revenue. This is reflective of 38 landholding charges received and 128 land licence applications received. In total, 131 applications were approved in 2023/24 as follows:

- Sixty-eight land licence applications to acquire land;

- Twenty-seven short-term rental applications;
- Twenty-three permissions to let applications;
- Eight deferral certificate applications;
- Two permissions in principle to let; and
- Three taking a mortgage or charge on land application.

Mr. Chairman, in comparison to the previous fiscal year, the Alien Land Licence Programme saw a decrease in the number of land licence applications received falling from 151 land licence applications in 2022/23 to 128 land licence applications, a decrease of 23 applications. As a result, the Alien Land Licence Programme also experienced a decline in revenues from over $5,900,000 in fiscal year 2022/23 to $4,400,000 in revenue.

Mr. Chairman, the Economic Development Department [EDD] maintains its commitment to promptly handling alien land licence applications and is committed to collaborating with the Bermuda real estate market to uphold operational efficiency. The EDD will endeavour to continue its processing timeline with the expectation that application processing will not exceed 30 days.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I would like to take the opportunity to extend my thanks to all the staff at the Cabinet Office for their ongoing contributions and dedication to serving the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my presentation on Head 9, Cabinet Office.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

The Minister has concluded his brief as it relates to Head 9 under the Ministry . . . he is the Honourable Minister with responsibility for the Cabinet Office.

Minister, your next head is Head 13, I believe.

Hon. Vance Campbell: That is correct.

The Chairman: Very well, Minister, at your leisure.

HEAD 13—BERMUDA POST OFFICE

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I present the budget for Head 13, the Bermuda Post Office, found on pages B-48 through B-54 of the Budget Book.

The Bermuda Post Office is governed by the Post Office Act 1900, the Post Office Regulations [1933] and the Post Office Departmental Administration Regulations 1933. Postal services are provided from the General Post Office (also known as the GPO), located on Church and Parliament Street, the Mail Processing Centre (also known as the BMPC) and located at New Venture House on Mills Creek. Currently the Post Office operates seven sub-Post Offices located throughout the Island. Sub-Post Offices are located in Crawl, Devonshire, Flatts, Mangrove Bay, Southampton, St. George's and Warwick.

The overall mission of the Post Office is *To provide all residents of Bermuda with an affordable, reliable and accessible postal service that is also customer focused*. The Bermuda Post Office is a member of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and works to ensure that it meets its universal service obligations as Bermuda's national postal service provider. The Post Office is 212 years old and was the first to offer domestic letter, parcel and package delivery services. It is 100 per cent Bermudian and continues to provide postal products and services as a cost-effective alternative.

Mr. Chairman, the Post Office continues to meet its local delivery standards. That is, it delivers 98 per cent of all local and international letter mail received into Bermuda within four working days and delivers all customer notifications of international parcels, packages and express mail, to advise the addressee of the mail arriving in to Bermuda in their name within two working days.

Mr. Chairman, as a UPU member, the Post Office meets its international requirements, expectations and standards in delivery. The Post Office has passed both security and process standards certified by the UPU. In fact, Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office is gold certified for mail security. Bermuda also sits on the management board of the Caribbean Postal Union and currently chairs its task force to modernise the constitution and regulations. The Post Office's disaster risk management plan and attributes are also being used as part of a pilot project to help determine the disaster risk management certification and credentials for the Universal Postal Union. As the Bermuda Post Office was first in the region for security certification, they have been deemed (though unofficially now) DRM certified and should receive a gold certificate in May.

Mr. Chairman, benefits of membership in the Caribbean Postal Union include access to postal benchmarks, best practices and alignment with regional postal administrations to help grow the postal industry and to build resilience. Bermuda Post Office staff also benefit from training and development opportunities as regional and UPU workshops are held.

Mr. Chairman, annually traditional letter mail is declining and the Post Office needs to retool and to reinvent itself to remain relevant. This means providing a balanced approach between service offerings based on taxpayer funding received and providing an efficient and quality service. For example, MyBermudaPost was implemented in November 2021 to help increase revenues for the Post Office. Membership now stands at 4,000 local residents, entrepreneurs and many small to mid-size businesses. Its homepage also encourages residents to shop locally.

Mr. Chairman, local residents can continue to visit www.bermudapost.bm to track-and-trace incoming and outgoing parcels, packages, registered mail items and letters containing merchandise and goods. Residents can open an online account to make mail forwarding services smoother and can find information on all postal products and services on the Post Office

website. Stamp collectors and interested parties can also utilise the Post Office philatelic link on the website to buy retail items, physical stamps, first day covers, et cetera.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office is comprised of the Administration Division and the Operations Division. The Administration Division includes Administration, Finance, Information Technology, Philatelic Services and Quality Assurance. The Operations Division is made up of the Bermuda Mail Processing Centre (BMPC), the General Post Office (GPO), Sub-Post Offices and the Facilities and Procurement Department.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, as indicated on pages B-49 and B-50 of the Budget Book—

The Chairman: Yes, go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: The Bermuda Post Office has been allocated a total of $9,620,000 for the financial year 2024/25. This amount this reflects an increase of $335,000, or 3.6 per cent, from the original 2023/24 budget allocation of $9,285,000. The percentage difference as has been stated in other budget briefs represents negotiated salary increases effective 1 April 2024 and related staff salary increment changes.

Mr. Chairman, you will note on page B-50 that Salaries and Wages continue to be the largest expenditure item at 81 per cent of total expenditure. The total estimate of salaries and wages for 2024/25 is $7,820,000. While full-time equivalents remain at 125 staff members. For 2023/24, full-time equivalents were revised to 125 against the prior year as Post Office staff retire or resign due to an ageing workforce. To offset, staff are reassigned and operations are maintained by making processes efficient and more effective.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-50 you will note that Operational Expenses for the Bermuda Post Office make up the remaining 19 per cent of the expenditure for 2024/25. The major operational expenses included in the Post Office budget include inflation and market increases in rent, repairs and maintenance, energy costs, and materials and supplies.

Training costs for the 2024/25 budget is static at $20,000, as the Post Office continues to commit and encourage staff to train, enrol and take advantage of online job-related courses to develop and improve technical skills.

Communication expenses is estimated to be $72,000 for 2024/25, with no change from the 2023/24 revised total. This expenditure includes telephone rental equipment, local and overseas calls, GPS devices and mobile devices for couriers and customer communications in delivery.

Mr. Chairman, Rental expense for the 2024/25 budget cycle remains at $396,000. This allocation represents rent for the Post Office Mail Processing Centre, which is located at New Venture House, Mills Creek, at current market rate.

Mr. Chairman, Repairs and Maintenance expense is estimated to include an increase by 2 per cent, or $10,000, for the new budget year to $548,000 in total and includes service charges for New Venture House, building repairs, cleaning contracts, cycle and vehicle repairs, and security services.

Equipment, which includes furniture and fixtures, handyman tools and equipment, the Bermuda Mail Processing Centre lift, mail trays and racks remains at $20,000.

Materials and Supplies costs of $225,000 for 2024/25 have not changed from the previous financial year. This expenditure line includes increased costs for stamp production, printing, stationery, office supplies, chairs and more.

Mr. Chairman, Transport costs, which include freight charges for the transport and the handling of mail to and from international postal administrations, will be $46,000 as the Post Office looks to manage increasing costs in mail transport.

Travel costs to support conferences, training opportunities and workshops as a member of the Universal Postal Union and the Caribbean Postal Union hold at $18,000 during the 2024/25 budget period, as the Post Office embraces local and global trends in the postal market.

Advertising and Promotion expenses to cover philatelic and increased BPO marketing efforts remains at $52,000 in the 2024/25 budget.

Mr. Chairman, Professional and/or Consultant Services include annual dues for the UPU, the Caribbean Postal Union, EMS (Express Mail Service) cooperative and fees for the Stamp Design Advisory Committee. The 2024/25 estimate is $63,000 with no change from 2023/24.

The budget for Energy costs, which includes electricity, gas and diesel, for 2024/25 will be $213,000.

Insurance expenses to cover the Post Office vehicle fleet remain the same at $12,000.

The Clothing, Uniform and Related expenses will also remain the same during the 2024/25 financial year at $60,000. It is expected that uniform costs will reduce going forward as the Post Office implements effective usage and exchange policies but also as persons retire and are not replaced.

Other Expenses include World Post Day recognition costs, staff-related costs (for example, staff retirements), office supplies, paper, debit/credit card commission fees, et cetera. These budgeted line items in 2024/25 remain at $55,000.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the commentary of the Bermuda Post Office's 2024/25 current account expenditure.

I will now move into an overview of revenue, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Very well, Honourable Minister, go right ahead.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Post Office continues to provide postal and other services as mandated by the Bermuda Government and supported by local legislation and UPU regulations. As a British Dependent Territory, the Government of Bermuda has a designated obligation to provide residents of Bermuda with a postal service—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Vance Campbell: This obligation . . . you are correct. I stand corrected. This obligation is Bermuda's Universal Service Obligation (USO) as mandated by the United Nations and executed by the Universal Postal Union to member countries and their territories. Bermuda has to provide its residents with a postal service that is affordable, reliable and accessible to all. Affordability means that postal fees must be reasonably priced. Simply put, as a UPU member through the United Kingdom, Government is legally obliged to deliver all addressed mail which includes mail that is addressed to the occupier or with any other generic recipient information, as well as mail that is personally addressed to you by name five days a week.

Mr. Chairman, therefore the Bermuda Post Office has a unique responsibility to provide a postal service. That service is expected to be efficient and as stated to provide taxpayers with value and quality service.

Mr. Chairman, what the Post Office is experiencing regarding a reduction in mail volumes is being experienced by most international postal administrations. That is, a steady decline in mail volumes and its impact on postal revenues and expense ratios. These declines have to be hedged through innovation and new products and new services.

Mr. Chairman, from a revenue perspective, the total revenue estimate for the year 2024/25, which can be found on page B-51, is $2,829,000. This is an increase of $181,000, or 7.0 per cent, from the 2023/24 . . . and that would be versus the revised amount of $2,648,000, as the postal industry struggles to return to pre-COVID-19 mail volumes and resulting revenues.

Mr. Chairman, the main revenue source for the Bermuda Post Office continues to be Frankpost or postal meter sales, bulk mail, Post Office Box rentals, terminal dues revenue and general stamp sales.

Mr. Chairman, Frankpost or postal meter sales is budgeted for 2024/25 at $603,000, as postal meter sales are a most efficient way for small to large businesses to apply postage to letter mail and packages without having to buy physical stamps or even to visit the Post Office as postage is updated online. Express and parcel sales add an additional $57,000 of revenue.

Mr. Chairman, the Bulk Mail budget for 2024/25 is estimated to be $227,000, as revenue difference is reclassified under Frankpost meter sales. This service is especially beneficial to small businesses and entrepreneurs who can use the Post Office to market their products and services using flyer mail. Flyer mail can be used to target postal codes, parishes and to specific addressees and/or Island-wide to the occupier. Business mailers continue to take advantage of flyer mail rates. This service is an inexpensive alternative when compared to other traditional and electronic media to market and reach 38,000 residences, businesses and PO Box holders.

Mr. Chairman, total Philatelic sales for local, international and general stamp sales decrease by $9,000 for 2024/25 at $86,000. The Philatelic website link is expected to drive online sales and increase the current standing order customer base and retail philatelic sales locally and internationally.

Direct Stamp Sale revenues for 2024/25 are expected to decrease by $44,000 to $445,000, or 9 per cent, as digitisation and other means of communication impact the purchase of stamps.

Mr. Chairman, PO Box rental fee revenue projections are estimated to be $419,000 for 2024/25. Compared to 2023/24 revised revenue of $369,000, or a 14 per cent increase. And the original 2023/24 figure was $562,000. The Post Office continues to market PO Box usage as an affordable, secure and private 24-hour service. PO Box late penalty fees is estimated to be $29,000 for 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, Terminal Dues, or mail revenue received from international postal administrations for the Post Office to deliver mail received into Bermuda, is conservatively estimated to be $250,000. As the letter mail product shrinks annually, terminal dues received decreases. It is hoped that the Post Office can continue to explore other products and services to offset this decline.

Customs Declaration Fees, namely MyBermudaPost Processing, and Post Office front counter service fees is expected to be $523,000, or a 9 per cent decrease versus the 2023/24 estimate of $574,000. For 2024/25, parcel revenues is estimated to be $75,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Other smaller revenue line items include Mail Handler Licence fees of $45,000, Courier Service fees of $32,000, and Postage Paid Indicia fees of $15,000, among miscellaneous revenue receipts.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office also continues to collect revenue for other government departments. During 2023/24 and as of 31 January 2024, the Bermuda Post Office collected agency receipts of $1,176,000. This amount is broken down as follows within the Post Office network:

- HMS Customs duty collected, $662,000;

- Department of Public Transportation bus passes, tokens and tickets sold, $319,000;
- Department of Education pre-school and after-school vouchers sold, $173,000; and
- Department of Environmental Protection dog licence fees collected, $22,000.

Based on timeline, $1,176,000 agency collections is estimated to increase to just over $1,400,000 by the 31 March 2024. These collections represent a testament from residents that still value the service and postal network that the Post Office provides.

Mr. Chairman, agency receipts plus delivery and courier services [which] the Bermuda Post Office continues to provide to other government departments are not included in the Post Office Revenue figures but represent cross-departmental initiatives though not recognised as Post Office Revenue. These services or financial goodwill provided by the Bermuda Post Office in this context adds to government-wide efficiencies and effectiveness and highlights the role the Post Office plays to provide service opportunities for government departments while helping to reduce their annual operational budgets. This is the Post Office's direct contribution to government with an estimated savings of millions of dollars annually.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes commentary of the Bermuda Post Office 2024/25 current account revenue. Mr. Chairman, I will move now move into Capital Expenditure.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office Capital Expenditure budget for 2024/25 can be found on page C-9 of the Capital Acquisition Estimates—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: —Schedule C. The Bermuda Post Office has been allocated $15,000 for computer equipment and (on page C-4) Capital Development of . . . they have been allocated an amount of $500,000 to renovate the General Post Office main floor to help improve operational efficiencies and customer service.

Funds received will also be used to help start the remedial work and planning to move the Post Office's mail processing centre to the General Post Office over the next two budget cycles. This significant move will ensure greater economies of scale, better customer service overall and improved capacity in staffing.

The Chairman: Honourable Members, the Minister continues in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Minister is in Head 13 on the Post Office and he is on C-9 which is the Cabinet Office department.

Honourable Minister, you may continue.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to now move into performance measures for the Post Office.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Performance Measures

Hon. Vance Campbell: The performance measures developed and reserved for the Bermuda Post Office are found on pages B-54 and B-55. These measures are directly related to the work done within the Post Office to meet both local and international mail and delivery standards as a collective business unit.

Mr. Chairman, the high-level summary of the 2023/24 performance reflects that despite declining letter mail volumes, the Post Office continues to increase its customer base and confidence in the Post Office. Mail is being delivered on-time and parcel and package arrivals are communicated to addressees for pickup. Customer service training has improved customer engagement at the front counter as customer service training will become mandatory for all front counter staff and delivery teams later this year. Customer complaints are at an all-time low, though they will occur, mostly via social media but the Post Office engages customer complaints and customers to resolve as quickly as possible.

Mr. Chairman, the Post Office philatelic service continued to produce the number of stamps issued targeted as the philatelic customer base increased on its www.bermudapost.bm website module. Mr. Chairman, from an international perspective, the efficiency of the Post Office's processing unit helped to make foreign posts more aware of Bermuda's timely domestic delivery standards as they do not hesitate to send Bermuda their mail to deliver locally. Relatedly, the Post Office is meeting UPU compliance standards and measures and remains part of the UPU compliance project to ensure quality in service to local residents.

Mr. Chairman, Post Office international measures has resulted in Bermuda being used as a benchmark (and I am reiterating that) regarding security, process reviews and disaster risk management compliance in the Caribbean region. As mentioned earlier, the Post Office is gold certified from a security perspective and will be re-audited by the UPU in April (next month). In May the Post Office will also be awarded a disaster risk management gold certification from the UPU for its continued excellence and compliance.

Mr. Chairman, the MyBermudaPost product is a related measurement and is improving also despite its ongoing legal matter as residents look for value in package and parcel delivery. It remains part of the Post Office's efforts to meet local delivery standards and quality in servicing initiatives. To date, the product

service has approximately 4,000 customers signed up and the Post Office expects to improve and increase parcel and small package volumes and offerings in the near future.

Mr. Chairman, it is the hope that these improvements will also transfer into additional revenue: increased Post Office Box rentals and increase in staff buy-in and satisfaction.

Mr. Chairman, the Post Office Administration and Finance section continues to meet its objective to improve staff engagement, training and future development. The Post Office now has a UPU trained staff member to assist staff with online UPU training post courses and it is expected that more staff will take advantage of this. Further the Post Office's operations manager, assistant manager of facilities and IT managers have also participated in international UPU and USPS workshops to increase skill sets, exposure and experience as the postal industry shifts and the Post Office attempts to remain relevant and continues to train and develop staff. New Post Office staff members have also been trained in security and dangerous goods standards to meet local aviation requirements.

Mr. Chairman, the Post Office IT services team remains effective, efficient and continues to meet staff's daily IT concerns, problems, and resolves issues within the standards set. IT services remain engaged with the UPU IT professionals regarding several IT applications that the Post Office uses to record, measure, process and dispatch mail.

Mr. Chairman, the performance measures developed and reserved for Bermuda Post Office are found on pages B-54. These measures are directly related to work done within the Post Office to meet both local and international mail and delivery standards as a collective business unit. A high-level summary of the performance reflect . . . sorry, I think this is a repeat.

So, I will stop there, as far as performance measures and move on to policy changes.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Policy Changes

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, this budget statement from the Bermuda Post Office is a reality-based reflection of Government's investment in the Bermuda Post Office. Policy changes within this budget year are focused on an increased emphasis on digitisation and diversification of services. The focus on the customer remains. We are also trying to provide these services at a reduced price point.

Mr. Chairman, this House should be reminded that the Bermuda Post Office is not just a local post office. Its operations and standards are governed by local and international laws, Universal Postal Union standards, resolutions and conventions.

Plans for the upcoming year, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office's high level objectives for the next budget year are

- to modernise postal legislation to reflect the changing postal industry both locally and internationally in line with ensuring compliance with UPU acts and mandates and international laws concerning electronic data transmissions and mail item electronic declarations;
- to increase market share to be more relevant by embracing digitisation and to diversify services for continued growth;
- to introduce new postal products and/or services; and
- to continue to empower and train staff to serve customers better.

The Bermuda Post Office's focus is to better utilise staff to meet mail delivery demands. This includes re-tooling and re-training staff, capacity building and cross-training staff to meet customer demands. The reality, Mr. Chairman, is that the volume and type of work to be done should match the staffing requirements to do the work. No jobs will be lost but the Post Office will right-size and work with all stakeholders as the postal market shifts and becomes more competitive.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office plans to have four stamp issues inclusive of the Presentation Pack in 2024/25 and a private stamp issue later this year. The tentative stamp programme will include the following:

- Bermuda Fruits, 4 April 2024;
- Mary Prince, 17 July 2024;
- Alternative Bermuda Christmas Trees, 19 September 2024; and
- Presentation Pack 2024, 7 November 2024, which is a combination pack of all the stamps issued in the year.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office is the only government department that has direct competition that impacts its revenue generation and services. To remain relevant and to survive, the Post Office has to shift its operations model to embrace or even reconstruct its universal service obligation to maintain a postal service that is affordable and accessible. The Post Office business model, mail delivery and government policy for the Post Office role continue to be reviewed.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office is meeting most of its customer service needs. This is evidenced by a customer service survey conducted in January 2023 which gave the Post Office an overall customer service satisfaction rate of 76 per cent. Mr. Chairman, other survey responses indicate that 72 per cent of respondents are satisfied with the Post Office's

MyBermudaPost mail product. Sixty-five per cent of respondents are satisfied with the value for price paid and timeliness of delivery and 65 per cent feel that the Bermuda Post Office should be more competitive.

Mr. Chairman, from a competitive perspective the Post Office was the first to offer international package and parcel services in Bermuda. E-commerce, such as online shopping and delivery of parcels and postal packages, are areas where the Post Office needs to grow to survive.

Mr. Chairman, additionally a Post Office analysis of MyBermudaPost customer transactions compared to if they would have used other services since inception is calculated to have saved local residents and businesses almost $1 million in transport and other related costs since the inception of MyBermudaPost. These savings allow local businesses the opportunity to hire more staff, to pay them better, to grow and increase residential and business disposable income within Bermuda. Fundamentally, these savings add to the premise and concept of government's service obligation to its people.

Mr. Chairman, by 1 May, a UK address should be in place with a future start date to be announced and MyBermudaPost will be a one-stop payment portal soon, meaning quicker post office to residential and business doorstep deliveries. The Post Office's mail forwarding service will be marketed so small to medium-sized enterprises can sell their products to international customers via a low price point to ship overseas with reliability in delivery. During this budget year, the Post Office hopes to provide residents with access to input mail forwarding dispatches online, then come to the Post Office to weigh, pay and ship. For inbound mail items, addressees will be receiving electronic customer notices for arriving mail items into Bermuda to aid in pickup and delivery, in addition to the use of parcel lockers with 24-hour access. The Post Office is making processes more efficient as it strives to provide the best service propositions for its customers.

Mr. Chairman, courier and postal transformation has been accelerated to a future norm. Bermuda has one of the most accurate addressing systems in the world, and the Post Office, local business and private delivery services will continue to capitalise on this benefit. For local packages, the Post Office's drop-and-deliver service is a package pickup and drop off delivery service. Customers can drop off packages to any office, pay local postage rates and the Post Office will deliver them within 24 hours. Looks like you are looking to use that delivery, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Absolutely!

Hon. Vance Campbell: Alternatively, customers can ask the Post Office to pick up and deliver pre-addressed packages anywhere in Bermuda within 24 hours at a cost of $7.50 each for packages up to 20 pounds.

Mr. Chairman, lastly, the Post Office continues to serve the local community in need. They have a general delivery service in the General Post Office [GPO] so residents who are indigent, homeless and without a home address can use the GPO as an address. Staff served within the community throughout the year and each World Post Day staff do volunteer work to help those in need. Annually, the Post Office has its own in-house centre and welcomes hundreds of school children for pictures with Santa Claus and for takeaway goodies. They also get free postcards to mail to their parents, guardians and relatives. Nice touch.

Mr. Chairman, I conclude by thanking the hard-working and dedicated staff of the Bermuda Post Office, Postmaster General, Mr. Samuel Brangman, Jr., and his senior management team for their continued commitment to deliver mail and to provide an efficient postal service.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Very well, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I now move on to Head 32, Department of Planning.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

HEAD 32—DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 32, the Department of Planning found on pages B-55 to B-59, and C-17 of the Approved Estimates [of Revenue] and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Planning is *To ensure the sustainable management of the natural and built environment.*

Mr. Chairman, the department's objectives comprise of

- balancing the need for development with protecting the natural and historic environment;
- managing the development of land to ensure its efficient use;
- ensuring policies and processes are streamlined, transparent and consistently implemented;
- ensuring developments are constructed in compliance with required standards to protect the health, safety and welfare of communities; and
- engaging with educating and being responsive to the needs of the public.

To meet these objectives the department has seven business units as shown on page B-56. They are as follows:

- Business unit 42000, General Administration

- Business unit 42020, Front Desk
- Business unit 42050, Enforcement and Searches
- Business unit 42060, Planning
- Business unit 42070, Development Management
- Business unit 42080, Building Permits
- Business unit 42090, Inspections

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Planning's total budget allocation which is shown on page B-56 is $3,838,000 for the 2024/25 fiscal year. This represents an increase of $242,000 from the previous year.

Mr. Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates is also found on page B-56 and includes the following:

- Salaries for the department is shown on line one. The total budget is $3,351,000 and represents 87 per cent of the department's budget.
- Rentals is shown on line eight with a budget of $275,000 which is required to fund the rent associated with the planned office move during this fiscal year to 44 Church Street in the City of Hamilton.

Hon. Vance Campbell: If I move on to the Revenue Summary, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the department's revenue is found on page B-57 for the 2024/25 fiscal year and is estimated to be $1,691,000. This estimate represents an increase of $136,000 when compared to the budgeted revenue for the 2023/24 fiscal year. Like other industries, the construction industry is not immune to rising costs of doing business. Whilst these rising costs may deter some projects from proceeding, therefore representing a slight contraction in the industry, there is still a healthy appetite to develop. Residential and new tourism investment will continue particularly within the high-end sector. This is in addition to the recently announced large scale projects such as the Fairmont Southampton and the Brookfield development (91 Front Street).

An analysis of the projected revenue includes the following:

- Planning Application Fees, shown on line one is projected at $649,000 which reflects an increase of $190,000.
- Building Permits, shown on line three and is projected to increase. Now, we expect, Mr. Chairman, that residential construction will continue. It may decline slightly but the expectation [is] that it will still be vibrant and robust throughout this year. And the expectation is that it will be ably supplemented by a number of larger scale projects which are expected to come online. The revenue is set at $600,000, which represents an increase of $100,000 over the original estimate for 2023/24.
- The department continues to observe a healthy real estate market in respect of property transactions. The projections made for the revenue of Planning Searches are based on search requests received this current fiscal year and only a minimum decrease is forecasted. As shown on line five, the projected revenue figure is $150,000, representing a decrease by $85[,000].

The Chairman: The Minister continues in the Committee of Supply. He is on Head 32, the Department of Planning and he continues under Review Summary.

Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman,

- The projected revenue for Elevator Licences is $200,000 and is a relatively static number due to the number of conveying devices on Island. It is not expected to change significantly and I might add that last year's original budget was overstated in regard to this. I believe it was listed at $300,000.

Mr. Chairman, if I move on to Manpower—

The Chairman: Go ahead.

Manpower

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the department's employee numbers are outlined on page B-57 of the Budget Book. For the past three years two administrative support positions were not funded. One of these posts falling within the Administration business unit of the department will now be funded for this new fiscal year. The department has a total of 33 full-time funded posts of which eight are currently vacant. The department is therefore operating at 75 per cent of its minimum staffing requirement to provide core services. All postholders apart from three are Bermudian. The vacant funded posts include Assistant Director, Planner, Development Management, Electrical Inspector, Senior Applications Officer, Applications Officer, Applications Information Clerk and Heritage Officer.

The recruitment process was completed for the Planner post with the successful applicant starting in the first quarter of the new financial year. Recruitment for the Electrical Inspector post has recently begun. Recruitment for other posts such as the Assistant Director, Administrative Officer and senior applications officer is planned for the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, it bears mentioning that the department takes a keen interest in providing young Bermudians with work experience and to train them for key roles within the field of planning. It is recognised that the Planner post is one that is labelled as hard to fill and

as such the department aims to attract young Bermudians who are studying in related disciplines. The department takes part in the Government's bursary award scheme each fiscal year and for this upcoming year will be advertising two awards. One to attract a student aspiring to be a Planner and another interested in the construction field, specifically as an Electrical Inspector.

Mr. Chairman, in this vein, I am pleased to report that the department's most recent bursary student commenced employment as a trainee Assistant Planner in September 2023 and is currently on a development plan for future advancement. Additionally, I am happy to report that a trainee Heritage Officer, another young Bermudian, is nearing the completion of her training and is expected to move into the Heritage Officer post during the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, I will now move into Output Measures.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Output Measures

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the performance measures for the department are presented on pages B-58 to B-59 of the Budget Book.

These performance measures remain largely unchanged from when they were first introduced last year. For the business unit 42070, Development Management, during the period of 1 April 2023 to 10 February 2024, Mr. Chairman, 287 planning applications for development or subdivision were processed. This represents a decrease by 76, or 21 per cent, when compared to the same period of the prior fiscal year.

Despite this reduction, it must be noted that the Development Management team of the department has been operating with two vacant posts for the majority of this fiscal year, a Planner and an Assistant Planner post. The vacancies represented a reduced capacity of approximately 30 per cent. Similarly, the department's Building Control team has been operating with a vacant Building Control Officer post and the department's Front Desk team has been operating with two of its four posts vacant for the majority of the fiscal year. The workload of each officer has therefore remained extremely high. The department has worked tirelessly to process both planning applications and building permits to service the construction industry, a key pillar of the economy.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to highlight some key projects that the department has processed over this past fiscal year.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Not all successfully, I might add. Planning permission was granted for two hotel residence buildings at Harbour Drive subdivision. Approval was granted to create 13 additional lots at Wilkinson Quarry and the department carried out comprehensive assessments for a substantial tourism and residential development at the Fairmont Southampton. A major tourism and a supermarket development at South Road, Warwick and a multistorey office and commercial development at 91 Front Street. The department has also processed applications for other tourism and residential developments including numerous executive style homes and a large volume of applications involving renovations to existing dwellings.

Mr. Chairman, for this next financial year, the department expects to receive planning applications for executive homes particularly on lots within the approved White Crest Hill subdivision, redevelopment of brownfield sites within the City of Hamilton and infrastructure projects such as the replacement of both the Longbird and Swing Bridges in St. George's and expansion of port facilities. We are hopeful anyway. I have the Minister for Works in front of me.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: And there is also the expansion of the port facilities in Dockyard, as well, that we expect to process an application for.

Mr. Chairman, for the business unit 42080, Building Permits, the statistics for both the submission of building permits as well as the issuance of building permits has held relatively steady over the course of the 2022/23 and current fiscal cycles. Of note, building permits have continued to be issued for the development of residential lots at Riddell's Bay pursuant to the Special Development Order made in July 2020. Tourism development maintains at steady levels including both the Azura/Nautilus expansion, the recommencement of the Bermudiana Beach involving a new administration block and swimming pool and renovations of the Southampton Princess, a new beach club development. The department is also observing a continued growth of commercial solar array installations particularly on the rooftops of buildings within the city and along the outskirts, similar to what has been done on the Bacardi building, as a notable example.

Mr. Chairman, a breakdown of building permit data reveals the following with totals included from the 2022/23 year as a helpful comparison:

- For the 2022/23 fiscal year, a total of 961 permits were submitted, and a total of 765 of these permits were issued. Of the 765 permits issued, 16 per cent were for commercial developments, 26 [per cent] comprised residential developments and 58 per cent represented the minor works category of development.
- We anticipate a volume in and around between . . . for the 2023/22 *[sic]* fiscal year projects the projection to 31 March based on current trends so far this year, there is an expectation that

permits submitted will be in the region of between 850 to 900 permits.

Mr. Chairman, the department has experienced another healthy year with respect to the number of planning searches performed under business unit 42050, Enforcement and Searches. Comparing the figures for the same period used for reviewing planning approvals and permits, this fiscal year thus far yields 240 planning searches. This number reflects an active real estate market despite this being a slight decrease of 37 searches, or 13 per cent, from last year.

Mr. Chairman, I will move on to some of the greater or major achievements for the year.

Major Achievements

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, aside from the general processing of planning applications and issuing of building permits, the department has completed several other key projects. The Department of Planning completed an extensive process of data gathering, analysis work and public consultation in supported of a new land use plan for the City of Hamilton. I am pleased to report that the department has pleased numerous messages of support for not only the change in process, but the content of the plan. The department has just released the official draft City of Hamilton 2024 plan which has commenced the statutory consultation period which will run for two months. Any representations that are received during this period will be processed by the department. Taking into account the requisite legislative steps towards adoption, the department remains on course to have the new plan adopted and operational within this new financial year.

Mr. Chairman, it was reported in the past that the department partnered with the Bermuda Land Development Company [BLDC] to produce a community plan for St. David's. The area of St. David's is recognised for its expanse of open spaces, wide mix of uses and valued historical landmarks. The need for St. David's to have its own community plan is vital to ensure a continued compatibility of land uses but, most importantly, that the area can grow sustainably, and future economic growth is in alignment with the needs of the local community.

Mr. Chairman, after months of research and consultation with the residents and business owners of St. David's, a draft version of the St. David's Community Plan was issued in August 2022 and the public was invited to provide their input. Following the conclusion of the consultation exercise, the Plan has moved to the final stage of adoption which includes a strategy for implementation.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to legislative change, the department has provided significant input into the forthcoming Special Development Order for the Fairmont Southampton. During this fiscal year, the department has published procedures and guidance to enable the commencement of the use of civil penalties to allow for proper measures to be taken against those who breach planning regulations. Procedures and guidance have also been issued on Protected Conservation Areas and Emergency Development Orders pursuant to the amendments which were made to the Development and Planning Act 1974 in 2021.

Mr. Chairman, a number of civil penalties have already been issued and received by the department following the procedures and guidance which was put in place over the past year. The value of the civil penalties received by the department totals in excess of $60,000 to date and further civil penalty notices have been issued which will result in the receipt of further penalties during the current fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, I am also pleased to confirm that the department's efforts to increase awareness of its functions and processes along with a desire to clearly understand the concerns of the construction industry have continued with regular stakeholder engagement. Meetings are routinely held with key groups in the industry such as the Institute of Bermuda Architects, the Construction Association of Bermuda, the Professional Engineers Registration Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation. This engagement proves to be key in ensuring the department is acutely aware of the challenges and needs that the industry and community are facing. These existing efforts will be expanded upon through the provision of a series of information sessions to engage and educate the general public on planning processes. In response to the feedback received, the department is currently exploring new ways to incorporate further efficiencies to improve the ways services are delivered.

Mr. Chairman, the department continues to make enhancements to its public online interface, more commonly known as EnerGov as well as the streamlining of workflows internally to enable a more efficient process. Progress continues with improvements to the department's website, particularly in respect of the publication of procedures and guidance notes to provide clear and transparent information to stakeholders (including members of the public). This coming year, the department will be exploring how the use of artificial intelligence can provide further assistance to the public in answering frequently asked questions on planning procedures.

Mr. Chairman, we have gone through a short testing phase on this, just to test the accuracy. It did better than I did . . . or would have done, in answering those questions. So, we will develop that further and that is something we are hopeful that we will be able to bring to the public sometime in the future.

Mr. Chairman, if I can go into our plans for the coming year.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the department aims to roll out its Grow Bermuda initiative through creating a place for willing landowners to connect with members of our community who are looking for farming opportunities. Whilst we have a very limited amount of land, there are still numerous areas of land across the Island which could be put to more productive use for the benefit of the wider Island. Through creating a platform which connects landowners with farmers of any skill, the department hopes that this will increase the volume of locally grown produce and make a positive contribution to bringing down the cost of living.

Mr. Chairman, the department is in the process of developing an online platform for the identification of development opportunities which will highlight and promote sites that have development potential starting with the identification of vacant and/or derelict properties. An important part of this project will be the mapping of all vacant properties across the Island. When we have such a limited landmass, it is imperative to consider the number of disused properties across the Island, particularly residential. From a sustainability perspective, the department aims to first and foremost facilitate the reuse or redevelopment of brownfield sites and vacant and/or derelict buildings. Compiling the data on these opportunity sites and properties will bring them into public focus and hopefully ignite the interest of potential investors.

Mr. Chairman, we will look to work with other government departments . . . when you look at housing, they may have some of this information already available through their research, so we are not looking to completely reinvent the wheel on this here, but to work with our fellow government departments and/or NGOs, like the Housing Corporation who may have some of this information already.

Mr. Chairman, it was announced previously that the department was performing a comprehensive review of the Listed Building Register, a register that was first established in 1991 and has been subject to limited review over the years. This is a significant undertaking by the department, the first stage of which was to devise an appropriate methodology for the audit. International best practice on reviewing listed buildings is constantly evolving and the department had to determine an approach which was not only reflective of modern practices within this field but could also be effectively applied within a Bermudian context.

There are currently a total of 782 listed buildings in Bermuda, all of which had to be reviewed as part of this audit. Mr. Chairman, owing to the cyberattack on the government's IT network, regrettably there has been a delay in the completion of this project and therefore it is anticipated that the review will be completed within this new fiscal year enabling the consultation processes to begin thereafter.

Mr. Chairman, another item which I anticipate tabling this year includes the replacement of the Development and Planning (General Development) Order 1999, which will increase the scope and provide greater clarity on what is considered permitted development. The new order will introduce permitted changes of use to Bermuda which will provide much-needed flexibility to assist business owners with appropriate limitations to protect residents. In efforts to encourage renewable and green technologies, changes to increase the scope of renewable energy infrastructure will also be one of the key features of this document. This item was due to be completed during the current fiscal year. However, due to current staffing levels and the need to prioritise other items, it was not possible to complete the task within the originally anticipated timeframe.

Mr. Chairman, the department has been liaising with and assisting the Ministry responsibility for Municipalities to advance the adoption of a new World Heritage Site Management Plan. This document has been finalised and has since been sent to the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport of the UK State Party. The department continues to lend its support to the Ministry of Public Works in respect of providing the technical expertise in the arena of heritage planning of an anticipated new management structure for the World Heritage Site and upcoming mission visit by UNESCO officials.

Mr. Chairman, [during] this next financial year, the department will commence a review of the existing building codes with an aim to incorporate requirements where appropriate and feasible to mitigate against the impacts of climate change. It is readily acknowledged that Bermuda's building requirements are recognised as the gold standard, but the intent is to take another big step forward in ensuring that development is as efficient as possible with respect to energy usage. This project will be collaborative, inviting the input from a broad range of stakeholders.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, during my short time thus far as Minister for the Department of Planning, I have acquired much knowledge of the department's processes as well as the significant efforts being made by the staff despite the resource challenges mentioned earlier. Year after year progress continues to be made in respect of both policy and legislative change and I look forward to the continuation of these efforts to streamline the department and become more customer centric. The department recognises its value and pivotal role it plays as it relates to the health of the construction industry and ultimately the overall economy. Investor confidence is often dependent on obtaining a smooth delivery of service derived from the regulation of development. I am confident in the Department of Planning's team and attest firsthand to their persistence to educate the public on the important role that Planning plays for our Island home. Whilst we don't always get it right, that is our goal . . . to provide the best of service to our client.

With that, I would like to thank all of the dedicated members of staff in the Department of Planning, led by Ms. Victoria Cordeiro, the Director. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to now move on to head, Head 43, that is the Department of Information and Digital Technologies found on pages B-60 through B-63 of the Budget Book.

HEAD 43—DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Mission

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the department is *to provide information and digital services that streamline processes to facilitate the government's strategic business objectives*.

Mr. Chairman, the department seeks to fulfil its mandate by securing and maintaining its IT infrastructure that hosts applications that are used within government departments. IDT will continue to improve on its security posture. This will provide a safe and secure platform to build the future upon. IDT will continue to provide governance and oversight to monitor and control the use of key systems. IDT will also provide analysis tools which will allow for data-driven decision-making. The department delivers and manages IT and telecom services used by government departments, as well as deliver a digital reform solution for select government business processes.

To fulfil its mandate, the department has nine business units as shown on page B-60 and they are as follows:

- Business unit 53000, Administration and Management
- Business unit 53030, Device Support
- Business unit 53035, Network Support
- Business unit 53040, Service Support
- Business unit 53050, Digital Services
- Business unit 53060, Business System Support
- Business unit 53070, System Support ISeries and Wintel
- Business unit 53080, Training
- Business unit 53090, Security

We will now move into the expenditure overview, Mr. Chairman.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure of the Department of Information and Digital Technologies, found on page B-60, is estimated to be [$8,505,000] for 2024/25. This is an increase of $287,000, or 3.5 per cent, over the 2023/24 budget of $8,218,000.

Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates of the Department of Information and Digital Technologies is found on page B-61. I will now focus on the line items with the greatest absolute change. Please note that most of our budget increase will be in Capital which will be addressed under the Capital heading.

Consultants increased by $141,000, or 62 per cent, to $370,000 over the 2023/24 budget amount of $229,000. This increase is due to the need for additional security staff. Currently there are only two security positions. Given the impact of the cyberattack, it is prudent that IDT on board additional security resources.

Mr. Chairman, Salaries increased by $348,000, or 7 per cent, due to salary uplifts and the [defunding] of four vacant and formerly funded posts. These unfunded posts are Service Analysist Support and Business Analyst and Business Process Analyst. These posts are under the business section and would have no affect on security. There were also two additional posts which have been filled and they were Network and System Engineer posts. These two positions are critical to the long-term operational success of the department.

Mr. Chairman, Training decreased by $34,500 as these funds were redirected to other critical expenses. To address the training shortfall, IDT has in place an extensive online training catalogue which is available for use by all staff members.

Mr. Chairman, Other Personnel Costs . . . IDT's other personnel costs in 2022/23 was $64,000 and these same costs in 2023/24 was $60,000. The budgeted amount for 2024/25 budget year is $48,000. This is $12,000, or 20 per cent, less than last year's budget. The other personnel costs include the allowance for network security and system staff to be on call for network security and system issues. IDT will further enhance monitoring of the infrastructure, utilising a lot of tools as opposed to the personnel.

Communications, IDT Communications costs in 2022/23 was $1,609,000 and in 2023/24, the budget was $1,578,000. In the 2024/25 [fiscal year], the budget is $1,515,000, which is a decrease of $63,000, or 4 per cent. Communications includes data lines and telephone communications. This decrease is due in part to system stability and enhanced staff skills and abilities.

I will move on to Rentals. IDT Rentals in 2022/23, [the budget] was $751,000. In 2023/24, this amount was $743,000. In the 2024/25 budget, Rentals is $660,000, a decrease of $83,000, or 11 per cent. This is due to a decrease in rental costs at Link Bermuda for our facilities plus building rental costs.

If we look at Repair and Maintenance, IDT Repair and Maintenance for 2022/23 was $500[,000]. It is budgeted at $650,000 for this current year and in 2024/25, the budget is $640,000 which is $10,000, or 2 per cent, less. This area includes software maintenance and application licensing costs.

Mr. Chairman, if I now move on to Capital Expenditure. Mr. Chairman, the Capital Acquisition for the

Department of Information and Digital Technologies [IDT] can be found on page C-9. It makes provision for new capital expenditure in the amount of $5,846,000, which is an increase of $2,441,000, or 72 per cent, over the Capital budget for 2023/24, which was at $3,405,000. This is an example of the commitment of this Government to making sure that IDT has the resources that it requires to best serve the government and also to protect the information and data that the government collects in its normal operations.

IDT will be able to launch and complete major systems upgrades to our infrastructure, implement a testing environment, improve systems security with 24/7 monitoring and additional tools to assist with detecting and prevention of cyberthreats. This also includes upgrading legacy servers, upgrades to network switches, upgrades to cabling and other uninterruptable power supplies. IDT will also upgrade the ISeries platform as well as improve our backup systems. Investments in our infrastructure will ultimately lay the groundwork for our digital transformation initiatives.

The 2024/25 budget adjustments in capital expenditure affect the following areas.

- There is increased funding for Infrastructure Computers of $200,000 which brings the total Infrastructure Computers budget to $500,000. This includes replacement workstations, laptops, monitors and inventory.
- Development Projects funding was decreased by $5,000 and sits at $690,000.
- There is increased funding for Network Upgrade of $470,000, which brings the total Network Upgrade budget to $1,000,000. This will include the replacement of current switches, cabling upgrade, network monitoring tools, licences and firewall upgrades. The cost includes unified communications and network costs. The unified communications costs are for telephone software, business critical services, collaboration support, Cisco room kits and endpoints as well as related items and that is $700,000. Network costs are Cisco Edge, switch replacements, Cisco total data centre, network assessments and Cisco digital network architect centre implementation. These funds also include the Fortinet equipment systems services and licensing. Our switches are at the end of life . . . also cabling and uninterruptible power supplies are outdated, and we need the additional equipment for monitoring and support. This is $300,000 . . . are the additional funds for these tasks.
- Increased funding for ISeries Systems/Servers of $325,000 which brings the total ISeries Systems/Servers budget to $555,000. This would include hardware system and software upgrades. This is to purchase an IBM Power10 Server and an additional storage area network and direct access storage device or disk drives as our current system is now longer supported by IBM and needs to be upgraded.
- Increased funding for Wintel Systems/Servers of $1,251,000 which brings the total Wintel Systems/Servers budget to $1,601,000. This increase is to upgrade servers, licensing, storage and additional maintenance costs. This funding will also provide for licences for Office365 which will enable the government email system to be migrated to a secure cloud environment. Our email systems are at end of support and need to be upgraded. This move will alleviate the email outages that occur and will enable the government's email servers to be more resilient in the future in the event of future attacks.
- Government Portal/Website funding remains the same at $400,000.
- Increased funding for E-Government Initiatives Digital Reform of $100,000 which brings the total E-Government Initiatives Digital Reform total to $600,000: This is to support the Government Reform Initiative. These funds will support digital reform requests for proposals, requests for information, evaluation, onsite demos as well as proof of concept pilots for government departments. IDT, Mr. Chairman, will continue to support management consultant services as the Project Management Office for government reform. Delivery of 100 per cent of the priority initiatives set out in the Government Reform Strategic Plan Framework 2019–2023 were tracked used a cloud-based project management tool called Achieveit. This system is open to 125 users to monitor and report on the implementation of the Government Reform Initiative. As a note, Mr. Chairman, and to validate government efficiency endeavours, Achieveit is also being used to project manage other largescale initiatives inclusive of the Economic Recovery Plan and the Education Reform Plan. The maintenance of this licence is $70,000 annually.
- Mr. Chairman, increased funding for IT Security of $100,000 which brings the total IT Security budget to $500,000. As you might expect, Mr. Chairman, security is our top priority. These additional funds include software, monitoring, penetration testing and additional tools. Additional security tools include, but are not limited to, extended detection response (XDR), topology mapping and Fortinet analyser tools, 24/7 monitoring and additional tools also to respond to cyber incidents.

I move now to Manpower, Mr. Chairman.

Manpower

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Manpower for the Department of Digital and Information Technologies, shown on page B-61, has increased by one. There are 49 full-time equivalents in 2024/25, one less than the 50 . . . it has decreased by one, at 49, which is one less than the 50 in 2023/24. The department is working with the Department of Employee and Organizational Development to fill eight additional vacant funded positions to increase our operational capabilities and meet our mandate. These positions are filled currently with temporary relief employees. Just in case the public was wondering on that matter, these positions are filled by temporary relief employees.

Mr. Chairman, I am happy to report that recruitment for some of our critical posts has been completed. Those posts would be a Deputy Chief Information Officer, two Department Relationship Managers, a Network Engineer and a Systems Engineer. Two of the remaining critical positions to be filled include a Chief Systems Engineer Wintel currently filled with a temporary additional. IDT is working with the Department of Employee and Organizational Development on recruitment for this critical post. A Security Manager, we are working to upgrade this position to Chief Information Security Officer to assist the department with recommendations, guidance and implementation as well as leading and implementing the security initiatives as it relates to IT and the government. This will yield a higher pay scale and make it more likely that government can attract a quality and experienced person to this public officer position.

Mr. Chairman, IDT recruitment programme is ongoing and will enable us to better manage government's IT resources and consequently allow us to meet the department goals. Recruitment will also supplement project management resources and oversight with respect to ongoing government or IT projects. Additional staff will also allow IDT to support a future digital government and security.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I will move on to Output Measures.

Output Measures

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Information and Digital Technologies Performance Measures are found on pages B-62 and B-63 of the Budget Book. Selected indicators under each business unit are outlined as follows:

Business Unit 53030—Device Support

Hon. Vance Campbell: Indicator: Resolve and repair service tickets within service level targets. The original forecast for 2023/24 was 80 per cent to be completed within service level targets. Revised forecast for 2023/24 achieved 89 per cent within service level targets due primarily to staff turnover. The target outcome for 2024/25 is 90 per cent due in part by filling in additional posts and the implementation of modernised device management systems and desktop upgrades.

Business Unit 53035—Network Support

Hon. Vance Campbell: Indicator: Network monitoring, resolve repair tickets within service level targets. Original forecast for 2023/24, 75 per cent. Revised forecast achieved 75 per cent due to telephone system stabilisation initiative related to telephone incidents. The target outcome for 2024/25 is likewise 75 per cent.

Business Unit 53040—Service Support

Hon. Vance Campbell: Indicator: Manage tickets and resolve account administration within service level targets. The original forecast for 2023/24 was 95 per cent. Revised forecast remains at 95 per cent. The target outcome for 2024/25 is 95 per cent completion within service level target due in part to continued roll-out of self-service online tools such as: password.gov.bm, service desk logging, and single sign-on.

Business Unit 53060—Business Systems Support

Hon. Vance Campbell: Indicator: Conduct routine monthly service level review meetings with key departments. Original forecast was 70 per cent. The revised forecast is 60 per cent and the target outcome for 2024/25 is moved back up to 70 per cent, due in part to the cyberattack and the introduction of a new IT governance model.

Business Unit 53090—Security

Hon. Vance Campbell: The target outcome for 2024/25 is 100 per cent, as all E1 upgrades have been completed and IDT working along with the Accountant General will focus on coordinating and executing a full disaster recovery exercise.

Projects in the Past Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: The following IT projects were accomplished during the 2023/24 fiscal year:

- Cybersecurity attack investigation and restoration. The Bermuda Government was hit by a cyberattack during the past fiscal year. This had a significant impact on services delivered and moving projects forward as all IT resources were focused on recovery. However, although the systems were impacted, IDT was able to get some things accomplished.
- If we look at portals, automation of the Cabinet memorandum process (phase one), online payment portal, Flu Express health, gov.bm portal upgrade.
- Under digital services, the issuance of Smart Government Partner Request for Information (RFI); assisted with the National Digital Health

Strategy; assisted with the Judicial Enforcement Management System (JEMS) replacement.

- Under business services, a manual mission critical tool created to assist and prioritise outages after a cyber incident, restoration of Manage Engine for ServiceDesk; assisted with decryption of service and desktops.
- Under ISeries, maintained 100 per cent uptime for server platform prior to and during the cyber incident.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: The Department of Information and Digital Technologies will continue with the development of its core services in the upcoming year by focusing on four key strategic areas. The four areas that make up our IT strategy are centred around:

1. Ensuring a Trusted Environment. Building a trustworthy and dependable IT infrastructure.
2. A Secure Environment. Security has been and will continue to be a top priority. IDT will continue to focus on protecting systems, networks and data from unauthorised access, breaches and other cyberattacks. Due to the recent cyberattack, IDT will be adding extra resources such as enhanced monitoring tools that take advantage of artificial intelligence and staffing to increase our cyber awareness even further. By investing in these resources, we fortify our defences and maintain vigilance against potential threats. Fostering an environment where safety and security are paramount concerns, IDT will implement a more stringent process to ensure the safety of our stakeholders and systems. By remaining vigilant and adaptable to the evolving cyber threat landscape, IDT stands ready to confront and mitigate emerging risks effectively.
3. Reliable Environment. Committing to ensuring that IT systems and services are consistently available and perform well.
4. Robust Environment. Ensuring that systems strength and resilience in the face of challenges are embedded within all that falls under the IDT purview.

Mr. Chairman, IDT has created a draft 18-month strategy that lays the foundation to deliver a more secure environment while increasing operational stability. Thereby creating a catalyst for the Digital Reform Initiative in 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, as I close this section, I think that it is important to note that this Government continues to make investments into technology and that these investments will yield significant productivity improvements in future fiscal years. I hasten to also thank the entire Information and Digital Technologies staff for the service that they continue to provide the Bermuda Government, especially with multiple challenges and staff shortages. They have done a great job over the last year serving the Government and I commend them for their efforts. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my presentation for Head 43.

The Chairman: For the listening audience, this is Minister Vance Campbell presenting on the Cabinet Office in our [Budget] Debate. We are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. Minister Campbell has a four-hour debate which started at 4:00 pm. It is now 6:45 so that leaves us with just over an hour left. He has done Heads 9, 13, 32, 43 and he is about to go on to Head 51.

HEAD 51—DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 51, the Department of Communications found on pages B-64 through B-67 of the Budget Book.

Mission

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Communications is *To be the trusted source of information for Bermuda*.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: If we look at the Expenditure Overview, Mr. Chairman, on page B-64 there is a General Summary for the department.

The total current expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25 is estimated to be $3,396,764. This is an increase of $88,661, or 2.6 per cent, over the original 2023/24 budget.

Mr. Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates can be found on page B-65 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, in this year's Communications budget, in line item 1, page B-65, there is an allocation of $2,665,000 for salaries. This is an increase of $154,000. This increase accounts for posts that were vacant and are now filled and for the Bermuda Public Services Union (BPSU) uplifts in salary. Also, an additional $35,000 has been allocated to cover the cost of overtime expenses for the myriad of government events which occur during weekends, holidays and after hours on weekdays.

Mr. Chairman, in this year's Communications budget, in line item 3, page, B-65, there is an allocation of $20,000 for staff training and development. This allocation is to provide all members of the department an opportunity to engage in industry training in specialised fields.

In line item 5, page B-65, there is an allocation of $40,000 for travel, subsistence and accommodation associated with any overseas training that will be undertaken by members of the department.

In line item 6, page B-65, there is an allocation of $94,250 for Communications which covers the acquisition of replacement cell phones and monthly billing costs. Mr. Chairman, with a steady rise in government activities, events and community engagement, the Department of Communications is being relied on more and more to provide promotional services to support the critical programmes and activities that affect the lives of Bermudians. In order to support these activities, Mr. Chairman, the Department of Communications will utilise an increased allocation in advertising to support a variety of media activities and engagements.

In this year's communications budget, at line item 7, page B-65, there is an allocation of $371,221 for Advertising. This allocation also covers the annual Blue Page's insertion which outlines the litany of public service information available to the public.

Mr. Chairman, in line item 8, Professional Services, there is an allocation of $35,231. This is for securing specialised services associated with ensuring the effective operations of the government television station, CITV.

In line item 10, on page B-65, a new object code, there is an allocation of $2,000 to cover insurance costs for the department's three vehicles. In line item 11, on page B-65, there is an allocation of $49,100 to cover energy and the increased cost of electricity. In line item 12, Material and Supplies, there is an allocation of $40,800. This is to cover the cost of office supplies, computer software and general administrative materials. In line item 13, Equipment (Minor Capital) there is an allocation of $9,439 for the cost of furniture such as desks, chairs and storage units.

Staff

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Communications consists of a passionate and committed staff, all of whom work tirelessly to achieve the department's mission. Currently, there are 28 full-time funded employee posts. I am pleased to note that previously vacant full-time funded posts of an assistant director of communications, content officer, photographer and senior graphic designer have now been filled. In that regard, I am pleased to acknowledge the following individuals who have been confirmed in these posts: Ms. Honey Adams, as the assistant director of communications. Mr. Jamie McDowell, senior graphic designer, Mr. Antoine Hunt, photographer and Ms. Michelle Lamb as a content officer.

Mr. Chairman, we are anticipating that the two vacant posts of a communications officer and a graphic designer will be filled before the end of this current fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, when we discuss the structure of the Department of Communications, you should note that there are five sections within the department and they comprise of the following:

- Administration;
- Communications;
- Creative Services;
- CITV (the government television station); and
- Telephone Customer Service Representatives, who are the government telephone operators.

Mr. Chairman, as we highlight the staff within the department, I want to provide a brief overview of the various sections within the department, starting with the Communications section, business unit 61030, as indicated on page B-65 of the [Budget] Book.

The Communications section currently comprises of an assistant director, four communications officers, an internal communication officer, a content officer and a social media officer. There is a vacant Communications post that will be filled on 18 March. That is the target deadline.

Mr. Chairman, these eight officers serve a dozen ministries and more than 60 government departments. Mr. Chairman, in the last year, this team of communications officers continued to operate at a breakneck pace, meeting increased demands and providing a number of communications services [to] government ministries and departments. Working days, nights, holidays, weekends, through hurricanes, power outages and cyber interruptions, communications officers continued their mission of ensuring that residents were informed about government's critical programmes, policies and legislative initiatives.

During 2023, the communications officers created targeted messaging, wrote several hundred government press releases, media advisories and ministerial speeches, responded to hundreds of media inquiries and mitigated high profile crisis and risk situations. Added to these tasks, Mr. Chairman, the communications officers also project managed dozens of community events and government activities throughout the year. The communications officers are at the forefront of public engagement on behalf of the ministers, ministries and the departments they serve. They are the creators and architects of the messaging that supports and enhances the government initiatives. They work in partnership with the government leadership, and they are an integral component to ensuring that the public have all the information required in order to make informed decisions about their lives.

Mr. Chairman, I now turn to the government television station, CITV, business unit 61040, as indicated on page B-65 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, CITV comprises a general manager, programme manager, senior producer, television editor, and two full-time videographers.

Mr. Chairman, the government television station works in partnership with the Communications

section to support and amplify the words and messages that are created on behalf of government ministers, ministries and departments. Throughout the past year, the government's television station has remained committed to producing and airing programming that showcase the government's programmes and how they benefit the people of Bermuda. The station also features cultural, historical and socially relevant topics that celebrate and underline the diversity of Bermuda's heritage. In 2023, the government television station also produced hundreds of videos, radio commercials, public service announcements and social media videos. Additionally, the station provided coverage of press conferences, government town hall and public meetings and several major live remote broadcasts.

Mr. Chairman, highlights of this year's live broadcasts included the convening of the Parliament, the Speech from the Throne, the Peppercorn Ceremony, the Bermuda Day Parade, the Remembrance Day Parade and the Bermuda College commencement ceremony just to name a few.

Creative Services

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to the Creative Services section, business unit 61050, as indicated on page B-65 of the Budget [Book].

This team includes the assistant director of creative services, a senior graphic designer, two graphic designers, two photographers and a photo librarian. There is also a graphic designer post that will be filled by 2 April of this year.

Mr. Chairman, this section of the department provides the government's visuals through photography, digital and hard copy collateral materials. The imagery created by the Creative Services section helps to tell the story of government's programmes and policies. Creative Services work together in support of government ministries and departments to provide all the government's signage, posters, e-fliers, business cards, social media graphics, animated graphics, print ads and photography. This small team has proven to be an invaluable resource to the Government of Bermuda.

Customer Service Representatives

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Customer Service Representatives section, business unit 61070, as indicated on page B-65 of the Budget Book currently consists of two full-time employees. Government's call centre remains one of the most active in Bermuda. On average, the government's switchboard receives around 150 calls per day. The Customer Service Representatives provide information to hundreds of callers on a weekly basis. The Customer Service Representatives field calls from the public ranging from health to immigration, from education to public transportation, from social insurance to financial assistance and more. The department continues to partner with the Department of Information and Digital Technology to manage the Cisco Unified Computing [UC] System, the digital, web-based platform that interfaces with the call centre. Because the call centre is now web-based, it has from time to time experienced some technical issues as a result of intermittent network issues. However, there has been a concerted effort to ensure that regular maintenance on the system is conducted to reduce any customer complaints due to dropped or missed calls.

Additionally, the Department of Communications, in partnership with the Department of Information and Digital Technology, continued to explore machine learning technology to populate an online knowledge base platform to provide more complete information to residents.

Administration

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, business unit 61000, as indicated on page B-65 of the Budget Book, comprises of the director, an administrative officer and an accounts assistant. This unit continued to steadily ensure the efficient and effective administration of the department.

Performance Measures

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the output measures for Communications are listed on pages B-66 and B-67 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the continued demand for CITV, business unit 61040 on page B-66 of the Budget Book, to provide live coverage of government events has increased tremendously. The government television station will seek to ensure that government press conferences are successfully carried live on CITV and streamed live to the Government Portal, Facebook and YouTube without interruption of the broadcast signal 100 per cent of the time.

Mr. Chairman, our Creative Services section, listed as business unit 61050 on page B-66 of the Budget Book, prides itself on speed, innovation and efficiency. Mr. Chairman, Creative Services is an integral component in the cost savings necessary to make public information quickly accessible to the broader community. During this past year, the Creative Services team fielded more than 1,429 project requests. Within those requests there were a further 4,500 pieces of artwork that were required.

Our Photography Section, within the Creative Services, has taken an excess of 146,000 images over the course of 2023. This past year Creative Services had a job completion rate of 99.3 per cent. Creative Services will seek to ensure that there is a 100 per cent turnaround time on the production of photography and graphic design materials.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, in this upcoming year the department will continue to assist implementing communication strategies that will demonstrate the Government's commitment to engaging and supporting the people of Bermuda. This includes communications, campaigns and promotions that support such activities as the 2024/25 national budget, the annual Ag Show, International Women's Day, Heritage Month and the Bermuda Day Parade, the Government Summer Employment programme, the Ministry of Transport's Electronic Vehicle campaign, improvements to the Island's ageing infrastructure, promoting the Government's Economic Development Strategy, attracting talent into the Government with the re-imagining careers in the public service campaign, education reform, health care reform, and the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Chairman, communications in all its mediums and disciplines are rapidly growing. This year's budget reflects an increase in funds for training so that the department can invest in the professional development of the staff. As the demands and technology of the profession change, the talent matrix must adapt. A premium will be placed on ensuring continuous learning and development to keep the team at the forefront of industry evolution.

Mr. Chairman, our digital and online platforms, Government's Facebook, Instagram, X, WhatsApp, StreamYard, YouTube and LinkedIn continue to be popular mediums for residents to receive their information. The department recognises that building and strengthening relationships with our stakeholders is a priority for the Department of Communications. This year, in an effort to communicate to a broader audience and ensure maximum awareness of the Government's programmes, initiatives, and policies the Department of Communications will expand its engagement with local, nontraditional and traditional media partners.

Funding for advertising within the department's budget will allow for partnerships with new and emerging local media entities who have contributed to the rapidly shifting media landscape. The aim of these partnerships is to engage our community directly in diverse and innovative ways to encourage residents to learn more about the Government initiatives that matter most to them. These engagement activities will take the form of direct in-person curated events with key segments of the community. We expect that the invaluable feedback received will be used to guide proposed Government policies and programmes.

Mr. Chairman, to ensure that we provide the most unique perspective with the Government imagery we share with our community, funds in the budget have been included for an unmanned aerial vehicle, UAV, or drone. With the introduction of drone technology aerial photography has become more compelling and innovative. The Creative Services section within the department will invest in this technology. By doing so, we hope to revolutionise government photography by opening up a number of new opportunities to capture high-quality photos and videos from a variety of perspectives.

Mr. Chairman, as indicated earlier in this brief, the department will continue its commitment to providing our community with access to events and activities that engender national identity and community pride. This year the government's television station will continue to provide live coverage of signature events such as the Remembrance Day Parade, the King's Birthday Parade, National Heroes Day, the convening of Parliament and of course, the Bermuda Day Parade. To assist with the technical demands of showcasing these events live, a modest uplift in the budget has been provided to allow the upgrade and acquisition of new equipment for the Government's television station.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, it has been roughly five years since the Department of Communications has engaged in a strategic review. This year, under the leadership of the Director of Communications and in partnership with the Government's management consultancy services, the department will undertake a strategic planning exercise that will review the current mission and operating model and identify strategic issues and determine strategic actions.

Mr. Chairman, the reality is that much has changed over the past several years and the communications landscape has transformed considerably. To ensure that there is a shared purpose and clarity of message, both internally and externally, the department will implement a robust plan that supports the team and seeks to deliver Government communications in ways that contribute to the enhancement of the lives of the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, as I close, I wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the director and to the entire team at the Department of Communications. They are a team of committed public servants. They work behind the scenes effectively with professionalism and without fanfare. Their sole aim is to serve the Government and the people of Bermuda. For that we are appreciative of their dedication. During this next fiscal year, the Department of Communications looks forward to continuing to support the Government's mandate of ensuring a prosperous and successful Bermuda for all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my budget presentation for Head 51.

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister Campbell has finished his presentation on Head 51. He does have two more heads to go. He has Head 61 and Head 80.

Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 61—THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYEE AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 61, the Department of Employee and Organizational Development, found on pages B-68 through B-72 of the Budget Book.

Mission

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Employee and Organizational Development is *To optimize talent and transform the Organization.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be $7,962,000 for 2024/25 which represents an increase of $364,000 or 5 per cent compared to 2023/24. The increase is largely attributed to salary increments because of negotiated salary increases with the Bermuda Public Services Union [BPSU].

Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis for the department is on page B-69 of the Estimates Book, which I will highlight.

Salaries: These are estimated at $6,803,000 and represents an increase of 7 per cent or $469,000 compared to the current estimate for 2023/24 of $6,334,000. Mr. Chairman, the majority of this increase is attributed to the salary negotiations with the BPSU, as previously mentioned. In addition, one position that was partially funded in 2023/24 is now fully funded.

Training

Hon. Vance Campbell: The estimated budget for this is $135,000 and represents a 1 per cent decrease in comparison to 2023/24. However, funding of $80,000 (which will be discussed under the subjective analysis for professional services) will be journaled to raise the total number of bursary awards from six to ten.

Travel

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, this is estimated at $27,000 and represents a 23 per cent decrease in comparison to 2023/24. These costs are associated with expenses to relocate new employees to Bermuda and to repatriate non-Bermudians at the end of their contract period.

Communications

Hon. Vance Campbell: As we look at Communications, this is estimated at $45,000 and represents an increase of 80 per cent, or $20,000. These funds which were sourced from funding already in the department's budget will cover the cost of mobile services as phones were purchased in the latter part of 2023 for critical staff to ensure they have telephone access to conduct Government business. The current location cannot accommodate additional landlines and thus office phones have been experiencing challenges since the cyberattack.

Professional Services

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, this is estimated at $554,000 in comparison to $492,000 for the current estimate. Funding to continue work with the new job evaluation modelling initiative which commenced in 2023 remains. More details from the status of this project will be shared later in this brief.

In addition, as previously mentioned, $80,000 will be applied to the bursary and trainee schemes programme. Other costs covered under this category are associated with such areas as the annual employee assistance programme fee, consultant fees for local and overseas facilitators to provide services in relation to talent management and legal fees associated with work undertaken by the Public Service Commission.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. Vance Campbell: The budget is estimated at $361,000 and represents a 6 per cent decrease in comparison to 2023[/24]. And the reduction has been used to supplement other priority areas, Mr. Chairman.

Materials and Supplies

Hon. Vance Campbell: The total funding of $83,000 represents an increase of 14[per cent], or $10,000. It was necessary as more office supplies are needed due to the increase in employee numbers as positions that were not occupied previously have now been filled.

Receipts Credited to Programme

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, this is attributable to the estimated recharges back to the Public Service Superannuation Fund [PSSF], Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pensions Fund [MMLPF], and the Government Employee Health Insurance Fund [GEHI]. These funds cover the administrative costs incurred by the compensation and benefits [business] units.

Manpower

Hon. Vance Campbell: The manpower estimates for the department as outlined on page B-70 is 63 full-time

equivalents which remains consistent with the original estimate for 2023/24.

Capital Acquisition

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, capital acquisition for the department is on page C-10 of the Estimates Book. The estimated $14,000 is to cover the replacement of outdated computer equipment, i.e., laptops, monitors and monitor stands.

Performance Measures

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the performance measures developed for the Department of Employee and Organizational Development are found on pages B-71 and B-72. These measures are directly related to the work of each of the business units. Time will not permit a full and detailed review; therefore, I will provide a high-level summary of the 2023/24 original and revised forecasts on significant matters.

Mr. Chairman, with a view to causing ministries and departments to function more efficiently, the Management Consulting Services (MCS) section completed 15 operational/organisation reviews thus exceeding the original forecast of 10.

Mr. Chairman, MCS also served as the Project Management Office for Government Reform. Delivery of 100 per cent of the priority initiatives set out in the Government Reform Strategic Planning Framework 2019–2023 were tracked using the cloud-based project management tool AchieveIt. The system is open to 125 users to monitor and report on the implementation of the Government Reform Initiative.

As a note, and to validate Government efficiency endeavours, AchieveIt is also being used to project manage other large-scale initiatives inclusive of the Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) and the Education Reform Plan.

Mr. Chairman, on the matter of employee compensation, through a competitive tendering process a new job evaluation tool was selected to determine the relative value of public service positions. The implementation guided by the selected vendor has started with the evaluation of specialist positions in the areas of finance, health, compliance, engineering, legal, and information technology which are in alignment with hard-to-fill data.

Mr. Chairman, the HR Business Partnering Section completed 40 per cent of the development of human capital resource plans for assigned ministries and departments. However, given the high volume of recruitment their work continued to focus on recruitment and hiring owing to the high number of vacancies across the service.

Forecasting activities were again limited to length of time to recruit for vacant funded posts and workforce planning centred around devising ways to fill the labour gaps in the short term. As each HR Business [Partnering Section] stabilises their portfolio recruitment issues, they will re-focus on the more holistic matters associated with human capital resource planning.

Mr. Chairman, the Talent Management Services section continued the implementation of the Government's Succession Planning and Management Policy upon identification of critical and hard-to-fill posts. Posts held by officers retiring within five years and posts held by non-Bermudians.

The team working with the HR Business Partnering Section met with respective client departments to prioritise implementation of succession strategies in relation to business and resource planning.

Professional development plans were created for internal candidates having expressed interest in development toward the next level [of] hard-to-fill posts. In addition, a more focused effort was made in relation to bursary recruitment ensuring hard-to-fill posts were given priority. Lastly, the team was active with student outreach organising several departments' participation in career events held at the Berkeley Institute, CedarBridge Academy and the Bermuda College. These events provided opportunities to share information about critical and hard-to-fill posts as well as bursary or trainee programmes offering support for those transitioning from high school to university and then into the work force. In addition, content was created for inclusion in a planned career guide for use by students, parents and anyone interested in a career within the public service.

Mr. Chairman, the Government bursary and training schemes, including trainee and designate development plans, are existing tools used to ensure that there is cadre of competent viable candidates to fill hard-to-fill roles. In relation to the forecast, Ms. Ashley Fubler completed her tutelage and was appointed as a junior crown counsel in January 2024.

Mr. Chairman, the Leadership Development Programme continued with two groups this year. Those requiring support around the foundations of management and those demonstrating the ability to fill permanent secretary or head of department posts within two years of training. The cohort completed learning not only in management and leadership but policy development. Some have led or participated in cross-department projects having significant impact on Government services or legislation such as Government online payments, improved debt collection and the minimum hourly wage entitlement. In addition, public officers were invited to apply for the permanent secretary leadership development programme with a view to increasing the number of viable candidates to fill vacancies as and when they arise.

Current Year Achievements

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, in summary, amongst other initiatives, the department

- successfully managed the weekly and monthly compensation and benefits programme for in excess of 4,400 public officers;
- onboarded 218 new permanent employees;
- conducted 177 recruitment exercises since April 1, 2023;
- facilitated and/or organised 160 in-person and virtual training sessions;
- supported six bursary students;
- developed and managed 24 professional development plans;
- conducted 15 organisational reviews as previously shared; and
- successfully managed the continued implementation of the Government Reform initiative focusing on people and Information Technology.

Mr. Chairman, additionally, in response to the 2023 Throne Speech, which indicated that the pace of Government recruitment needed to be streamlined to ensure vacancies are replaced more quickly, the recruitment function has been enhanced to offer a decentralised option, i.e., line managers and supervisors to lead out with their own recruitment. The aim of the decentralisation option is to assist ministries and departments with moving recruitment for posts forward faster through the expansion of resources. To ensure leaders are equipped the Department of Employee and Organizational Development commenced mandatory training for all permanent secretaries, heads of departments, managers and supervisors.

The Bermuda Government is committed to developing talent to fill critical roles at all levels in the public service. During this fiscal year, six students received bursary awards. Five students are pursuing degrees in the health profession which will fill an increasing need in health care service delivery. The cohort consists of four nursing students: Ms. Dejhah Burgess-Simons, Ms. Alaysia Swan, Ms. Zyon Minors, Ms. Chioma Lawrence; as well as Mr. Joshua Gilbert who is pursuing a degree in dental hygiene. Ms. Keanna Gooden is completing a master's degree in real estate management in preparation to transition to a role of trainee estates supervisor. Ms. Danielle Foote who was a bursary student transitioned to trainee assistant planner in September 2023. It is anticipated that bursary student Ms. Taneesha Ottley will be appointed to a trainee policy analyst post before the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to now move into plans for upcoming year.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Management Consulting Services section, in their capacity as the Project Management Office for the Government Reform Initiative [GRI] will guide the Government through the development and implementation of a new Government Reform Plan. The forthcoming phase of reform slated for 2024–2027, extends from and expands upon the groundwork laid in prior efforts joined from insights garnered in the previous GRI engagement, this phase capitalises on accumulated wisdom to drive even more impactful and sustainable transformation.

The Reform Plan for the next period will maintain its people imperative and focus on digital transformation which is a catalyst for the creation of value for citizens and employees through significant change that leverages the potential of process technology data and also to create value.

Mr. Chairman, the project team, led by Management Consulting Services [MCS], will continue to deliver on people and IT initiatives, as the fundamentals of digital transformation are already in progress. Mr. Chairman, The MCS team will work with ministries and departments to review and conduct cost benefit analysis to support the decision-making process for the future of government's service offerings.

Mr. Chairman, the most important deliverable by the Administration [Unit] is to continue with the evaluation of positions for completion in August 2024. Thereafter, plans for full implementation will be developed.

Mr. Chairman, the Talent Management Strategy will be completed, and an implementation plan drafted for developing government's talent pipeline to meet current and future needs at all levels of the service.

Mr. Chairman, the implementation of training programmes related to succession planning for hard-to-fill posts will continue to be a priority, although with the bursary and trainee programmes there will be focused efforts on relaunching programmes for apprentices and trainees at the Departments of Works and Engineering, Transport, and Marine and Ports.

Efforts to launch programmes in the areas of accounting, IT policy compliance, nursing, and project management and procurement will also be a focal point of the 2024/25 fiscal year. Participants of the permanent secretary leadership development programme will be exposed to how Cabinet functions and will have the opportunity to sharpen public policy and administrative policy development skills and participate in capacity building experience in another jurisdiction. The programme will run parallel with the existing leadership development programme inclusive of leadership courses to be undertaken.

Mr. Chairman, in the interest of supporting the growth and development of young Bermudians and exposing students to jobs within the Government of Bermuda, the Department of Employee and Organizational Development will coordinate the participation of ministries and departments in the Bermuda public school system's signature learning partnership programme.

This partnership will give students valuable information about pursuing Government careers.

Mr. Chairman, the department will play an integral role in the re-imagining public service careers initiative to include hosting career and networking events that will attract and inspire persons entering the workforce and those currently in the workforce to pursue meaningful careers in the public service.

Mr. Chairman, the current contract for the government's first Human Resources Information Management System (HRIMS) will soon 30 June 2025. To this end a request for proposal will be launched for a new user-friendly system to improve the quality of online HR processes such as recruitment, talent management and performance management with a view to implementing a new HRIMS by December 2025.

Mr. Chairman, the projects and initiatives shared do not include the delivery of smaller special projects as well as ongoing services carried out by the department and its small team of officers.

Mr. Chairman, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the devoted and diligent staff of the Department of Employee and Organizational Development under the leadership of the Chief Employee and Organizational Development Officer, Ms. Carlita O'Brien. Despite resource challenges and effects of the cyberattack, they continued to persevere throughout 2023/24 to deliver a range of human resource services to ministries and departments. Thank you and well done to the team!

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I will now move on to Project Management and Procurement.

HEAD 80—OFFICE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Vance Campbell: It gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 80, the Office of Project Management and Procurement found on pages B-73 through B-75 of the Budget Book.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Office of Project Management and Procurement's mission is *To provide oversight and guidance in project management and procurement to ensure transparency and value for money.*

Department Objectives

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, following are the objectives of the Office of Project Management and Procurement:

- Promote the areas covered in our statutory mandate related to good governance and best practices and continue to strengthen our office functionality.
- Use a professional approach in our capacity to help and enable our clients to achieve project, procurement and compliance efficiencies.
- Strengthen internal processes for enhanced team performance and development by keeping abreast of emerging trends.
- Help modernise the project management and procurement functions in order to increase the efficiency of public spending and building professionalism in project management, procurement and compliance capacities.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be $874,000 for the financial year 2024/25. This is an increase in the budget from the previous year in the amount of $34,000 and is mainly attributed to respective union increases.

Mr. Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates of the Office of Project Management and Procurement is found on page B-74. Please allow me to highlight them.

- Other Personnel Costs—No change, remains at $3,000.
- Training—No change, remains at $3,000.
- Communications—No change; remains at $4,000.
- Professional Services—No change; remains at $40,000.
- Rental Expenses—No change.
- Repair and Maintenance Expenses—No change, which remains at $4,000.
- Material and Supplies—A decrease from $22,000 to $18,000.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the total of capital expenditure is estimated to be $22,000. This is an increase from the previous year in the amount of $9,000 mainly attributed to the purchase of computers and equipment for new staff. This can be found on page C-10 of the Budget Book.

Current Year Achievements

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the office met its three performance measures for 1 April 2023 to the present. [These are:]

1. The Minister and Cabinet received most of their required quarterly waiver reports and analysis on time. Some quarterly reports were not delivered on time due to technical challenges after the cyberattack and were beyond this office's control.

2. The office completed the Cabinet Memoranda vetting within five business days after receipt at 95 per cent of the time; and
3. The office only completed three of the four targeted virtual training sessions on the Introduction to the Code of Practice for Project Management and Procurement for 35 participants. This was due to extenuating circumstances brought on by the digital crisis across the Government and its associated fallout and system reconstruction.

Mr. Chairman, the office also facilitated six of nine targeted project management training sessions: two virtual and four in-class sessions for 53 participants. These dynamic project management orientation programme courses are customised for public officers in middle and senior management positions and are based on international standards and training for the Project Management Institute [PMI]. Not only does this ensure project delivery sustainability in a dynamic global market, but it also ensures that the Bermuda Government maintains the growth capacity and know-how necessary to navigate challenges in the coming years. Along with personal advancement options toward professional certification the office partnered with the American Management Association to provide project management for administrative professionals. This initiative has had a broad response from various ministries across government. Finally, in an effort to embed project management and procurement effectively as a viable business assurance instrument, the office has taken steps in this initiative by partnering with Department of Employee and Organizational Development. These initiatives will be further developed in the coming year as something that provides immediate and worthwhile benefits toward helping achieve the Government's goals and objectives.

Mr. Chairman, these are noteworthy training achievements across the Government for the office this year. The adaptation of a growth mind-set and standard approach toward project delivery is critical as public officers navigate an ever-changing and more complex global business environment. The work being done in this area by the office demonstrates the utilisation of resources across the Government and private sector alike that can positively impact capital project delivery and allow the Government to achieve efficiencies and value for money in project management and procurement activities.

Mr. Chairman, the office also continued introducing opportunities to gain procurement skills and tools. Unfortunately, due to internal resource constraints, the in-house RFX Drafter (Orbidder 2.0) in-person training sessions were not done this year. Instead, the office continued working with the RFX drafting software service provider to enhance their offering to ensure that public officers involved in procurement and preparing RFX documents had access to online self-serve training, a help desk, and how-to guides and videos for this application.

Mr. Chairman, the office continued to enhance the online depository (Local Vault) in the RFX Drafter application for ease of access for public officers to gain other prescribed templates such as the Evaluation Matrix, updated Contract Award Recommendation template, sample pricing schedules, the updated Social, Economic and Environment Local Benefits form, the Invitational Request for Quotation [IRFQ] template and other procurement documents such as unsuccessful and successful letters and more.

Of particular note, Mr. Chairman, the office has recently completed a competitive and robust application and interview process that will see critical vacancies filled. This includes the hiring and onboarding of two Bermudians who will fill the contract of compliance manager and compliance officer posts and two non-Bermudians who will fill the procurement manager and the procurement support specialist post for three years. However, the project manager post will not be filled this year due to budget constraints.

The office has already developed a comprehensive plan to identify and train Bermudians for the post filled by non-Bermudians. The office being fully staffed will enable it to fulfil its mandate as stated in the Public Treasury (Administration and Payments) Act 1969 and the Good Governance Act 2011 and Good Governance Act 2012 thereby allowing the office to provide the necessary professional advice and guidance in procurement and compliance across government ministries. Along with the aforementioned, the office will be able to support ongoing in-house projects and procurement professional training as part of the office's commitment to ensure further capacity development of public officers involved in these activities.

Mr. Chairman, the office is nearing completion of updating the Code of Practice for Project Management and Procurement. In so doing the office sought and received input from senior management and practitioners, allowing for a comprehensive review based on current practices. Additionally, this year the Code underwent plain English and legal governance compliance reviews by a third party. This was done to ensure that plain English was employed so that persons could easily understand the Code's content and that good practices were continually applied. The third edition of the Code should be ready for release in 2024.

Mr. Chairman, the office continued to be an integral and active member of the IDT Governance Committee along with providing professional project and procurement advice and guidance as to government's internal consultants and business concerns that perpetuate and advance the Economic Recovery Programme, Education Reform, and Education Care Reform, specifically Universal Health Coverage, and other capital projects along with capital and regular acquisitions.

Mr. Chairman, the office is a member of the National Anti-Corruption and Bribery [NACB] committee and continues to provide project and procurement perspectives to the NACB meetings with the United Nations Convention against Corruption [UNCAC] assessment.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the office will continue to produce quarterly waiver reports for the Minister and Cabinet. The office will complete the Cabinet memoranda compliance reviews within five business days after receipt. The office's goal is to achieve these 95 per cent of the time within the five business days target.

Mr. Chairman, if resources permit, the office will increase its efforts to ensure public officers understand their oversight and advisory roles for capital projects and acquisitions. This will be accomplished by delivering customised virtual and one-on-one training sessions to ensure project and procurement policies and procedures are understood and complied with.

Additionally, the office will offer four virtual training sessions on the Introduction to the Code of Practice and nine Project Management Training sessions during the next fiscal year with support from the Department of Employee and Organizational Development and other partners.

Mr. Chairman, with the addition of procurement and compliance professionals there are plans in progress at this time to determine an acceptable baseline regarding compliance provisions with stakeholders both within the public service and private sector. It is anticipated that the office, along with other Government entities, will establish not just a standard policy but also a robust procedural approach with a concentration on real-time information-sharing access and reporting between authorised public officers across all ministries.

Mr. Chairman, the office will continue to work with IDT and PIPA/PATI departments and the Paperless Committee to complete the development and implementation of

1. a new internal online waiver request form;
2. establish an e-sourcing platform, Bonfire pilot project,
3. help establish a contract register to streamline these processes;
4. enhance the prescribed project management and procurement templates; and
5. will investigate and invest in a new case record management solution for the various internal sections to enhance efficiency, transparency, productivity, record-keeping and consistency in the office's case record management.

Mr. Chairman, the office will continue to work with Ministry and department programmes and project managers after the capital budget is released to assist them in planning and prioritising the capital projects thereby helping them to gain an early start on critical aspects of the project and procurement planning and bidding processes.

Mr. Chairman, the office will produce its annual reports for the office operational year 2023 in the not-too-distant future. Mr. Chairman, the office will continue to advise, guide and support the development of and adherence to project management and procurement regulations and policies. They will continue to facilitate the development of the Government and public officers' knowledge and capacity on procurement and project management best practices to raise the level of expertise in these areas across the Government.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the office diligently provides oversight and guidance on all Government procurements and project management while building the workforce capacity. Mr. Chairman, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge and commend the officers of the Project Management and Procurement team and the Director, Ms. Elaine Blair-Christopher, for their continued dedication and efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my budget presentation for Head 80 and the budget presentation as a whole.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister Campbell.

Is there anybody who would like to speak to these heads?

I recognise MP Scott Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think we have 15 minutes left.

The Chairman: You have 16 minutes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: All right, 16 minutes. Well, I will bowl a few overs and see what the Minister wants to tell us this evening before we come to an end.

Starting with the Cabinet Office, which is on page B-41, Head 9. It does show savings of some $18 million, but as the Minister explained that is because $19 million [from] the Tourism bucket moved to the new Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. So that is the expenditure line.

On the revenue line, my first question to the Minister, we see a drop of $880,000 of revenue, specifically from the post office. We see a drop of $350,000 and the Cabinet Office a drop of $540,000. So if the Minister could perhaps address why those drops were and specifically the $350,000 drop in revenue at the post office.

Over to pages B-43, B-44, and B-45 the Minister took us through the various budgets and expenditures of the various offices and also foreign consultants who are assisting the PLP Government. I am curious to know why it is that for the Brussels Office . . . and I have had the pleasure of meeting Ms. [Aliyyah] Ahad. She is an extremely impressive Bermudian working in Brussels. And then we have a Bermudian also working in

Washington DC. And I am just curious why two Bermudians working in Brussels and Washington DC are being paid so much less than the Middle Eastern Affairs consultant. And I would just like to hear the Minister's view of the relative value, the non-Bermudian consultant from the Middle East is offering compared to two Bermudians working diligently in Brussels and DC.

Moving to the Post Office and Head 13, we have actuals in 2018/19 of $3.6 million. This is on the revenue on page B-51. That dropped to about $2.3 million in 2022/23 and then we see the column reduces to $3.1 anticipated, and then revised down to $2.6 million. So, $3.6 million back in 2018/19, then $2.3 million two years ago on the actuals, and then we hope to get $3.1 million but only get $2.6 million. In that context, why is it that the Minister is predicting that we will get $2.8 million next year? That seems pretty unlikely given the numbers over the past few years.

Also on page B-51, could the Minister explain where the numbers are on that page for MyBermudaPost? Because I was not able to find the MyBermudaPost line item. I note that last year in the Budget Debate the Minister predicted that there would be revenue from MyBermudaPost of circa $350 million *[sic]*. I am just curious if that target has been met or exceeded.

While we are on the subject of the Post Office and appreciating the limited time available, and I want to leave the Minister time to answer some questions, I note that there was a decision against the Ministry, against MyBermudaPost in terms of allowing that company to come into the picture. And I note further that having lost that case and paid costs, the Ministry is now appealing that case which will expend more taxpayer money on the appeal. Given how expensive lawyers are, and I take due note that I am a lawyer, and I declare my interest, but given how expensive lawyers are, why are we wasting yet more money from the taxpayers on an appeal in relation to something that was really only anticipated to have circa $300,000 in revenue. I mean, we are going to spend that in litigation, aren't we? Is that appeal really a sensible way forward?

On Tourism, you took us to pages C-17 and C-20 in relation to the Grants. I appreciate that it has moved across such that your grant of $19 million is now a grant for the new Minister of $16.5 million. My question, though, Minister, is, Had this remained with you, would you have cut the grant in a similar fashion, and why?

In terms of tourism, it is pretty clear that we are lagging behind other competitive jurisdictions to our south. And we heard real, hard-fact numbers in the Reply to the Budget given by the Opposition Leader. And if we are lagging behind in tourism, does it really make sense to be cutting the Tourism budget that significantly in this year?

Moving quickly to Planning . . . and then I will sit down and let some of these answers be given. But on Planning which is Head 32, specifically page B-57, line item 8123. You will remember, Minister, that I had . . . the OBA and, indeed, I, specifically, had criticised the previous Minister on his *penchant* for overturning decisions of Planning officers. Since the Ministry has moved to your portfolio and your Ministry, have you overturned any Planning decisions brought to you?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: That is line item 8123, for the Premier's benefit because he asked me which one it was. And it is 8123 on page B-57, Head 32.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, those are my questions.

The Chairman: Is there anyone else who would like to speak on these heads?

With there being no one else indicating that they would like to speak, Minister, did you want to respond to some of these questions?

And for the listening public we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the 2024/25 budget year. And we are actually debating quite a few heads which come under the Minister Vance Campbell. Minister Vance Campbell is about to respond to the Opposition's questions.

Hon. Vance Campbell: I will start with the last question in regard to Planning.

The way the law is structured it does allow the Minister . . . and provide the Minister or any appeals that come to the Minister . . . I think in one of my Ministerial Statements (I believe it was a Ministerial Statement) I spoke to the fact that the City of Hamilton Plan 2024 is one that is moving away from a standard, or numbers, numeric-based system to one that is a principle-based system which will allow for more flexibility. That is something that is very much supported by the officers of the Planning Department. That will allow them to use their expertise and experience in many instances. They are in favour of that move. They are strongly behind it.

They recognise that the numeric-based, numbers-based system is extremely restrictive and so when certain decisions come to the Minister, they do come in the format that provides recommendations that if the Minister is so inclined to overturn, these are the conditions. Or they can make recommendations for the Minister to uphold and appeal, for example.

So, in answer to your question, I provide that background but in answer to your question, yes, I have overturned a decision of the . . . or the decisions of the Planning Department on an occasion or two.

The Chairman: Minister, if I could just ask for your indulgence. It has been brought to my attention that we might have to correct the record.

Honourable Member Scott Pearman, during your summation you stated that it was publicly [said] by a Minister last year that MyBermudaPost was going to generate $350 million in revenue. You might have meant to say $350,000.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I certainly did mean to say $300,000 *[sic]*. Thank you for correcting me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: All right. Thank you.

Just let the record show that it was $350,000 and not $350 million.

Sorry about that, Minister. You can have the floor again.

Hon. Vance Campbell: No problem.

So, again, the Tourism grant, that is not my remit. I know when the question was asked, if it was . . . I don't know the basis for the current Minister's decision to reduce the grant, so I cannot comment on what I would have done or not done.

The Chairman: Yes, the Tourism head is not up for debate right now, so you do not have to—

Hon. Vance Campbell: I don't have to answer, but I thought I would put that out there and answer that.

So, if we look at Head 9, there was a question as to the differential from Brussels and DC which were headed up by Bermudians and the Middle Eastern Affairs consultant. There is no office in the Middle East. So the DC and Brussels offices have overheads. You will note that the total cost of those offices are $393,000 and $462,000, respectively. And the $240,000 in regard to the Middle Eastern Affairs consultant is $240,000 for that whole process.

The revenue created for Cabinet Office is a matter of the vacation rental fees and hotel licences belonging to the section that is now moved out of our Ministry. And this lies with cost centre 19065, Regulatory and Policy, Hotel Administration.

Now with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, it is not a matter of decreasing revenue overall, it is just a transfer. We also had the $540,000 budget that was for enhancement of our cultural . . . you know, to assist our musicians and creatives in expressing their talents. And that has moved as well to the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Those are the responses that I have to date. Now, I don't know if there is anything . . . I will not respond on the potential appeal by the Government to the MyBermudaPost decision because it is still *sub judice*. I think that is the term that attorneys use. I am not sure if there is anything that I missed answering—

Mr. Scott Pearman: There were two that I asked that you didn't answer. Or one you answered in part. First of all, it was where on page B-51 was the money for MyBermudaPost? On what line item? That was the specific question.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Can you repeat that again?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, was on page B-51. Where is the MyBermudaPost line item for the revenue?

You remember the question about $300,000 *[sic]* that I misspoke and said $300 million. I was just curious where it is on that.

And then secondly, in relation to the postings in Brussels and Washington, you answered that it was overheads. But during your brief you stated their actual salary levels at $157,000 and $133,000 which is considerably below. So it is not a question of overheads, it is actual salaries. Thank you.

The Chairman: And for the listening audience we are in the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2024/25. Questions are being posed to Minister Vance Campbell on the heads that he has been doing . . . he has presented on Heads 9, 13, 32, 43, 51, 61 and 80. The Honourable MP Scott Pearman is asking questions on Head 13 regarding the Post Office.

Minister Campbell, you have the floor.

Hon. Vance Campbell: As far as the MyBermudaPost revenue I am advised that that is part of the Custom declaration processing fee, revenue I believe is at $523,000. And the . . . I may have misspoken when I referred to the $240,000 as being for salaries. I believe that is the total cost for all expenses allotted for the Middle Eastern advisor.

The Chairman: And we have . . . it looks like we have one minute left, if my eyesight is correct from back here.

Are there any questions that can be posed and answered in 60, 59, 58 seconds?

Mr. Scott Pearman: I can try. Head 51, page B-64, in relation to the COMS [communications] mailings that you were talking about being mailed out by the Government. Do you have a budgetary figure for those COMS mailings? What the annual cost was for all of those mailings you referred to.

[Pause]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am happy to take it from the Minister by email at a later date if he does not have it at hand.

Hon. Vance Campbell: I don't have it handy right now and I can provide that to the Honourable Member in the not-too-distant future.

The Chairman: All right, thank you, Minister.

And while you are on your feet, we have come to the end of our four-hour debate. Minister, would you like to move your heads?

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 9, 13, 32, 43, 51, 61 and 80 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 9, 13, 32, 43, 51, 61 and 80 be moved as printed.

Are there any objections to that motion?

With there being no objections, agreed to.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Cabinet Office Heads 9, 13, 32, 43, 51, 61 and 80 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.]

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

With there being no objection, agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Pause]

House resumed at 8:02 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the House rising and reporting progress and seeking leave to sit again?

There are none.

That brings us to an end of the Budget Debate process that we have participated in today and we thank Members for their participation.

There is no other business to be done other than seeking the indulgence of the House. The Deputy Premier has a Bill that he would like to table for debate at another time. And with your indulgence we will allow him to table it.

Any objections? None.

Mr. Deputy [Premier].

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 14

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that Standing Order 14 be suspended to enable me to introduce a Bill to the House.

The Speaker: Continue, no objections.

Go ahead.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]

BILL

FIRST READING

VOLUNTARY REGISTRATION OF VITAL DOCUMENTS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) ACT 2024

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting: Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the indulgence of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until—he is on his feet to speak. Someone is on his feet to speak—until Friday, 8 March.

I see Ministers are up to speak.

The Speaker: I see two Ministers on their feet.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Deputy Premier, the Minister behind you was actually up before you.

Minister, would you like to make a contribution at this time?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I will yield to the Minister.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Would you like to make your contribution?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thanks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have to set the clock . . . there we go.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: You have your 20 minutes.

USE OF CONSULTANTS

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, we stand at a crossroads of rhetoric and reality. A moment when the Opposition's sensational claims deemed a response from this side grounded in facts, transparency and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance has thrown out what I label *red meat* for their base, accusing the Progressive Labour Party of recklessly spending $41 million on consultants. They ask, and I quote, Mr. Speaker, from the *Royal Gazette, "*Why the lavish expenditure when we have elected MPs to serve?" To imply simply a misuse of public funds by comparing the spending of $17 million for one year of their short four-year stay when looking at $41 million spent by the Progressive Labour Party in one year. Well, Mr. Speaker, when I dissect those figures with the rigour and honesty that this House deserves, the Opposition's narrative, a relic of their United Bermuda Party origins, is designed to paint the Progressive Labour Party as wasteful, unable to manage money and to emphasise that their OBA friends will put their "friends and family" plan.

Mr. Speaker, consultants are not a luxury, but they are a cornerstone of any modern government. They bring specialised skills and perspectives crucial to our nation's progress. Skills that at times are not readily available within the government structures. But Mr. Speaker, I did the research [that] our daily and other journalists seem incapable of doing. I have looked at the professional expenses, details from the One Bermuda Alliance's four years in Government and compared them to the Progressive Labour Party's six years of budgets that are available. Under the One Bermuda Alliance, in four years they spent $83.4 million on consultants. That is an average of $20.8 million per year. Under the Progressive Labour Party for six years, we have spent $139.8 million in consultants over six years which averages $23.2 million annually.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, Mr. Speaker, I agree—

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Forty-one million dollars last year!

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —the PLP has spent more on consultants in the six years that we have been Government than the One Bermuda Alliance spent in the four years that they were Government.

But Mr. Speaker, let's not stop there. Let's delve deeper into the Professional Services expenditure on contractors, travel, and legal fees, Mr. Speaker, where another narrative unfolds. The OBA's desired narrative crumbles when faced with the fact that they have spent more year per year on consultants, contractors and . . . here is the good one, Mr. Speaker, travel and legal fees.

Some Hon. Members: Aah! Ooh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, Mr. Speaker, when the One Bermuda Alliance's Leader stands up and repeats to the *Royal Gazette,* "The PLP should come clean regarding the consultants they hired" I challenge the One Bermuda Alliance to tell the public what contractors were hired during their four years at an average of $2.3 million more than the PLP has spent in six years.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Where did they travel and what was the value that the people of Bermuda got from their $2.8 million per year more than the Progressive Labour Party has spent in six years?

An Hon. Member: Forty-one million dollars.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, lastly, what legal firms (and I hear the Member chirping because he should be able to answer this) were receiving the $5 million per year which is almost $2 million more than the Progressive Labour Party has spent per year? I wonder if they will stand up and tell us what legal firms received those funds, Mr. Speaker. Because we know from the previous Government's fascination with pursuing a former PLP Premier and the legal fees they have spent all over the place chasing a pipedream, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if they are going to come clean and say, *This is what we spent all this money on.*

An Hon. Member: Forty-one million dollars.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So indeed, Mr. Speaker, . . . and I hear the Member chirping. I hear the Member chirping. Because when you add up consultants—

An Hon. Member: Facts are facts.

The Speaker: Member. Member.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: When you add up what was spent on consultants, contractors, travel and legal fees, the One Bermuda Alliance in four years, Mr. Speaker,

spent $2.6 million *[sic]* more per year than the Progressive Labour Party has spent in six years.

Hon. E. David Burt: Aha!

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, Mr. Speaker, when we ask them, Who was gaining all of that money? What contractors? What legal fees?

An Hon. Member: Aah!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: What legal firms? I hear the Member chirping, perhaps he will get up and talk.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member is imputing improper motive. If he was going to suggest that there was something untoward in relation to payments made to a firm in which I am related, he better damn well have facts. Because he doesn't!

The Speaker: Ah! Ah! Ah! Wait, wait, wait, wait.
The last words you used, please withdraw—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I'll withdraw that word. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: The Member certainly indicated that you should produce some facts to support your comments.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, the—

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: The Budget Book!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The facts are in the Budget Books that stretch back to the beginning of their term.

[Inaudible interjections and desk thumping]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: That's where the facts are Mr. Speaker. And Mr. Speaker, as you know, those facts are their part of the record that exists within this House.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Where's the proof?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, he can go and look for himself. They managed to find $41 million versus $17 [million], Mr. Speaker, from the same—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —people I'm speaking to.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member is imputing improper motive. If he is going to suggest any impropriety, he needs some proof. He does! And you know that, Mr. Speaker. It is not proper. It is not proper conduct in this House.

The Speaker: Member, I have given you a little leeway, but the point that is being stressed is that it is okay to make the comment. But if you are making comments to this degree can you produce more facts identifying the firm or company or whoever you think received the funds?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I never said any firm did. I said *Will the One Bermuda Alliance be willing to stand up and state what firms were the receivers of that over $5 million per year that they spent.*

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: That is what I said. I did not imply any firm.

The Speaker: Now, now . . . now that approach is acceptable.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Had you said there was an individual or company then that would be different. But you asked them to name it, so that is acceptable.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know the saying goes, *He doth protest too much.*

Hon. E. David Burt: Ooh!

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Just finish speaking to me.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that I give this speech during the annual Budget Debate. We are not here to merely juggle numbers and demonstrate, but we are here to demonstrate accountability for every dollar spent.

Mr. Speaker, consultants are instrumental in driving forward critical projects from infrastructure development to education reform. And consultants are needed to get us through a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So Mr. Speaker, each one of them contribute to the fabric of our society. They fill gaps, they provide fresh perspectives, and they ensure Bermuda remains competitive on the world stage.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we move forward let us commit to having a dialogue that elevates and does not denigrate.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: A dialogue that acknowledges the complexities of being a Government in the 21st century, most important a dialogue that actually serves the people of Bermuda and not personal interest, ensuring that their money is spent with transparency, vision and a purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Premier.

COPING WITH THE COST OF LIVING

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak briefly tonight because it is important that we use the time in this particular Chamber to bring attention to the important matters of our country and the community, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the cost of living is something that everyone in the country is being challenged by. In recent years we have seen prices of certain essential services and essential commodities that Bermudian residents need to survive experience often exorbitant increases, whether it be food stuffs, whether it be health care services and other essential services. Even water! You know, things that are essential to living. And the Government has not been immune or inattentive to this situation, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen the challenges that this has confronted our people. In fact, even the Government because we do provide support for persons through our own agencies to deal with food costs through Financial Assistance, for instance. And support is given to families, particularly those who are perhaps foster parents and others to deal with their needs. And we know the challenges that we confront with health care, with the growing population of seniors with the unfortunate (perhaps) increase in obesity and preventable disease in the community and often in age groups that in the past this was not experienced before. These are issues that we face. And even just overall issues of . . . as modern medicine in all of its areas have become a lot more improved, different types of ailments and different types of conditions have added to the situation of cost. And as I said, just people finding what they need to eat daily.

We go into stores and find that to eat healthier it is often more expensive than to not. And that is a difficult fixture of the market place . . . I'm sorry. I did not mean to name . . . it wasn't a store; I was just mentioning the market.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Walter H. Roban: It was not meant to associate anything with a particular establishment, Mr. Speaker.

But that is a feature of the market. Bermuda imports most of its foods, most of what we use is imported even just to build, just to maintain, just to operate. And we are blessed that we are wealthy enough to afford much of what this is, but it comes at a cost. And the cost is not always something that is easy for residents to handle.

But because the Government is concerned about the cost of living it has done a number of things to deal with this. It has lowered the duty to zero on essential commodities, fruits and vegetables. Things like flour, bread, butter and other commodities that are essential to people's basic lives and staples that we exist on on a daily basis. The Government has sought to create a list of items that . . . at least from the standpoint of the public purse, we are not imposing taxes.

And I would just like to say, clearly, health care costs in particular are something that everybody is challenged by, whether you are an institution or you are an individual. So I will say this to those persons who continue to have concerns about their health care costs. Remember that the Government has not raised the Standard Premium Rate over a number of years. So when you go to your health care provider, when you go to your doctor and others who you are going to and you are concerned about the cost of that bill, you need to ask them why they are increasing the bill. This is not a feature of the public mechanism. There has been an effort to keep a lid on the increase of those costs that the Government itself contributes to. So the inflation in health care over recent years has been a fixture of the private health sector, primarily.

But these are issues that we will constantly be challenged by as a country, Mr. Speaker. So I implore us all to be vigilant when it comes to these things. Take some ownership of what we are experiencing and ask the tough questions to service providers when you see

. . . and you are concerned about certain costs that you are having to be belaboured with.

But Mr. Speaker, this past year in particular the Government has (over the last year, obviously) been concerned about the cost of electricity and again, that is a regulated sector and there are a number of factors which contribute to that cost. One is the importation of the fossil fuel, and then there are other factors. And as I said, this is a regulated sector, so it is possible for people to understand better what those costs are.

But some of that does have to do with our usage. And it is very important that even as we seek to transition to renewable energy, which can over time help bring down the cost, seek to find ways to regulate the fuel sector so that how fuel is priced, whether it be at the pump or the usage of fuel in other activities on the Island, it is priced appropriately, which has not been the case for years. But we now are bringing in a system where there will be a better pricing of fuel. These are things that we hope over time will help bring a rationalisation of cost.

But one thing the Government has done is that we have over the last year been promoting ways that we can help people have control of their electric bill. At one point we were able to see the decrease in the basic rate of electricity. But as we know, [there are] market factors, such as the fuel adjustment rate, which clearly in the last part of last year brought certain concerns to the business and the residential community. But we are pleased that has gone down in this first quarter and we hope that things like the fuel adjustment rate, which is also influenced by the market for petroleum does stay as low as possible. And certainly, that is a feature of the regulated environment and we do hope that in future evaluations that we won't find unnecessary shocks to the electric bills of residents.

We have also done some other things. And today I decided that I would give my colleagues in the House a little something that they could take home to help in their own little way deal with their own electricity costs. Because everybody is impacted. I don't care what your income bracket is in this country. Electric bills are high. Bermuda has some of the highest kilowatt hours in the region, and perhaps the world. We are certainly in the top five, if we are not the top itself. It ranges somewhere between 39 and 40-plus cents per kilowatt-hour. That is exorbitant for the region. And my hope over time is that with the transition of energy and many things that we would like to see happen in our vision for the future of energy that this type of cost, people will begin to see decline.

But in the meantime, there are little things that can be done. And one of those little things the Government has done is to create the opportunity for every household to have the benefit of the latest technology in electricity that is available. And that is a giveaway of LED bulbs. With the wisdom of the Ministry of Finance, the Minister of Home Affairs was given a sum to purchase a large consignment of bulbs. And we have done that. And we have made efforts to ensure that our seniors and other groups who are challenged by the cost of living in Bermuda were the first tier of receiving that. So, Age Concern and other groups were the first tier. And we were pleased with the uptake of that. And we have since then made this giveaway open to everyone on the Island.

So, everyone right now can go to their post office and pick up a pack of four bulbs . . . and as an exhibit I will show it for the benefit of the House. But I chose today to bring a four-pack for every Member of the House. Now, some Members of the House may have already made the conversion to LED bulbs and that is great. And I applaud those Members who have done that. But I would encourage them to take the four-pack that they have been given. If they do not want to use it for their own house, give it to one of your constituents. And I brought it and gave it to every Member, not just Members on this side of the House, but to every Member because everyone in the country should benefit from . . . in some way, with the challenge of this issue of high electricity costs.

Now, this is not to throw any barbs at anyone. But in different countries where this is an issue, many different things have been done. And in some cases, not only has the Government done exactly what we have done but also those who provide electricity have done other things. I know of countries where the utility itself went into every home in that jurisdiction and installed LED bulbs or perhaps compact fluorescents which was a previous generation of bulbs.

So, because it is seen that if you can assist and support the needs of your community, your community will be better. So, I say that to say that any institution, not only the Government, can participate in finding ways to help. But I also say, Mr. Speaker, that we all can make a change and help control our costs. Some of this is about demand and how we manage our own demand of our electricity needs. So, I would say that there are little things, you do not have to go out necessarily and put solar panels on your roof. Because not everybody in Bermuda can afford to do that. But you can do little things that can build on conservation and efficiency. And the priority of the Government is to help the citizens of this country to embrace conservation and efficiency. I can tell you, if we embrace conservation and efficiency in electricity in the same way that we have done it with water, because the world admires what we have done around water conservation, we will be a better country.

So, I implore citizens and Members of this House to take this pack of four bulbs . . . and I can tell you that over the lifetime of this pack of four you will save $1,000. That is a fact. So, this in anyone's household where they installed these bulbs for the life of these bulbs, they will save $1,000 in electricity use. So, this is a little step in the right direction. And I

understand. And the Government along with the regulator are focused on other things that we hope over time will improve this situation with electricity and Bermuda's dependence on oil and electrification in a way that will benefit the country in the long term.

I do hope that Members appreciate getting the bulbs. I also gave them a little form that provides information on LED lights. And I just did this as a gesture of awareness for everyone in the House to embrace what you can do as an individual to address this issue not only for yourself but for you community. And go back to your own constituencies and support and promote and encourage your members to go to their post office and pick up their bulbs because I am still finding people who did not know that they could do that. So clearly there are people who maybe haven't done it or forgot about it or missed the notes or the promotion but perhaps we all 36 can make a difference. Because I do believe that individuals can make a difference to the big questions that we face.

Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

Does any other Member . . . MP Swan.

A BALANCED BUDGET

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to take a few brief moments to speak about the significance of Bermuda achieving a balanced budget in 2024. I believe it is the first time that this country has had one since 2002. [It is] significant because I remember some 12 years ago when the whole conversation was around the debt. I remember writing an article about the red sea of debt in 2012. After 2012 we did not see a remediation of the debt. We saw an acceleration of the debt of some $1.2 billion immediately after that, during the tenure of the One Bermuda Alliance.

I feel, Mr. Speaker, it concerns me because I understand politics and I understand rhetoric, but I think persons who are in the space of the media have a responsibility to sometimes be balanced.

Today there was an article, March 6, is that today? March 6 is today?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: "[1]Chamber data dive paints stark picture of economy." And I said, *boy, the Chamber is coming out with an article today,* which I will deal with somewhat. And then I went looking for what the Chamber said as a collective when the budget was released. The most interesting thing that I found was that the article in which is entitled where this Chamber is very complimentary of the budget. Not only was the Chamber complimentary of the budget but a group of persons such as the Association of Bermuda Insurers and Reinsurers [ABIR], the Association of Bermuda International Companies [ABIC], Bermuda Business Development Agency, Bermuda Chamber of Commerce, and Bermuda International Long Term Insurers and Reinsurers [BILTIR] issued a media release jointly complimenting Government for a balanced budget. And not only that, [but] complimenting Government for the collaborative work the Government had done. In fact, they hailed the collaboration that Government has done to bring about the corporate income tax considerations that they worked hard to assist the Government in providing.

And I said, *That is in stark contrast to the narrative that the Royal Gazette wants to paint.* And I understand that the *Royal Gazette* is a conservative-based, led by persons whose shareholders and directors are extremely conservative. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? I am one who believes in fairness. And I have gotten up in this House and I have said this much, that the 36 of us here all want what is best for Bermuda.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I want to say this: since 2002, [for] 22 years, [when] this country achieves a balanced budget it is huge! And the *Royal Gazette* has to have some responsibility to be responsible. And they want . . . they just want to hang on to that bone to paint the PLP in a bad light. And I am here to say that if I was one who wanted us to try to balance this budget to pay down the debt, if a government comes to us with a plan where the debt is going to paid down, it can only do so if you can first balance it.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And if the same government is going to find a way to help the people get scholarships and the seniors to be able to afford Bermuda . . . we all know that that is a difficult task. Right? That Government needs to be heralded in that regard. Right?

And let me tell you this. The same persons who might be directors and shareholders and the like are in industries that would raise the price of cheese, raise the price of milk, raise the price of cereal, raise the price of staple goods that make it difficult for this country to live on.

You know, someone said to me, *You know what? We have not had that real debate about health care, 8 hours or 10 hours or 15 hours in that space about the rising costs, because people make money off of people who do not eat healthy.* People make money off of people who are suffering from diabetes. People make money off of people who eat in too great a proportion of macaroni and cheese and all those types of

[1] *Royal Gazette*, 6 March 2024

things that adversely impact the . . . the . . . particularly the Black population in this country.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? When I went to that page where the Chamber of Commerce had said glowing things about the PLP and the budget, guess what? You cannot click on that link and get that link the same way you can click on other links. It is unavailable. The only reason I can read it is because I am a little bit tech and I can screenshot as I look to be able to get it. That is not an idea of fairness.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is the type of unfair, unlevel playing field that has existed in this country for centuries. It is a mind-set that we have to go against.

Now, let me just talk a little bit about that article today. Because, you know, the article makes references to a time period of which I don't need a history book to go back to. It looks at employment levels and dates it back to 1985. Yes, we are going to have more people working in international business in 2024 than locals. Why? Because in 1985 and 1986 you had a plethora of hotels up and down this country. And what happened to them? Businesspeople changed them to condominiums. Business owners changed their properties. Some in the guise are building a hotel. Palmetto Bay was going to build a hotel. It turned out to be all condominiums. Right? Coral Island was a hotel; it turned out to be condominiums. Even my beloved Belmont was going to be a hotel and residence and luckily there was a collaboration and a purchase of Newstead to have that collaboration. But that used to be a hotel and is no longer a hotel space. And in that time period, in 1985 and 1986 you had Lantana, you had Sonesta Beach, you had Elbow Beach and they do not exist today.

Now, let me look at this. You also had bases on this Island. One of the biggest exoduses of working people [as an] economic driver in this country . . . left this country in the early 1990s. At the same time a recession came. And what happened? What did my crowd do? What did the UBP do? They shipped people out.

What did the PLP do when it came into power? They put in long-term residents and put in a system where people could then be able to see a future for their families. That is what we did.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is what we did. And that does not get played up.

And when you just go back and look at numbers without the context, it is dangerous. It is dangerous! And yes, I know people left this country in great numbers. The same recession we blame on the PLP was caused by a global recession that caused people to leave. And the reason why the debt accelerated between 2008 . . . because, remember, the biggest growth this country ever saw economically happened in two periods. Both of them under the PLP. Both of them under the PLP! Right? In the early 2000s. And yes, I was saying, *Look. You need to put aside for a rainy day.* Mr. Cox had set that up and that fund was actually used that could have been a benefit between 2008 and 2012. But during the recession that was blamed on the PLP. People were blaming the PLP for XL going down to two dollars in stock. AIG having to change their name to Chartis. British American pulling out of Bermuda. Madoff and Stanford robbing people of everything they had—globally. Right? Companies went into survival mode.

And when the people of this country were reeling, the Government decided to make sure that it could provide some relief to people. So, you had to either balance the budget at that time and let your people perish, or find a way to stave it off. And let's not forget that during that time period the Bank of Butterfield relied on the PLP Government to throw out a lifeline. The same Bank of Butterfield that would lay people off today. That would have redundancies right before Christmas and having pensioners . . . and I declare my interest. My mother is a pensioner who today her health insurance far exceeds the pension that she gets while they brag about profits!

I am here to tell you! You know we have a lot of disingenuousness going on in boardrooms. And let me tell you this: In countries like the United States, friends of mine who are lawyers in Mississippi and down in the South who are hired by Fannie Mae and stuff to seek out some of those predatory lenders. A lot of people in boardrooms got away scot-free in this country. A lot of people!

And when you talk about . . . people ask me a question. *Is it a conflict that you could be doing . . . wearing this hat and wearing that hat?* Where did I . . . who benefited in the country when Sir Henry Tucker was the head of the Bank of Butterfield, was on boards up and down this country, and making decisions and his cousin who ran the bank and ran the golf courses? But they could use their leverage around the world to help Bermuda. What is wrong with that? How come there is something wrong with it that Black people are in a similar position?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is the same mind-set that will cause the *Royal Gazette* to not allow me to go online and pull up an article today where businesses have heralded this Government for what it has done.

And let me say this, right? And look, I take licks all the time. People go and say, *Well, you were part of that UBP!* Yes, I learned a lot there too. And I am not afraid to . . . I learned a lot hanging around Ralph and

Harry. I [learned] a lot hanging around Jim Woolridge. I am not afraid. I am not going to run away from where I learned a lot of things. And that is why I am glad I am here today. Because when people can put things in the wrong context, I understand it a lot better than they will ever know. I walked into houses and saw pictures that were hung of some people that you would run. I remember going up just in 2022 . . . I shared that I went into a hotel room and went into the kitchen that night and saw all the Confederate generals on the wall. I said, *Oh, my, my, my, my.*

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I said, *Oh, my, my, my.*

I shared that picture with some folks. I shared it with a professor of African American Soldiers of the New York University.

There is a great mind-set. But you know what? I was trained how to navigate in those types of waters both here and overseas. And I am here to tell you that we in this party care as much about this country as the Opposition does. I tell people that I know they care about Bermuda. But you got to tell those people who support you that there is a new day coming when we have to let go of some of that thinking that allowed the *Royal Gazette* to do such a thing as I just highlighted. It is wrong. It is not right.

And let me tell you this. I am looking forward to the opportunity . . . because it is easy to take numbers and look at the glass as half empty. Very easy. It is easy to be negative particularly when the people who are providing the first balanced budget in 20 years, the people who are planning a future for all Bermudians. Bermudians did not leave this country because [of] the PLP. They left for opportunities that came about as a consequence of having greater access to Europe.

In 1999, after the bases left this country, right, the UK Government . . . I am trying to think of his name. Now I can see his face. The Partnership for Progress [and Prosperity], the White Paper, which ushered in a passport that allowed Bermudians to be able to go and live and work in all of Europe. That changed the dynamic. We once went to the United States or Canada. First blush. Now all of Europe opens up. And Bermudians started to take advantage of that.

Throw in a recession. And let's not forget that during that time period and England was a labour government, and so to go and get an education in England was a lot more . . . it was a lot cheaper and you could go over there and qualify for that loan system that they had in place. And persons took advantage of that. The conservatives changed that in education. Just like the conservative OBA came into power and made education scholarships . . . they took it away.

Thank you Minister Diallo Rabain and the PLP for putting students first and making sure that young students today can get educated and go to the Bermuda College with a certain grade point average and get an education. For what?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Uh-huh! For free!

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: For free! My, my, my, my, my, my, my how we . . . And you know what? When . . . if only we could work together.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you in the vein of working together I want to thank some good people out there. Some hoteliers in this country who are working hard to get this country up and running. People who work in tourism are working hard to get this country up and running. People overseas who love Bermuda, our repeat visitors, and people who are getting excited about Bermuda. I look forward . . . I have a vision too. I have a vision that one day that place where I used to watch water skiing, Lantana, will be back open as a hotel again. One day Sonesta Beach will have a hotel once again. One day and one day soon and very soon I hope to hear some news about Elbow Beach. What would that do? That would rise the tide of Bermudians working in the industry.

And it would also . . . and look . . . and that same article today that looks at the glass as half full who would say that there are more persons working from overseas, you have heard the Minister of Labour say we have to grow our labour force. And maybe do things that encourage more people to come back home. We have to do both. We are doing that. And that is why you would get an article that gets lost in the translation deliberately that speaks well of this country by the persons who are not necessarily our natural kin. But I believe that Pam Gordon said to me one time, she said, *Listen, you know, businesses support governments. They do not necessarily support parties.*

So, it is our intention to be Government for quite a bit longer. And we are going to work collaboratively with every man, woman, and child in this country, including the Opposition when they want to try to be disingenuous sometimes. We are still going to work with them. We are going to do what we can to move this country forward. We are going to grow tourism. Yes, we are! We are going to find . . . we are going to find some people who want to move the needle and invest some money and build those hotels. We are going to go find them! They are out there!

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? To move the needle in this country economically, we got to grow the tourism season between November and April. And we are not talking about a lot of people. The amount of people who we need to come by air during those months is not a lot of people, but you go to know who they are and what they like and as Jim Woolridge used to say, *We have to provide value for money.* So we got

to raise our satisfaction level in some areas. In St. George's we got to make sure our stores are open, and we got to do things that make sure that the people who come there and other places in Bermuda are given world-class service. People say to me, *How come you do not have a boutique cruise ship?* Well, I had one and then they weren't as happy. And they could very well vote with their feet. We need to remediate that by making sure that we are what we want to be here. And that is the hard conversation.

But I have every confidence that it is going to happen because I believe in tourism, and I believe in this country. And I love this country like every Member of this House does. But sometimes it is going to take some statesmanship to start talking to those folks out there who we know have a preconceived notion about people who sit in this party. And it is the truth. But I am here to say this. I live in hope. And I am going to live long enough, hopefully, with the help of the good Lord, to see us realise some of those hotel spaces that are some of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful, places in the world and bring back some greater beds. Because since 1985 the exodus of hotels has been a drain on our economy. And that lies at the feet of people who owned them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: No other Members moving . . . the House now stands adjourned until Monday morning . . . I got Monday on my mind . . . Friday morning at 10:00 am.

Members, have a good evening.

[Gavel]

[At 8:47 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 8 March 2024.]

[This page intentionally left blank.]

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
8 MARCH 2024
10:00 AM

Sitting Number 14 of the 2023/2024 Session

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

The Speaker: Good morning.

Ms. Beale will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Ms. Kara Beale, Assistant Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 6 March 2024]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of the 6th of March have been circulated.

Are there any amendments required?

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Under the top right-hand corner of page number 2, under the heads that I presented, 13 is listed as Child and Family Services. That should be Post Office.

The Speaker: Post Office? Okay.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Ms. Beale is making a note of it now for us. Thank you.

Any further corrections?

Thank you.

The Minutes will be printed with the necessary corrections. Thank you.

[Minutes of 6 March 2024 confirmed as corrected.]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

APOLOGY

The Speaker: MP Dunkley will be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: There are four such papers this morning. The first is in the name of the Minister of Finance.

Premier.

OFFICE OF INFORMATION COMMISSIONER ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, good morning to you.

I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of this Honourable House of Assembly the Information Commissioner's Office Annual Report 2023 as required by section 58(1) of the Public Access to Information Act 2010.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The second is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister Hayward.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT FINTECH 2023 YEAR END REPORT

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the EDD [Economic Development Department] FinTech 2023 Year End Report.

The Speaker: Thank you. The next is also yours. Yes. Continue, Minister.

BERMUDA IMMIGRATION AND PROTECTION (PROHIBITION OF ENTRY) ORDER 2024

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024 made by the Minister responsible for Immigration in exercise of the power conferred by section 26(1) of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next paper is in the name of the Minister of Transport.

Minister.

MERCHANT SHIPPING (FEES) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2024

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker and everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024 proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for maritime administration in exercise of the power conferred by section 250 of the Merchant Shipping Act 2002. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

That brings us to a close of all of the Papers and Communications. We will move on.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: Members, this morning there are eight such Statements. The first is in the name of the Deputy Premier.

Deputy Premier, would you like to present your Statement at this time?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

PROGRESS ON THE INTEGRATED AGRICULTURE STRATEGY

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Good morning to the House and members of the public. And of course, Happy International Women's Day.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on the Integrated Agriculture strategy of the Ministry of Home Affairs which I introduced this time last year and which is aimed at supporting and enhancing the Island's local food production.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's agricultural industry is at a pivotal moment in our history and, as we all know, is under pressures not seen before. Land for in-ground farming is in decline. Labour and costs of doing business have escalated higher than ever before. Climate change is expected to bring stronger and more frequent hurricanes, extended periods of rainfall or drought—all factors beyond the control of the traditional in-ground farmer. As the existing farmers continue to battle against these obstacles, the Government is actively working to support local farmers in their steadfast efforts to provide fresh, healthy products for our local market.

Mr. Speaker, in May 2023 the Department of Environment and Natural Resources [DENR] secured the services of a consultant agronomist who is tasked with reviewing the existing industry and identifying opportunities for efficiencies and growth. This service is a result of a long-standing request of farmers that I endeavour to fulfil.

To date, the consultant has undertaken a number of key initiatives related to weed management, soil health and nutrient analysis, the results of which have been communicated to the farmers. [The agronomist] has connected local farmers with overseas resources to provide information on improved crop seed varieties, agriculture management and technological innovations. [The consultant also] has provided a training opportunity for the farmers in safe pesticide application to a standard equivalent to the University of Florida's pesticide licence certification level.

With the assistance of a specialist, the agronomist is currently undertaking a plant nematode study looking to identify the types of parasitic and beneficial nematodes in our Island's fields, banana patches and golf courses. These microscopic worms can have a significant impact on crop yields and are considered one of the premiere agriculture pests. It has been over 50 years since the last time one of these studies was conducted. The study will provide recommendations on how to reduce pest pressure and crop damage in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, the consultant agronomist's work will continue for two more years. Over this period, he will focus on crop innovation and diversification, development of grading standards for local produce, and identification of post-harvest handling efficiencies and added value opportunities. During this time, he will be (I quote) "shadowed" by a full-time trainee agronomist, [a position] filled by a Bermudian. This will ensure good knowledge transfer and retention. We are currently concluding the process of filling this post, which I expect to be completed in the next several weeks.

Mr. Speaker, in support of the economic embargo that entitles local farmers to restrict the importation of fresh produce when sufficient yields have been produced locally, the Department of Environment and

Natural Resources has implemented a review of all shipment invoices for imported commercial produce to ensure that infractions against the economic embargo are not taking place, thus best positioning farmers to be able to sell their produce locally when crop yields are plentiful and their product is at its best. Invoices for each shipment of produce are also reviewed for compliance with established quarantine embargoes to ensure the exclusion of serious pests and disease from Bermuda which could negatively impact the agricultural industry and the wider environment. Policy amendments will be implemented, where needed, to further support the embargo system and to improve the uptake of local produce.

Mr. Speaker, the GIS-based Arable Audit will be completed in the next two months. This audit is capturing up-to-date information on field size, use, lease/ownership and access issues with the intention of identifying opportunities for new fields of production and effective use of the land resources available for in-ground farming. This study will look to identify opportunities such as new water connections from underground lines and threats to our farm fields such as saltwater inundation from future climate change and coastal erosion in low-lying areas.

Mr. Speaker, farmers are still reporting that theft continues to be an impediment to successful crop production. As part of a pilot programme with the aim of reducing this loss, cameras have been provided to farmers for problem fields to record *night farming*. The effectiveness of this method is being evaluated, and where possible persons involved will be prosecuted. Members of the public are urged to report any suspicious behaviour to the Bermuda Police Service at 211, or to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources at 236-4201 or email at environment@gov.bm.

Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to report that local farmers have also successfully secured and imported clean shipments of strawberry plants and seed potatoes for propagation in 2023. Additionally, the agricultural consultant is researching potential sources of suitable clean germplasm as part of a fruit augmentation and diversification project available to farmers. We expect that successful uptake will have positive outcomes for both farmers and small, local cottage industries in the form of jams, jellies, chutneys, preserves and the like, which can be promoted on the local market and to the tourist industry.

As I stated in my budget brief, I am pleased to announce that $500,000 has been allocated to begin work on a replacement Agriculture Services Centre. Cold storage is critical for keeping certain crops fresh, such as carrots and potatoes. Unfortunately, the existing centre in Prospect is well past its *sell-by* date. This facility is essential for our local farming industry, and our farmers have voiced their concerns, which this Government has heard. I can advise that at this time the replacement building has been designed and has received both full planning permission and [design] approval. Every effort has been made to incorporate energy efficiency, renewable energy and new water storage facilities, amongst many other elements. This funding will allow for the completion of the project's contract and preparation of the new site adjacent to the current facility.

Mr. Speaker, globally, countries recognise both the necessity of pesticide use in agriculture and the negative effects some pesticides have on the environment. In 2020 the European Union developed strategies and initiatives as part of their Farm to Fork programme to reduce by 50 per cent the overall use of chemical pesticides by 2030. Following in these footsteps, this Government, recognising Bermuda's sensitive ecological systems and delicate balance, will strive to reduce impediments to crop yields in a more sustainable way by researching suitable biological control agents for pest and disease management and encouraging the use of effective environmentally friendly pesticide products suitable for commercial agricultural systems.

In the next year, the DENR will undertake an insect crop pest survey to identify opportunities for biological control as a method of re-balancing pest populations. Staff will work with overseas experts to identify pests and research the specific biocontrol agent to reduce pest pressure. This Government also recognises that science and technology are continuously making improvements in the efficacy and accessibility of more environmentally sustainable bio-pesticides, and as such we will encourage and promote the inclusion of more environmentally sustainable pest control products in the commercial farming industry by ensuring that the Agricultural Service Centre stocks less-toxic and non-toxic pest- and disease-control products available to the farmers for purchase. This will offer the opportunity to reduce negative impacts to the environment. Increased use of these products and agents is expected to lead to less pest and disease pressure, reduced synthetic pesticide application, and therefore an overall reduction in environmental pollution, healthier plants and a more balanced ecosystem.

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative for Government to not only implement strategies that support the current industry, but also to look to the future and create policies that allow for the sustainability of the entire agricultural industry. Strategies that provide realistic support must be formed in consultation with the industry stakeholders to identify clear objectives that enable the industry to flourish, grow and remain economically viable, relevant and attractive to new partners whilst protecting the environment and local resources for future generations. As such, the DENR has already actively engaged with the Board of Agriculture and key stakeholders in the agricultural industry in a larger conversation to hear concerns, identify obstacles to growth and record recommendations on directions for progression and development of the industry. The priorities identified will be

discussed with the Board of Agriculture, looking for the opportunities for implementation.

Mr. Speaker, it is globally acknowledged that technology and artificial intelligence will play an increasing role in most large-scale farming systems. And in Bermuda this Government is actively looking to technology and scientific advances that can be embraced by the smaller-scale farming systems in Bermuda to provide realistic efficiencies, cost savings and input reductions such as requiring less fertiliser or targeted precision irrigation.

As we all recognise, technology and innovation have notably been embraced by the younger generation, and we can learn from their willingness and flexibility in transitioning to new or different systems. Agriculture is no different, and we are pleased to see a few farmers, some new to the industry, some more well-established, experimenting with innovative processes and new methods of crop production. This Ministry is committed to advocating for policies that support both traditional inground farming and innovative new systems that will contribute to food security for the Island in this generation and for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, we have all been touched by health concerns, either ourselves or those whom we care about. And we are acutely aware of how our diet plays a key role in our own health. In an age of easily accessible, processed convenience food, this Government is encouraging all of our people to draw closer to nature and to increase our intake of natural, fresh produce such as that grown locally. As such, and as these updates have shown, this Ministry is committed to collaborating with industry stakeholders to continue to identify realistic and relevant initiatives that will support existing farming systems and foster new growth in this industry whilst ensuring that the environment is protected, resources are managed for future generations and our local economy is prosperous.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the public to buy local and support our farmers and fishermen so that they can continue to provide for us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[No audio]

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

UNESCO ADVISORY MISSION TO THE HISTORIC TOWN OF ST. GEORGE'S AND RELATED FORTIFICATIONS

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to announce that the Government of Bermuda has invited the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (more commonly known as UNESCO) for an advisory mission to our World Heritage Site, the Historic Town of St. George's, and related fortifications. Mr. Speaker, before I detail the purpose of this mission, I would like first to give background on how the former capital was inscribed some 24 years ago. After a lengthy, concerted effort and application process by local heritage stakeholders in the late 1990s, the Historic Town of St. George's and related fortifications—approximately 19 different forts—were inscribed as World Heritage Sites by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in December 2000 and retroactively given the designation of Outstanding Universal Value in 2014.

UNESCO views the town as "an authentic and the earliest example of the English colonial town in the New World. Its associated fortifications graphically illustrate the development of English military engineering from the 17th to the 20th century, adapted to take into account the development of artillery over this period. Some of these are unique as surviving examples of the first defensive works built by early European colonists, few examples of which now remain intact. The later associated forts represent an excellent example of a continuum of British coastal fortifications." Mr. Speaker, I have quoted that statement directly from UNESCO itself.

Mr. Speaker, during this inscription process another piece was added, a World Heritage Site "buffer zone." This buffer zone protects the town and forts via legislation and policies such as the Development and Planning Act 1974 and the Bermuda Plan 2018—recent amendments to both approved by this Legislature. The purpose of which is to set complementary legal and/or customary restrictions on use and development within the surrounding area of the town to give an added layer of protection. This buffer zone (not including the town itself) spans some 746 hectares, or 3 miles, and vastly ranges from the town itself across to Tobacco Bay, then to the Royal Artillery Field (or as locals call it, "RA"), then back to the town itself.

Mr. Speaker, in 2000, to support and manage the World Heritage Site, a standing body was established known as the World Heritage Committee which comprised various local entities including representatives from the Corporation of St. George's, the Bermuda National Trust, the St. George's Foundation and other such relevant organisations. This body is supposed to advise the Government on recommended management plans and development proposals in the area. However, the committee has not held meetings since the COVID-19 pandemic, attributed to several reasons including a re-evaluation of the committee's structure moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature and the greater public understand the former capital is in dire need of an economic revitalisation. Hence, the rationale for the Government designating the area as an economic empowerment zone, agreeing for a designated NCL [Norwegian Cruise Line] ferry during peak tourist season and other incentives to assist the corporation in driving investment to the town. This attempted revitalisation for the town spans successive Governments, and both

sides of the aisle have demonstrated agreement that the town needs help, although our methods may differ.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of our differences, I am sure both the Government and the Opposition agree that a part of this economic renaissance must involve some sort of development. Anyone who understands basic economics knows that construction helps stimulate growth, and as such multiple major construction projects have begun over the last decade, such as the St. Regis development and the St. George's marina project, with the goals of increasing immediate investment in the short term while simultaneously increasing tourism investment in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, UNESCO has noticed this change in philosophy for the Island and has recently made their position known to the Government through several correspondences. Acknowledging UNESCO's renewed interest for the *Olde English* colonial town and former capital, the Government has invited representatives of UNESCO to the historic town to perform an advisory mission for the purpose of four things, as follows:

1. Conduct an overall assessment of the Town of St. George's World Heritage Property.
2. Review any current or proposed developments in the area.
3. Review and advise on the planning protections and management measures currently established in legislation and those intended to be.
4. Engage with decision-makers and relevant stakeholders involved in the maintenance and preservation of the World Heritage Site.

Mr. Speaker, representatives of UNESCO have not been to the Town of St. George's since

- the *Zenith* and *Horizon* cruise ships used to routinely berth at the docks;
- the town's Tuesday Harbour Nights existed;
- the Aunt Nea's Inn was open and receiving guests;
- the closure and reopening of the St. George's Club; and
- the Bank of Bermuda was acquired by HSBC.

Mr. Speaker, all of these activities, amongst a plethora of others, happened over a 24-year period—older than some people presently involved in the political and heritage conservation spheres today. Times have changed since UNESCO's only visit in 2000; therefore, it is intended for this advisory mission to allow the Government, the Corporation of St. George's and any relevant stakeholder to directly discuss the overall direction for the town, address any concerns the entity may have and seek its opinion on the town.

Mr. Speaker, representatives of UNESCO will arrive later this month and stay for a five-day duration with full expenses paid for by the Government as required by the World Heritage Convention [of] which Bermuda is a signatory. Yesterday the Ministry team and I met with the Corporation of St. George's and MP Renee Ming, the representative for constituency 1, to share the details of the visit. Over the coming days, technical officers from the Ministry will be reaching out to various other stakeholders outside of the Government involved in the town's strategic direction, including those in business, heritage and environmental spheres, amongst others, to provide information to UNESCO during this once-in-a-quarter-century initiative. After the advisory mission concludes, UNESCO will produce a report to the Government and said report will be shared with this Honourable House and the public.

Mr. Speaker, the World Heritage Site designation is internationally recognised. The Bermuda Tourism Authority leverages the status in its efforts to improve the Island's cultural tourism initiatives. However, if there are no businesses open, poor infrastructure, dilapidated buildings owned by individuals, outdated policies and legislation, and no financial support from outside entities—essentially, no incentives exist to retain designation—how would a revitalisation for the area occur? This is the feedback the Government is seeking from UNESCO: In their view, what would be best suited for our historic town?

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I just would like to mention that this Government wants to work with UNESCO. We want the entity's feedback. We want the advisory mission to be a success. But more importantly, our priority is the people of St. George's and the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister.

UPDATES TO THE BERMUDA IMMIGRATION AND PROTECTION (PROHIBITION OF ENTRY) ORDER—BERMUDA'S VISA CONTROLLED NATIONALS LIST

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I rise before this Honourable House to provide updates to the Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order—Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals List.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda protects its borders by controlling entry by persons from a specified list of countries. For listed persons, Bermuda requires travellers to have a multi re-entry visa for the US, UK or Canada that is valid for a period of 45 days from the date of intended departure from Bermuda in order to be landed. Consequently, Bermuda relies on the visa controls of gateway countries.

Mr. Speaker, on August 11, 2023, Bermuda's visa controlled nationals list was updated by way of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2023. This Order ensures that security and vetting take place prior to an individual's arriving in Bermuda and that tourist visitors and residents of

Bermuda have ready access to the US, UK and Canada through commercial air service.

Mr. Speaker, the visa controls by gateway countries (referred to earlier) are quite active in that changes are made frequently and without warning. On November 15, 2023, the United Kingdom [UK] amended its Visa Controlled Nationals list and removed nationals from Colombia and Qatar from that list. In addition, the UK listed nationals from 10 countries as exceptions so that certain categories of persons no longer need a visa before they travel to the UK as a visitor. Ordinary nationals of these countries still require a visa and therefore have to be listed on the Bermuda Order.

The UK's current exceptions, which are subject to change, vary for each country but include circumstances such as the following:

a) travelling on an emergency travel document to transit to the country in which they are ordinarily resident;
b) holding a diplomatic or special passport;
c) nationals or citizens who hold a passport issued by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region;
d) holding an electronic visa waiver; and/or
e) removal from exception if visiting the UK to marry or to form a civil partnership.

Mr. Speaker, Prohibition Orders are subject to the negative resolution procedure. Accordingly, the new Order was gazetted on the [6] March 2024 and will be laid before this Honourable House today, [8 March 2024]. In accordance with the UK's updated list, Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals list has removed Colombia and Qatar and lists the following countries as exceptions: Bahrain, the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Kuwait, Oman, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam. To prevent changes at short notice, the new Order directs visa controlled nationals to the UK's website for the current list of countries and exceptions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, while you are on your feet, I believe you have a second Statement. Yes.

FINTECH IN BERMUDA, A YEAR IN REVIEW

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members, I rise again today to update this Honourable House on Bermuda's journey and achievements in the FinTech sector over the past year. Indeed, the vision we embarked upon in 2017 to position Bermuda as a global leader in financial technology is taking shape and flourishing.

Since 2017 and with the oversight of the Bermuda Monetary Authority [BMA], Bermuda has introduced robust legislation including the Digital Asset Business Act [DABA] and the Innovative Insurer General Business [IIGB] licence. These initiatives have laid a solid foundation for well-regulated companies to join and strengthen Bermuda's FinTech ecosystem.

As a result, and as of the end of 2023, the Registrar of Companies listed 72 companies that engaged in activities related to Financial Technology [FinTech] compared to 53 such registrants in 2022, a total of 36 in 2021 and 23 in 2020. Beyond company registrations, it is noteworthy to consider a key economic indicator relevant to this industry, namely, the number of entities licensed by the BMA. Today Bermuda is home to 28 licensed FinTech companies, 24 of which are licensed under DABA. Again compare that to 16 DABA-licensed companies in 2022. Regarding the companies licensed under the Innovative Insurer General Business licence, Bermuda now counts four such companies on its shores. Bermuda is becoming a preferred destination for mature, well-capitalised companies seeking to leverage our innovative regulatory environment.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's FinTech vision includes attracting top-tier companies and investors, creating job opportunities for Bermudians and preparing them for sustainable, gainful employment in this sector. This is because Bermuda's youth, professionals and entrepreneurs must have a chance to be at the forefront of FinTech innovation and adoption right here in Bermuda. This objective is compelling the Government to provide the Bermudian learner with access to business and educational opportunities related to FinTech. Therefore, in 2023, as it did in 2022, the Government of Bermuda made educational and training opportunities in FinTech accessible to all. This training and educational effort includes the annual FinTech training programme which provides Bermudians with an understanding of the possibilities and inner workings of FinTech.

In addition to theoretical knowledge, this programme also introduces participants to leaders in the local industry through seminars and webinars and with in-person meet-and-greet sessions. Also in 2023, as in prior years, the Government of Bermuda ran its annual Tech Education Day, attended by students from high schools across the Island. Every year this event aims to make technology and FinTech relatable and familiar subject matters for students to consider as they make future career decisions. To that end, the agenda of Tech Education Day is intentionally diverse and provides various opportunities to relate to, learn from and question technology and FinTech.

Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that DABA and IIGB licensed companies have had a tangible impact on Bermuda's economy. Over the past few years, the number of individuals employed in the FinTech sector has risen with a notable increase in Bermudian employment. While in 2021 there were 16 individuals (of whom 12 were Bermudians) who were working in FinTech, in 2022 total employment in FinTech rose to 28 persons, half of whom were Bermudians. As recently as 2023, preliminary numbers from the Department of Statistics list total employment in FinTech to be 35 persons, of

whom 20 were Bermudians or spouses of Bermudians. This trajectory highlights expanding opportunities for our workforce in this field.

Moreover, DABA-licensed companies in Bermuda have collectively raised over $640 million, demonstrating the sector's attractiveness and growth potential. While most of these investments have been led by international venture capital groups, other investor classes—like family offices and sovereign wealth funds—are now actively deploying capital into the FinTech sector. These international investments are expected to invigorate our economy further, providing capital for DABA and IIGB companies to grow.

Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate that the Bermuda Government remains dedicated to providing Bermudians with robust and sustainable opportunities in the FinTech sector. We are not merely participants in the global FinTech revolution; we are leaders, innovators and trailblazers. Together we will continue to write this success story, a narrative in which every Bermudian can take pride. As we look to the future, let us continue to embrace the spirit of innovation and commitment that has brought us this far. Together we will continue to build a FinTech ecosystem that generates economic growth and creates sustainable and meaningful opportunities for Bermudians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Education.

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2024 SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS UPDATE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I stand before you to share an inspiring journey—a narrative of empowerment and growth fuelled by the Education Ministry's dedication to fostering a brighter future for Bermuda through our Scholarships and Awards programme. It is with immense pride that I announce our commitment, which has not only been met with overwhelming enthusiasm from our community but also has led to a remarkable increase in funding. Since 2017 we have successfully increased the budget for our scholarships and awards to a total exceeding $2 million. This milestone is not just a number; it is a testament to our collective vision of nurturing a diverse and inclusive Bermuda where every dream has the support it needs to flourish.

Mr. Speaker, expanding our scholarships and awards offerings is more than a policy. It is a beacon of hope and opportunity for Bermudians across all walks of life. Whether young or seasoned, regardless of background or career aspirations, we are here to say that your ambitions are valid and your potential is limitless. By investing over $2 million into our citizens' futures, we are not just funding education; we are investing in the social and economic pillars of Bermuda. We are fostering an environment where promise, growth and achievement are recognised and celebrated in all forms. Let us continue this journey together, building a Bermuda where every individual has the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue to evolve and refine our commitment to education, I am excited to reveal the latest enhancements to our Scholarship and Awards programme, carefully designed to meet the diverse aspirations of our community. This year we are proud to introduce new and improved awards that underscore our dedication to accessible and inclusive education. These are as follows:

University of West Indies Partnership

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: First, we celebrate our enduring partnership with the University of West Indies [UWI] by earmarking funds specifically for Bermudian students. We are offering three annual awards valued at $7,500 each for those committed to pursuing an educational journey at the University of West Indies. This initiative reinforces our long-standing relationship with UWI and opens doors for students eager to explore educational opportunities beyond our shores.

Males in Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Recognising the pivotal role of male educators in shaping our future, we are introducing four new awards to encourage men to enter the education sector. This initiative provides financial support for males aspiring to switch careers and earn a teaching licence through a qualified practicum, addressing a critical gap in our educational workforce.

The College Promise Programme

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Launched in 2021, the College Promise programme has been a beacon of opportunity for graduating seniors from CedarBridge Academy and The Berkeley Institute, allowing them to attend Bermuda College tuition-free. This year we are taking it a step further by including a stipend to cover class incidentals like books, ensuring that financial barriers do not hinder our students' educational pursuits.

Educational Trips

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Lastly, we are allocating $50,000 to support educational trips for public schools, enabling them to apply for up to $5,000 annually. This funding aims to provide a solid foundation for schools planning enriching educational experiences for their students to alleviate the financial burden often shouldered by parents and the community.

Mr. Speaker, together these enhancements to our Scholarship and Awards programme are more than just financial investments; they declare our belief in Bermudians' boundless potential. By broadening access and removing barriers, we are paving the way for a future where everyone can excel and contribute to our vibrant society's tapestry.

Mr. Speaker, these new or updated awards complement our already extensive awards list, which includes

- Bermuda Government Scholarships worth up to $35,000 per year for four years;
- Non-Traditional Student Awards worth up to $20,000 per year for four years;
- Teacher Education Scholarships worth up to $20,000 per year for four years;
- Further Education Awards valued at $10,000 each;
- Minister's Achievement Scholarships up to $25,000 per year for four years;
- Applied Science Scholarships worth $5,000 for one year;
- Exceptional Student Awards worth up to $25,000 per year for four years for overseas study and $5,000 per year for two years at the Bermuda College;
- Technical & Vocational Awards worth up to $25,000 per year for four years overseas and $5,000 per year for two years for Bermuda College;
- Bermuda College Book Awards worth $500 each; and
- The continued supply of the $300,000 grant to the Bermuda College for Financial Aid.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House and the listening public that the deadline for submitting applications for scholarships and awards is April 8, 2024. I encourage eligible applicants to take this time to consider and apply for our scholarships and awards. I hope those pursuing post-secondary education know that more and more scholarship opportunities exist for a greater range of people. Therefore, I encourage parents, students and other interested persons to review our scholarship opportunities and the many different scholarships and awards available at www.bermudascholarships.com. More information can be found on the www.moed.bm website. Information on how to apply for financial aid from Bermuda College can be found on their website at www.college.bm.

Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate another expansion of our scholarship and awards offerings to help support more Bermudians, the Ministry of Education is acutely aware that the need exceeds the supply. However, the Ministry stands committed to continuing to review our approach to scholarships and awards with an eye to improving what we do and developing more opportunities to bring post-secondary education within reach of all Bermudians. Our aim is clear: to broaden the horizon of possibilities, making post-secondary education increasingly accessible to all Bermudians. We are dedicated to meeting the current demand and anticipating and fostering future generations' growth. We are crafting a legacy of education and empowerment, ensuring that the promise of tomorrow is accessible to every Bermudian today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Transport.

Minister.

UPDATE ON TACKLING ABANDONED VEHICLES

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to my colleagues, and good morning to the radio listeners.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to provide an update on the progress made in tackling abandoned vehicles across our beautiful Island. Mr. Speaker, we have heard the calls from the public regarding the growing concerns of abandoned vehicles, a challenge that has progressively deteriorated. The Transport Control Department [TCD] is spearheading the problem and have made considerable progress thus far. Mr. Speaker, before I give the update, I will provide a little background on the issues surrounding abandoned vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, typically, abandoned vehicles are dealt with individually when reported by the public to TCD as part of our routine operations. The escalation of abandoned vehicles has necessitated a deliberate and concerted effort on our part to effectively tackle this problem. These abandoned cars and bikes mar the aesthetic appeal of our environment. However, it is also important to note that they also can pose various risks with regard to public safety and health. Abandoned vehicles can become potential breeding grounds for pests, can pose fire hazards and can obstruct traffic flow. It is high time we take decisive action to tackle this issue comprehensively.

Mr. Speaker, in the latter part of January the Ministry took proactive measures to inform the public about our initiatives to address the issue of abandoned vehicles. A press release was issued on January 24 urging the public to contact TCD and provide information about the whereabouts of abandoned vehicles. Additionally, social media platforms were utilised to disseminate information and raise awareness of our ongoing efforts. In conjunction with this effort, we established an email address to accept reports. To date, the public has provided details for over 30 vehicles. I must state that we appreciate the assistance of the public, the Parks Department and Keep Bermuda Beautiful with this project.

Mr. Speaker, our traffic officers have commenced issuing tickets to suspected abandoned vehicles identified across our Island. These tickets serve as

formal notice to the vehicle owners, notifying them of the impending removal of their abandoned property. We acknowledge that the legal requirement for notice is a seven-day period. However, we believe in providing ample time for vehicle owners to rectify the situation. Hence, we are collecting abandoned vehicles after the 14th day of ticket issuance. This additional time is intended to encourage voluntary action by vehicle owners who may wish to reclaim their vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, following the collection of the abandoned vehicles, we make all efforts to advise owners that upon a 30-day gazetted notice the vehicle can be disposed of. We also emphasise the importance of responsible vehicle ownership and encourage individuals to take responsibility for vehicles they no longer wish to keep. Responsible ownership includes properly disposing of vehicles through the correct channels or donating the vehicle to charitable organisations whenever possible.

Mr. Speaker, on average, the department has received up to four or five reports per day. This is both via email and the telephone. Since this initiative started, our traffic officers have ticketed 17 motor cars and 12 motorcycles and auxiliary bicycles, which accounts for 29 of the 30 reports received. The remaining vehicle had been moved prior to the traffic officers' visiting the reported location. In fact, thanks to the cooperation of the public, a high percentage of vehicles are being moved by the owners. To date, the department has used a private towing company to remove six cars. The Parks Department and a private cycle repair shop have assisted with the removal of eight of the twelve reported cycles. Overall, this is a collaborative effort for which we are grateful.

Mr. Speaker, after collection, some vehicles are being temporarily held at TCD to wait out the 30-day period and until a more suitable location can be found. Some vehicles are kept at a secure, private location free of charge. These vehicles scheduled for disposal are taken to the airport dump after the fluids and batteries have been removed.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to emphasise that the departments involved cannot deal with vehicles abandoned on private property; it is only on public property. Advice is given to affected property owners regarding the proper disposal of vehicles as stipulated in section 68 of the Motor Car Act 1951. In short, this legislation states that after 30 days the property owner "shall be deemed to be in possession of the motor vehicle." Therefore, he or she can dispose of the vehicle after submitting a declaration to the Minister. If it is on your property, you have got 30 days to notify the individual and let the Minister know.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion we urge the public to continue to support this effort, which is a necessary step toward revitalising the beauty and safety of our communities. Abandoned vehicles are not only an eyesore, but also a detriment to our environment and the well-being of our citizens. By making this concerted effort, we demonstrate our commitment to contributing to safer, cleaner and more attractive streets for all Bermudians. Let us continue to work together to ensure the success of tackling this problem and making Bermuda an even more vibrant and appealing place to live and visit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Before I call the next Minister, I am going to ask the Deputy [Speaker] to come forward.

But the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Minister.

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker. Mr. [Deputy] Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning as Minister responsible for gender affairs to acknowledge today that which is being celebrated globally as International Women's Day. This day is significant as it provides an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the cultural, economic, political and social accomplishments of women worldwide.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors embraces the 2024 theme for International Women's Day, #InspireInclusion. We celebrate all women in all of their diversities. We celebrate those women who came before us, those who stand beside us now and those who will come after.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, history tells us that International Women's Day dates back to the year 1908 when 15,000 working women in the United States unified under the National Women's Trade Union League and other groups to protest against low wages, lack of protective legislation and harsh working conditions. The very next day National Women's Day was announced to honour the female protestors, and subsequently in 1911 the day went global as International Women's Day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, more than 100 years later we continue to recognise International Women's Day, which is a testament to the significance of women in society and the impactful contributions that we make. We celebrate those women who came before us both internationally and locally, and we celebrate those women who currently stand with us to build on the steel foundation laid by women trailblazers globally.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year the United Nations 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which will be held in New York City from March 11 to 22, has set the theme "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all

women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective." From this overarching theme the United Nations has deemed the focus of their International Women's Day to be "Invest in women, accelerate progress."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the past year the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors has taken intentional action in its initiatives to invest in women and to accelerate their progress. Last week I informed this Honourable House of the ongoing work that is being undertaken by the Ministry in collaboration with UN Women and the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] Multi-Country office in Jamaica to progress the UN's sustainable development goals joint programme Building Back Equal. The principal vision for this joint programme is to invest in Bermuda's micro, small and medium-sized (MSMEs) women entrepreneurial businesses in agricultural, cultural and creative industries to empower and equip them for new growth opportunities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry is grateful to the team at the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation [BEDC] under the leadership of Executive Director, Ms. Erica Smith, who is supporting the Ministry with the investment in women entrepreneurs through the Building Back Equal joint programme. This year, in partnership with BEDC and through the Building Back Equal programme, an accelerator programme designed specifically for women entrepreneurs will be implemented. This investment in our MSME women entrepreneurial businesses will help position them so that at the end of the accelerator programme they can confidently pitch their business products to broader market investors. This directly aligns with the United Nations International Women's Day theme: "Invest in women, accelerate progress."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me now acknowledge some of the activities that have taken place this week in recognition of International Women's Day 2024:

On Wednesday, March 6, a wellness walk was held which promoted the collective commitment of women taking care of themselves and each other. I had the pleasure of opening this event and participating in the walk along with Her Excellency, Rena Lalgie; the Head of the Public Service, Mrs. Cherie-lynn Whitter; and women public officers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was great camaraderie walking with women who work at all levels across the public service. The atmosphere was both inspiring and inclusive.

On Thursday, March 7, I held a lunch "table talk" session with seven young female members of Future Leaders and Youth Parliamentarians. The table talk was highly engaging as our young women leaders expressed their views on various hot topics that included recruiting, retaining and developing female talent; women's economic empowerment; gender equality; supporting women and girls into leadership, decision-making and business; and helping women and girls make informed decisions about their health and sexual reproduction rights.

Today Friday, March 8, Her Excellency, Ms. Rena Lalgie, Governor of Bermuda and Bermuda's first woman Governor who [succeeded] 145 men who held the role up until her appointment, is providing all women with an encouraging and inspiring message in support of International Women's Day.

Also today, Friday, March 8, the International Women's Day Public Service Planning Committee is hosting a virtual panel discussion, "Paving the First Path," this afternoon. Ministries and departments have been encouraged to host office watch parties during the lunch window to stream the panel discussion and send in questions to be answered live. This approach promotes the inclusion of as many women across the public service as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the panellists participating in the discussion are as follows:

- Cherie-lynn Whitter, Head of Public Service, the first woman to be appointed as Head of the Public Service;
- Cindy Clarke, Director of Public Prosecutions, the first Bermudian woman to hold the post of Head Prosecutor, Department of Public Prosecutions;
- Tami Ray, Senior Ferry Pilot, the first woman to hold this post at the Department of Marine and Ports Services; and
- Keeva Joell-Benjamin, Commissioner of Corrections, the first woman to be appointed Commissioner, Department of Corrections.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the panel discussion will challenge and inspire female public officers to take on leadership roles across the public service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this morning along with many other colleagues I attended the Women's Resource Centre's inspiring breakfast reception at the City Hall, Earl Cameron Theatre. This networking breakfast provided a platform for women from all sectors of our community to reconnect and meet new women.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was followed by a TEDx-style presentation featuring three young women:

- Hazel Clark, Director of Global Sales and Business Development at Bermuda Tourism Authority;
- Kristin White, Writer, entrepreneur and community activist; and
- Tiffany Paynter, Executive Director of OutBermuda, poet and educator.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this afternoon the BPSU [Bermuda Public Services Union] Women's Committee is holding an information session to celebrate women and inspire inclusion. I am humbled to have been invited as a guest speaker at this year's event of which the theme is "Inspiring Leadership in Women Today and Beyond." The audience will consist of women and public and private high school students. I aim to inspire

them by talking about my experiences and my perspective on life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remind my honourable colleagues and the public that women are the engine that drives the public service, private and third sector organisations, households and our community. We must support our women as they contribute so much of themselves to make Bermuda a more inclusive place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, although International Women's Day is centred around celebrating women and girls, we must not forget the role that our men and boys play to ensure equality. Their roles are essential in ensuring that women and girls are included and respected in all spheres of our society. As a community, we must continue to take strides toward #InspireInclusion for our women and girls.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing I take this opportunity to wish all women within our community and globally a happy International Women's Day. And I encourage them to #InspireInclusion, as making a difference must start with us.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Minister, do you have another Statement?

MIRRORS PROGRAMME—2024 "TRANSFORM YOUR PERSPECTIVE" WORLD SUMMIT

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today to share with this Honourable House and my colleagues an overview of the 2024 "Transform Your Perspective" World Summit held from February 10 to the16 of 2024.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Mirrors Programme hosted the First World Summit in Bermuda in partnership with overseas partners at Quantum Learning Global [QLG]. The summit included an Educators and Youth Workers Workshop, facilitator training, and a SuperCamp Junior Forum for middle school students. Participants travelled from the USA, Argentina, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, the Dominican Republic and Taiwan to participate in the 2024 "Transform Your Perspective" World Summit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the purpose of the workshop was held to equip professionals with valuable insights, innovative approaches and practical strategies to create an empowering culture that develops the social and emotional capacity of today's youth. The aim of the workshop was for participants to

- experience valuable insights and practical strategies;
- develop young people's social and emotional capacity;
- engage with educators and youth workers from around the world;
- explore innovative approaches to education and youth development; and
- advance their knowledge and skills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the World Summit kicked off with an Educators and Youth Workers Workshop held on Saturday, February 10, at the Willowbank Resort in Somerset. It was a resounding success with more than 75 participants gathering to explore innovative strategies and insights for youth development. The workshop brought together educators, youth workers, professionals and parents from diverse backgrounds for a day of learning, collaboration, inspiration and rejuvenation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the turnout and enthusiasm of participants at this year's workshop were most encouraging. It was impactful to see educators, youth workers, parents and family members come together to exchange ideas, learn from each other, reaffirm their commitment to empowering young people and shift their mind-set about what it means to inspire Bermudian youth. The mind-set shift from *empowerment* to *InPower-Meant* was inspiring as it focused on renewing one's belief that when one explores who they are *in* their core, they discover that knowledge is *power*, and as leaders, that power is *meant* to be shared.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, participants engaged in a series of discussions throughout the workshop where they had the opportunity to delve into various topics including social and emotional development, youth empowerment and innovative teaching strategies. Through hands-on activities and group discussions, participants gained valuable insights and practical strategies for creating optimal environments for youth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the facilitators for the session shared their expertise and perspectives on youth development and the importance of character development principles built on neuroscience, counselling pedagogy, and leadership principles. The Path of Learning was explored which gives the learning and development process that teachers understand along with strategies to move from the low road where fear, anxiety, stress and threat take place to the high road to engage higher-order thinking and sound decision-making.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, participants left with the understanding that social and emotional development does not stop with them. It allows them to create awareness of themselves and how they impact our rapidly changing world. Participants received fresh insights and strategies to fuel their work. It also provided a platform for networking, allowing participants to connect with peers, share experiences and forge new partnerships. There were consistent lively discussions and exchange of ideas, fostering community and collaboration among participants.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after a rejuvenating kick-off, the World Summit continued with the in-powering SuperCamp Junior Forum, a five-day interactive camp for middle school students. The 33 middle school student participants discovered the in-powering elements of social and emotional development and focused on team building, communication, building self-identity

and discovering the importance of solid decision-making. The foundation of the SuperCamp Junior Forum was based on the eight Keys of Excellence, namely,

1. Integrity;
2. Failure Leads to Success;
3. Speak With Good Purpose;
4. This Is It;
5. Commitment;
6. Ownership;
7. Flexibility; and
8. Balance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, instilling these keys in Bermudian youth while having them engage with staff from nine countries around the world built connections where our youth thrived.

At the close of the camp, each young person stood on the stage and shared what traits make up their core and how they would share their greatness with the world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the World Summit also included training world-class facilitators to deliver this powerful programme. Facilitators focused on the *why* and *how* of social and emotional development. This included why it is vital to focus on behavioural development instead of behavioural management to ensure youth gain lifelong skills of success, and how we can support young people through empathy and mentorship.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Mirrors Programme, the Mirrors Alumni and Friends Association, Quantum Learning Global and the Willowbank Resort. The synergy and exchange by all participants contributed to the success of the first World Summit "Transform Your Perspective" Educators and Youth Workers workshop and the SuperCamp Junior Forum for middle school students. The collaboration between the Mirrors Programme and Quantum Learning Global underscores the Government's commitment to fostering opportunities for the development of our youth and empowering professionals with the tools necessary to make a lasting impact.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister Tinee Furbert.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: There appear to be none.

QUESTION PERIOD

PREMIER'S QUESTIONS

The Deputy Speaker: This is 30 minutes. Let me remind you of the guidelines, one of them: "A question to the Premier shall be asked without argument or opinion and shall not address more than one matter of general government policy."

Opposition Leader.

QUESTION 1: CARICOM MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would be honoured if the Honourable Premier would respond to this question: In relation to CARICOM, it can be argued that full membership will have significant and lasting impacts to Bermuda's economy and social fabric. Will this Government commit to allowing for a referendum on the Government's initiative as it relates to making us full members of CARICOM?

Hon. E. David Burt: I thank the Honourable Member for his question, and I would refer the Honourable Member to the Statements that were made previously that we are now beginning to engage in a full consultative process having now received a Letter of Entrustment in all matters whether it is decisions or all the rest, we have set out in that document.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Next question.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, supplemental to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Is the Government open to a referendum during this full consultation process?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not going to prejudge the consultative process. And I think the Honourable Opposition Leader should wait before . . . I know that he has a particular desire to continue to raise this issue. And I know that those persons will continue to raise the matter. But the fact is that in one case and instance he has said that we move too slow. In other things and other places when we are being deliberate, it is almost that we are being asked to rush on certain matters. So, when the consultative process is done, there will be plenty of time for discussion and debate on those matters.

But I think, you know, he speaks about massive changes and other types of things and all the rest and saying things that were said in 2003 and different things like that. I think that we should wait for the consultative process. And I would encourage the Honourable Opposition Leader to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: Another question?

QUESTION 1: CYBERATTACK

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My second question is relating to the cyberattack again. We note that a comment from the Deputy Premier in relation to the cyberattack struck at the very heart of the public service and has attacked and immobilised public service. We have been made aware during the Budget Debate process, specifically during the Budget Debate on the Ministry of Finance HQ, that some $3 million had been spent on—I believe the Premier said—*fixing the computers.* Given that some information is clearly publicly accessible, will the Honourable Premier be able to give us further information prior to the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee? Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am not entirely certain what further information the Honourable Opposition Leader is asking for. The Budget Debate—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I can clarify.

Hon. E. David Burt: The Budget Debate had laid in this particular matter. And I said that with the Finance Ministry's assistance in contribution to the remediation efforts of the Government of Bermuda.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I can clarify.

The Deputy Speaker: Second supplementary? A supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: No. Well, the question was not—

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, it is either a question or a supplementary.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the clarification that I cannot proceed unless it is a supplementary.

I will move to the next question.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Continue.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

With your permission, can I read from the Standing Orders? I need to provide some context for this question.

The Deputy Speaker: Ask your question, sir. This is Question/Answer. Is it a question to the Premier?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Okay. Thank you. Thank you. I will—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: That is right. This is Question Period to the Premier.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not arguing. I am clarifying.

The Deputy Speaker: If you have a question to the Premier, then ask it.

QUESTION 1: UPDATED REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTEREST

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. I will not provide the context.

My question is that the Progressive Labour Party MPs' declarations are quite dated, with the Premier's last made nearly 10 years ago. When will those declarations be updated? And we will provide context in the public forum. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: So one thing I can tell, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that I know that my last update is not 10 years ago. And if that is the case, it is on the website. Because I know that I had those things updated when I came to this office. But I am quite certain that the Honourable Opposition Leader should know that if Members have to update their declarations, they update the declarations. And there is a committee that is responsible for that to the House. I have said the last time this was asked, where the Honourable Members of course wanted to push the false and misleading commentary followed up by the WhatsApp groups that I somehow had an interest In a company that was dealing with matters related to COVID-19 that was . . .

I said my declarations are up to date and that is fine. So I am not sure where [the Honourable Opposition Leader] is getting the 10 years. I know that we filed updated declarations, and if he has any particular questions on them, he can raise them. And there is a committee of the House that does those particular matters. If he believes that person's declarations are out of date, he can raise that with the committee of the House. He is also a member of the Standing Orders Committee, which rules this House. And if the Honourable Opposition Leader wants to raise those questions, he can do that at that point in time. My declarations are up to date.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposition Leader, any supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, definitely.

We have been trying to convene that committee of the House that he is referring to for some time. Would the Honourable Premier . . .

Actually, no. I am good. Thank you very much. I appreciate all of the guidance today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the guidance from the Honourable Premier.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The next speaker is Kim Swan. You have a question for the Premier?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: He is not here?

Opposition Whip.

QUESTION 1: LOW INTEREST MORTGAGE RATE

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

During yesterday's press conference, the Premier mentioned lower interest rates with the banks. I received a few calls this morning. They were confused. So does this lower interest rate apply just to the contractors within the EEZ? Or does this, or will this allow someone or a family buying a home within the EEZ to be able to get a low interest mortgage rate? I did receive some calls concerning that.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me do my best to advise the Honourable Member. Because the matter that was raised yesterday was an MOU dealing with approved residential schemes. Approved residential schemes were debated in this House which were laid by the Honourable Minister for Economy and Labour speaking about the need for additional multi-family dwellings and construction there. So this is for the developers of those particular instances who are looking to do that. The BEDC has been working with developers. One of the things that has been announced has been the challenge that they have had due to the interest rates that are being charged by local banks.

We know that we had a mortgage guarantee programme, which has been incredibly successful in putting a number of Bermudians on the path toward home ownership and making sure that they can have access to lower rates. And we are being able to do that for Bermudians who are buying their first home or transfer mortgages. We have used the same idea to go ahead and translate that to developers who are looking to do things in the economic empowerment zone.

I received a message last evening from a Bermudian developer who has been trying to get something off the ground. The challenge has been the matter that has been related to interest rates. And he sent me a message last evening and said, *Thank you very much. This might be the final thing that we need to do in order to provide 50 additional units in the North Hamilton area.* So this is the type of work of which we are trying to do. We are trying to make sure that we make this easier. And the one thing I would just like to say, because I did not want the Order Paper to be filled with Statements today, so I will be giving a Statement on that on Monday in the House on the Kickstart Programme.

So, I am happy to address more questions then. Or if the Honourable Member has more questions now, I am happy to address them as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two supplementaries also if you care to use them.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

The next Member is MP Tyrrell.

QUESTION 1: FREEZE ON HEALTH INSURANCE RATES

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I note in the Budget Statement that the Honourable Premier announced the plan to freeze health insurance rates for the third year in a row. That measure has been welcomed on the doorstep by my constituents. But some constituents still have questions. Can the Premier make a guarantee to me and my constituents today that they will not see their health insurance bills rise this year? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. And it is an important one, because as we canvass, people do have questions surrounding this particular issue.

So here is what I can say. I can say for those persons who are either on FutureCare, persons on HIP, persons who are members of GEHI [Government Employee Health Insurance], whether they are retirees or active employees, they will not see an increase on their health insurance premiums.

It is important that I explain how health insurance premiums are formulated. Health insurance premiums are formulated by the government portion, which is called the Standard Premium Rate, which applies to all policies in the country. So whether you have a government plan, whether you have a private sector plan, everyone pays into the Standard Premium Rate, and it forms a part of every health insurance policy in the country. That will not move.

So what we are doing, because if that did increase, everyone's health insurance bills in the country would increase. I would hope that insurance companies—who some of us have seen have been reporting significant profits—would hold the line and not increase health insurance premiums. But it is important to note that if they are . . . And I honestly cannot give the

Honourable Member a guarantee. I wish I could give the Honourable Member a guarantee on this issue, because some persons in the private sector will see possibly rates increase depending on their individual claims experience of their individual companies.

But I would encourage those persons who are faced with that to speak to their employer and ask about other options. Because we are trying to create a more competitive environment in the health insurance sector. And I do know stories from employers who have been to one place, seen their rates go [up], go to another company and the other company says, *Well, I can give you a lower rate,* which gets passed on to their [employees]. So I think that it is important.

So I would love to give the Honourable Member a guarantee. What I can say as a guarantee is the government portion has not increased and will not increase this year. We have taken the money, and we will be tabling that Bill later today in the House and debating on it Friday, to enable a transfer from the excess borrowing fund, those $30 million, over to the mutual reinsurance fund so we can keep that cap and not see those price pressures raised. It is an important question. But I want Members to understand and members of the public who are listening to understand that if there is a health insurance increase in your rates, it is not coming from the Government of Bermuda. We have frozen government health insurance rates for the third year in a row.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Supplementary, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank the Premier and appreciate the answer that he has given.

Could the Honourable Premier please reiterate the savings that policyholders will see thanks to the Government's actions, and break those costs down to what the monthly and yearly increase would have been with the rates that are under the control of the Government? Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: I thank the Honourable Member for his question because I think that it is important to know.

And one of the things of which I have always said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that health care is very complex. It is a very complex situation. And the Honourable Minister of Health has been working on advancing matters related to universal health care, has been working on matters relating to fairness, making sure the system is more efficient.

But with this savings, if this Government did not take this action, due to the fact that we do have an ageing population with persons who are living longer, who are using more services, that is the cause of the driving cost to increase health insurance costs, because health insurance has to pay claims. And with people living longer, they will be accessing more claims over time.

The actuaries came to us and said that the increase would have been $45 a month. And $45 a month equals $540 a year. That is important. We are not passing that on. We are using our better economic performance, which means that there are more funds to transfer so that we can hold the line on these health insurance increases for the third year in a row. But I think it is important to know that it does not only affect individuals. Because we know that those costs are shared. So it also reduces the pressure on employers, and it also reduces the pressure on employers having to raise costs.

If you have higher health insurance bills, that means that you may have to raise prices in order to pay for those health insurance bills. If you do not have those increased costs which are coming from the Government, there is less stress to raise prices. That is why it is important to understand the total impact of the action that this Government has taken.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will say I look forward to the debate that we will have on this particular matter next week Friday. And I sincerely hope that Members of the party opposite will support this measure.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Tyrrell, you have one more supplementary.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will hold my supplementary. But I thank the Premier for those fulsome answers. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The next one is MP Ben Smith.

QUESTION 1: BTA GRANT REDUCTION FOR SPORTS EVENTS

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, and good morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Would the Honourable Premier be able to let us know whether he has been made aware of any sporting, international sports tourism events that might be impacted negatively by the Bermuda Tourism Authority's grant being reduced for the upcoming year? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: I have not been made aware that there is anything that might be affected. But as the former Minister of Tourism and certainly the current Minister of Tourism, I know that there is a degree of operational independence that the Bermuda Tourism Authority has. I am not aware of anything that may be

impacted by the reduction in the grant from the Bermuda Tourism Authority. So, if the Honourable Member has any more clarity, I am happy to have particular information. I know that there are events that might have other challenges, but nothing that I know that is related to the grant reduction for the BTA. And the grant reduction is there. So I cannot speak to that.

The Deputy Speaker: MP Smith, you have two supplementaries.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. Would the Honourable Premier let us know that if he does become aware that this is impacting our having specific events whether he would go back to looking whether we should increase the grant in order that we do not lose these events?

Hon. E. David Burt: Here is what I will say, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will say that events are complex. I do not want to delve into the BTA's budget because I know that there was certainly a difference of opinion when I was the Minister of Tourism. And BTA and other persons, or when I was Premier and there were other Ministers of Tourism regarding the events that we do have and in some cases the significant expense of which they occasioned to taxpayers. And whether or not those are the best spending of money.

But the BTA has a budget allocation. And I think that they will be able to go ahead and advance the things which are necessary, which are in the best interest and have the best return for the people of this country when it comes to promoting tourism and executing their National Tourism Plan. I mean, events are not cheap. They are very expensive. And we all have to make the judgment.

I will just speak very simply on . . . you know, we can go back to the history of the America's Cup. And we can remember the debate around the America's Cup. And we remember the fact that the America's Cup had this guarantee that was there which the Government had to come up with a certain portion if the private sector would not raise the money. And my answer to the Honourable Member is if these events are so important for the private sector, then the private sector needs to step up and put their money where their mouth is. It cannot just be for taxpayers to foot the bill while the private sector stands on the sideline.

And we know the former Government had to come up with about $30 million to fill the amount because there was not enough funding from the private sector. And the private sector was like, *Yay, yay, yay, yay, yay, America's Cup!* But they did not put their money where their mouth was. And they said, *Let the Government take care of it.* So I know that the Chairman of the Tourism Authority, Honourable Member from constituency 14, the persons at the Tourism Authority will work for those various items. The Government will lend as much support as it can.

But it is important to remember that the Government cannot do it all. And in the space and time when we need to make sure that we are diverting resources to making sure, as we talk about the BTA grant, to making sure . . .

It was school camp registration today. The Honourable Minister who sits in another place said he wanted to make sure that there were more activities for schoolchildren in the summer. Those are the types of things that we are trying to make sure that we can expand. So I would encourage the Honourable Member, as I know that he is someone in the sporting community, to lend his voice as Shadow Minister of Sport as well for the private sector to step up their funding as well. It cannot be just the Government.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Smith, do you have another? That is it.

The next speaker is Mr. Lawrence Scott.

QUESTION 1: ROAD REPAIRS

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Good morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the doorstep I hear a lot of repeated concerns on the state of our roads. Can the Honourable Premier please share with this Honourable House what the Government is doing to improve the state of our roads?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was at an event earlier today for International Women's Day. And the comment that got one of the longest chuckles of course was when someone raised the matter of potholes. It is not funny. It is a real and present issue that impacts many, many, many persons, if not all persons in Bermuda. What I can state is that you would have seen the fact that we have made a significant additional investment inside of next year's budget. I think what is also important to note is that we have seen works that have commenced now that the asphalt plant, East End Asphalt, is back up and running.

And the most important thing is the combination of extended good weather. Because you cannot [pour] asphalt when it is wet. And part of the challenges of which we have, of course, is there. I am not going to get in front of the Minister of Public Works because I do know that he has additional announcements to make due to work that the Cabinet has undertaken and the Ministry of Public Works has taken. So I do not want to steal his particular thunder today.

But what I do want the people of Bermuda to know and for the Honourable Member to let his constituents know is that this is something that the Government is not only aware of, but has put in resources behind, has reallocated resources to make sure that we can purchase the new equipment that is necessary to

make sure that we can increase the volume of road paving and also the efficiency of road paving.

I know that there are teams from the Ministry of Public Works, as the Minister mentioned in his previous Statements, who have been overseas already to receive additional training on new techniques to make sure that the roads and the work that is put down. And I do know that we are going to see progress on this particular issue.

So I will tell the Honourable Member that as difficult as it is, I will tell him to relate to his constituents that we are making progress on this. There will be more that will be coming. They will be seeing new equipment arriving on our shores quickly. And they will see that there is going to be increased activity around this.

The only thing that I would ask him also to relay to his honourable constituents—the Honourable Member to relay to his constituents—is have them pray for extended periods of dry weather so we can get more work done.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Scott, do you have any supplementary?

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: I do have one supplementary if you allow, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: First of all, I want to thank the Premier for his answer. But something else that is also raised on the doorstep is about the overgrowth on the roadsides. Can the Premier please advise what the Government is doing in regard to this issue?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for this question. And that is certainly something we have seen the Ministry of Public Works having moved aggressively, having placed notices on people's houses, making sure they know that they are going to be charged if they do not cut back their overgrowth. Because again, this is not just the responsibility of the Government. The Government can take care of its properties, but the Government cannot be expected to take care of the properties of private owners who are not doing what they need to do in order to cut the trees back.

In addition, I do know that the solar sweeper programme, which is to clean up our roadsides to make sure that our roadsides are done, has been fully funded. We do know that there are now 12 solar sweepers that are working throughout the country that are making sure to clean up and take care of our roads. But it is also important to note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is a community effort as well. We have seen many Honourable Members inside of this community and various organisations are doing the work.

So I would support the work of the Ministry of Public Works. But would also remind persons that this is not just a government issue. If you are a private landowner who has overgrowth, you must do your job under the law to make sure that it is addressed. And there are numerous landscaping companies that will help and assist you to make sure that your trees can be cut back.

The Deputy Speaker: The next speaker is Mr. Pearman.

QUESTION 1: CONTRACT WITH ONYX LIMITED

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Premier, in May 2023 the Attorney General's Chambers entered into a contract with the Attorney General's husband's company, Onyx Limited, to provide legal services to the Bermuda Government. Were you personally aware of that contract?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I do believe that this matter was canvassed significantly the last time around. And I think that all of the questions for this particular matter have been answered. The processes were followed as according to a public sector contract from the Attorney General's Chambers dealing with matters related to legal services.

The Deputy Speaker: Continue.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Were you personally aware of the contract?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have answered the question already, and I am not going to repeat what I have said on this particular matter.

This matter has been canvassed repeatedly, and I know the Honourable Member is trying to go somewhere. But if we want to go somewhere, we can certainly talk about many different contracts, whether or not it was the former Government and all the rest. The fact is that this matter was dealt with by public officers, handled in that particular way to make sure that the Attorney General's Chambers has the resources necessary to make sure it can provide advice to the Government of Bermuda.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Premier, when is it you say that you answered the question whether or not you were aware of the contract?

The Deputy Speaker: Hang on a minute. I want to remind you of the Standing Orders. I think it is

17(5)(d) *[sic]* and 17(9) *[sic]*. Because I am reading that you are kind of getting personal, and we are not supposed to do that. Right? That is why—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Are you not permitting me to ask this question, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Pearman, did you hear what I said?

Mr. Scott Pearman: I will be guided by you. What is your direction?

The Deputy Speaker: [Standing Order] 19(11)(d) and (f), right?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: If you want me to *read* it to you, I will.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: It says [at Standing Order 19(11)(d)], "It shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting . . ." It is not that one. But [Standing Order 19(11)](f) says, "No Member shall impute improper motives to any Member of the House or indulge in personalities, except on a substantive motion moved for that purpose." That is the way I understand it and what I told you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am asking whether or not the Premier of our country was aware of a government contract. That is a perfectly legitimate question. It does not impute an improper motive.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the contract was handled through the traditional government contracting method that was done via contracting for legal services. The one thing that is important to note is that I can confirm, like when I was asked this question in the last Premier's Question Time, that where . . . because I saw that the OBA's people went online and—

The Deputy Speaker: You don't need any further explanation.

Hon. E. David Burt: No. I have got it.

—where the OBA's people went online and say that it requires the approval of the Attorney General. The Attorney General certainly recused herself from this particular issue and it was handled by public officers. Because clearly if she was involved that would have been a conflict.

That is the way it was handled. And I know the Honourable Members want to continue to press upon this point. But the fact remains that this was handled through the standard processes, and those things were done.

The Deputy Speaker: I am satisfied, Mr. Premier.

The next speaker is Mr. Wade.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second supplementary?

The Deputy Speaker: You had two, I think, Mr. Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: That was my first supplementary.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: No. You had two supplementaries. Yes.

Mr. Wade.

QUESTION 1: ELIMINATION OF CUSTOM DUTY FOR STAPLE GOODS

Mr. Jason Wade: Thank you, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker.

Mr. [Deputy] Speaker, the Cost of Living Commission eliminated duty on 35 staple goods. The Throne Speech said that the list would be expanded upon. Could the Honourable Premier please advise, where does this promise stand?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Member for his question on that matter.

It is important to note that the Cost of Living Commission did bring forward a number of recommendations that we put through in this House that have reduced duty anywhere from duty on dishwashing detergent or female sanitary products, all of these matters were rated to zero duty. I do know that we have received a preliminary report from the Cost of Living Commission, who has met, who has produced a number of various items that will be added. Those matters have been sent back for additional clarity.

The Honourable Attorney General, who is the Minister responsible for consumer affairs, did update the Cabinet on that recently. And we are expecting that we will be bringing those matters to the House when we come back in the next session so that we can see further duty reductions and elimination on staple goods, fulfilling the promise that we laid out in the Throne Speech and making sure that we continue to expand the zero-duty rates across the country.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Wade, any supplementary?

The next speaker is MP Jackson.

You have the floor.

QUESTION 1: MIDDLE EAST CONSULTANT CONTRACT

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not expecting to have time. So my question is very quick.

Is the Premier renewing the Middle East consultant Alexia Hefti's one-year contract at $20,000 a month?

Hon. E. David Burt: So I am not going to speak to what the negotiations may be, but I think it is important to note that the Middle East contract, as I stated, is inclusive of costs, whereas there are others that are not. So we do not have significant additional costs. We are not paying for office space. We are not paying for those other items which we have to pay for in the Brussels Office, in the [Washington,] DC Office as well. We are going to be looking and reviewing that particular contract. And when there is a new contract that is done, we will certainly make sure.

But here is what I can make sure the Honourable Member is clear on. We will not stop our engagement with the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] region. We are going to press forward with that engagement with the GCC region.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: And despite whatever noise that the Opposition wants to make, we are going to press ahead. I know they want to make political points. I know they want to talk about X, Y and Z and all the rest around these particular things. But the point is the engagement in that region is important. It is bearing fruit. We know that we are expecting visits from ministers this year who are coming to look at various projects here in this country. We know that we have a delegation coming from the Emirates Family Office Association, the MOU which was negotiated by Ms. Hefti in conjunction with the Ministry of Economy and Labour to set up more family offices in line with the Economic Development Strategy.

Every single other Government in the world is making sure that they are paying attention to the GCC region. Whether it is the UAE [United Arab Emirates], whether it is Qatar, whether it is Bahrain, whether it is Kuwait or whether it is Saudi Arabia or Oman, that is what they are doing. And this Government will do the same. You need to make the investment in order to ensure that you get the return. And these things, as difficult as it may sound sometimes, cannot always be done on the cheap. We are making the investment and we are going to continue to make the investment.

The Opposition may make noise about it in their election campaign. That is fine. But we are focused on delivering results. We have delivered thus far. And we are going to deliver some more.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms. Jackson, you have time for a supplementary.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No, Deputy Speaker.

I look forward to the deliverables. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

MP Famous, you may not be able to finish. You may be able to get up and get down.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: That it is, Mr. Famous.

Some Hon. Members: Aww!

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Happy International Women's Day, everybody!

[Laughter]

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: Now we have the Question Period on Statements. And there are no questions for the Deputy Premier nor for the Minister of Public Works.

We have one from the Opposition Leader to Minister Hayward on the Bermuda Immigration and Protection.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 1: UPDATES TO THE BERMUDA IMMIGRATION AND PROTECTION (PROHIBITION OF ENTRY) ORDER—BERMUDA'S VISA CONTROLLED NATIONALS LIST

Hon. Jarion Richardson: My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry.

This is a question as it relates to Honourable Minister Hayward's Statement on the Bermuda Visa Controlled Nationals list. I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement.

May I read from a portion of it?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Go ahead.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

On page 2 the Honourable Minister outlined the Prohibition Order of 2023, the purpose of the Prohibition Order, where he says, "This Order ensures that security and vetting takes place prior to an individual arriving in Bermuda and that tourist visitors and

residents of Bermuda have ready access to the US, UK and Canada through commercial air service." The Minister's Statement appears to resolve a particular problem with the Order, which is that our dependence on overseas means that they can change the circumstances of the issuing of a visa, and that means that Bermuda is impacted by those overseas controls.

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: There is another problem that the Prohibition Order brings up. And that is a chicken-and-egg scenario wherein the work permit processing and the length of time it takes can either precede or pre-date the process of getting the visa in these countries—that is, the US, the UK or Canada. So we have a problem in that it is very difficult oftentimes to land additional specialist labour in Bermuda due to first, again the time it takes, and [second,] the chicken-and-egg scenario where you need the work permit to get the visa, but you need the visa to get the work permit.

So to that end, I was wondering if the Minister was aware of these particular other problems and if he has any plans to resolve those.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Opposition Leader.

Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the process. What typically takes place is [where] a work permit is submitted and the individual requires a visa and the visa is contingent on the work permit, we grant the work permit and then allow the person to obtain a visa. However, if that person does not obtain the visa prior to arriving in Bermuda, that individual will not be landed. So we are flexible as it pertains to issuance of permits so that persons can obtain the visa to come to Bermuda and engage in work.

But it should be also noted that there are a number of countries that can transit through the UK without obtaining a visa, and those individuals, on the issuance of a permit are allowed to use that transit provision.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: None. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister.

The Speaker: Second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: None. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.

Minister, that was the only question for you on that Statement. However, your second Statement also has questions. And again, they are from the Opposition Leader.

Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: FINTECH IN BERMUDA, A YEAR IN REVIEW

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question relates to the Honourable Minister's Statement, FinTech in Bermuda, A Year in Review. With your permission, can I read from page 1?

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: The Minister said, "These initiatives" (referring to the Digital Asset Business [Act], or DABA, or the Innovative Insurer General Business licence) "have laid a solid foundation for well-regulated companies to join and strengthen Bermuda's FinTech ecosystem."

My question is to the Honourable Minister, Is he aware of any crucial pieces missing from that foundation as it stands right now?

Actually, let me declare my interest, Mr. Speaker. I actually work on a number of licence applications that go before the Bermuda Monetary Authority in this space.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: So I wanted to make sure that everyone is well aware.

So my question relates to the missing pieces of the framework. There are a couple of guidance notes that are outstanding. And in fact, the Honourable Premier spoke to it during the [Budget] Debate on the Ministry of Finance, for example, being the sectorial AML risk assessment for digital asset business. So there are still pieces outstanding.

Would the Honourable Minister be able to outline what pieces of these foundations that he knows are outstanding and when he intends to remediate (either he or the Premier, I am not sure)?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Opposition Leader is clear on what is outstanding because he was able to articulate what is outstanding. But what I would articulate is the process which we are currently engaged in. And so there are two separate processes going on:

1. There is ongoing consultation with the BMA [Bermuda Monetary Authority] to have a better regulated environment and close those legislative gaps.

2. Then there is a second process that is going on with industry stakeholders where we have had a number of stakeholder meetings to not just close the regulatory gaps, but also the gaps in our ecosystem.

We will be putting together a comprehensive FinTech Strategy Report which I will table in this House. The report will highlight the areas in which we need to make further progress to ensure that our ecosystem is first class.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: None. Second question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second question. Yes.

QUESTION 2: FINTECH IN BERMUDA, A YEAR IN REVIEW

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Minister . . . may I read from page 2?

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: The Honourable Minister said, Mr. Speaker, "Bermuda's FinTech vision includes attracting top-tier companies and investors, creating job opportunities for Bermudians . . .". My question relates to these job opportunities for Bermudians. This sector requires a number of different kinds of people to operate in it, everything from coders to senior executives to compliance and risk professionals. So my question relates to a statement on page 3 where the Minister said . . . may I read?

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: "As recently as 2023, preliminary numbers provided by the Department of Statistics list total employment in FinTech to be 35 persons, of which 20 were Bermudians or Spouses of Bermudians."

My question to the Minister is, What are the roles that those Bermudians have fulfilled in FinTech for these 20 people? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that information readily available. I will seek to endeavour to see how detailed I can get that information. The information is normally submitted to the Department of Statistics in occupational categories. I am not sure if it is defined by each role in terms of the way in which those data are aggregated to put out to the public. But I will endeavour to give a further breakdown of the occupational categories in which those individuals work.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary? Second supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you. I have a third question.

The Speaker: Third question.

QUESTION 3: FINTECH IN BERMUDA, A YEAR IN REVIEW

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, please.

Can I . . . The Honourable Minister, on page 2 . . . may I read?

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: "This training and educational effort includes . . ." [The Honourable Minister] speaks to training opportunities provided by the Government as it relates to the FinTech industry. My question to the Honourable Minister would be, Can he please provide guidance as to how the public can access this programme?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: All training that is issued by the Economic Development Department in relation to FinTech is publicly advertised. And we go through a process where we advertise the opportunities for training and we will continue to do so. And so as training arises, we will advertise that particular training on an ongoing basis.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, please. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: How many students of the current training programme or programmes have now been placed in industry? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, we went through the employment numbers earlier, and we recognised that we have 20 Bermudians working in the FinTech sector under DABA and the IIGB licensed companies.

That does not comprise our entire FinTech ecosystem. So it would be very difficult to determine whether or not there is a direct connection between somebody taking a coding programme in high school and then ending up in the tech job in industry. So we do not have those numbers as it pertains to direct correlation.

But what we do know is that we are building capacity. And that is the main thing of the programme. It is not just to connect people with jobs; it is to make a more tech-savvy ecosystem and a more tax-savvy nation. And that is what we are doing. If one comes out of those programmes and they have increased their capacity in terms of their technological capabilities, that is a win for the Government of Bermuda.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: That is it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister, that is the last of the questions for you this morning.

However, Members, there is one other Statement for which questions have been indicated. And that is for the Minister of Transport. MP Pearman has a question for you.

MP.

QUESTION 1: UPDATE ON TACKLING ABANDONED VEHICLES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister Furbert, for your Statement this morning to the House stating that you were going to take decisive action on collecting the abandoned vehicles.

My first question is, notwithstanding having heard your Statement, How is this supposed to work? So more specifically, who should the member of the public call if they have a particular thing? I ask because when we were clearing out two abandoned vehicles in my own constituency, attempts to call TCD [Transport Control Department] to get those removed, they were told there was no truck available. And you referenced private hiring, towing companies and the Parks Department. So should the calls still go to TCD? And does TCD have a truck, and will they be doing the moving? Or does someone else have to do it? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you.

The information is in the Statement, Mr. Speaker. But we did say a call to TCD.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, supplementary.

In terms of calling TCD, before you can take the bikes out to the dump, one of the requirements is to drain the oil from them. Because they will not take them at the dump if there is oil in them. Who will be draining the vehicles?

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Because again in this particular instance, we were told the person at TCD was no longer draining vehicles. Is that still the case? Or has that been corrected?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I do not get into the nitty-gritty of this type of information. But that is being handled. If the Honourable Member wants to speak to me later, I can try to find out that information for him.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. Still on this issue on how it is going to work.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: The way it used to work was a seven-day notice would be attached to the bike or car by the police. And you called the police, and they would do that. You referenced now 14 days. Is there a policy reason for that change from 7 to 14? And could you explain that? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It is quite simple, Mr. Speaker. We are just being a little more compassionate. It has been our understanding that sometimes those vehicles have been there for quite some time. But we are just trying to work with individuals. As you know, as I said in the Statement, some vehicles actually have to be removed by the owners themselves. But we just want to give them enough time to move those vehicles. They now have 14 days before we will actually take action.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary?

The Speaker: No, no. You had your—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am sorry.

The Speaker: Second question now.

QUESTION 2: UPDATE ON TACKLING ABANDONED VEHICLES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second question; quite right. Still on the same area, but second question.

Again, on removal and the notice. Would it not make more sense that if someone has abandoned a bike, after seven days we would want to get it off of the road rather than leaving it for another seven?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Well, that is something that yourselves would do, but we are trying to be more compassionate. We are more compassionate than the OBA, so that is why we take 14 days.

[Laughter and desk thumping]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second supplementary.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. I suppose we would say we are more efficient. We actually get the problem dealt with in time. Yes.

(There is a supplementary to my right, Mr. Speaker.)

The Speaker: Oh. MP Jackson, you have a supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the Minister is, I am wondering, has the Ministry or the Department of Transport thought about taking a review of the process around abandoned vehicles to make it either more efficient—

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Well, I mean, actually really review it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Clearly no one has.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. The Honourable Member is not clear on what she actually means. But we actually have taken the action. We have reviewed the process. And so if the Honourable Member would be more clear, maybe I could answer her question. I do not know what she is talking about.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Or third question for—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I believe I have a second supplementary on my second question, do I not?

The Speaker: You have a second supplementary.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, thank you. Just checking.

The Speaker: So we are still on that second question.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Still on that second question.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Scott Pearman: Honourable Minister, in relation to these notices, the position will now be then the notice goes on, and in 14 days [the vehicle] is gone. Is that right?

[No audible response]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. (He answered yes.)

QUESTION 3: UPDATE ON TACKLING ABANDONED VEHICLES

Mr. Scott Pearman: And third question: Does the Honourable Minister have a sense of why we are seeing the increase in these abandoned vehicles? You mentioned that there are now two or three calls a day. It is obvious from just seeing around the Island there are more. Do you have a sense of why there are more?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: There has been one reason, Mr. Speaker, because the Honourable Members did not take action between 2012 and 2017.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I will let that slide. I will let that slide.

An Hon. Member: Shots fired.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, shots fired indeed, indeed.

[Laughter]

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: But on a serious note, Minister, there are clearly more. And you have said that this morning in your Statement. My understanding, at least again in a particular incident that I had to deal with, is that people are driving these bikes unlicensed. And if they get in an accident, they flee the scene and leave the bikes. Can you speak to that?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member is speculating. There are certain actions being taken by the authorities, such as the police concerns. And I just cannot speak to that part.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second supplementary.

And in terms of the licensing connection . . . Sorry. I will wait until the Minister is ready. (Sorry, Minister. When you are ready. Second supplementary on the last question, so you are almost done.)

But in terms of the abandoned vehicles, are you finding there is an increase of these vehicles being unlicensed vehicles rather than licensed vehicles? Are you having greater difficulty, as I understand the police say they are, in connecting a particular abandoned vehicle with a particular person? Because there is just no trace there anymore. Is that correct or incorrect?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am not clear on what the Honourable Member is saying. But most abandoned vehicles are not licensed.

Mr. Scott Pearman: That answered the question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

The Speaker: Thank you, Members. There are no further questions this morning. Thank you for your participation. And we will move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any—

[Laughter]

The Speaker: I had not even had a chance to finish, and everybody is jumping up this morning.

Premier, I will take you in your purple tie first this morning. How is that?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. And in the space of the purple tie, this is a strange congrats and obits for me.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Because I know that congrats and obits is to ask the House to send a letter. And so what I will ask is the House to send a letter to the Woman of the Year who has just been awarded this morning. She is none other than Ms. Tammy Richardson-Augustus—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: —someone who I do believe is the current Deputy Chair of the Bermuda Monetary Authority, someone who has worked with the Government on a number of issues, someone who is well known in the corporate community, but also in the philanthropic and third sector. And I wanted to make sure that the House recognised that.

On the occasion of International Women's Day you will see that a number of Honourable Members are donning their purple today in honour of International Women's Day. And certainly to the women of this Honourable Chamber, whether they be the Ministers of the Government, whether they be the backbench of the Government, or whether they be the Members on the Opposition benches or the ones who work inside of the office to make sure that this place works, I wish to extend a happy International Women's Day to them and to all of the persons in Bermuda.

And I would sincerely hope that we can send a letter of recognition to the Woman of the Year as awarded this morning, Ms. Tammy Richardson-Augustus.

On another note, Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to attend on behalf of Bermuda the 138th Bermuda AME Annual Conference that took place at my home church of St. Paul AME. And I would ask if this Honourable House could send a letter of congratulations to the Right Reverend Bishop Julius McAllister who is retiring after 30 years of pastoral service. Of course he is the Bishop for Bermuda, as Bermuda falls inside of his particular district. And he served as bishop since 2008, has visited our shores on a number of occasions. And I certainly hope that we would wish him well in his endeavours as he goes forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

Does any other Member?

MP Caines.

Mr. Wayne Caines: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Wayne Caines: I would like to acknowledge I heard some accolades being given to some, first for the women in government. And I noticed a glaring omission. And I would like to acknowledge the first female Senior Magistrate in Bermuda, the Worshipful Maxanne Anderson.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Wayne Caines: I would like to declare my interest.

The Speaker: Ah, ah, ah! I was waiting for you if you were going to declare that.

Mr. Wayne Caines: I would like to declare my interest. I have a close family relationship with the Senior Magistrate.

The Speaker: Very close.

Mr. Wayne Caines: The Senior Magistrate is responsible for a number of our courts. The Senior Magistrate is most committed to some of our treatment courts which include and are not limited to the Drug Treatment Court and the Mental Health Court, the Probation Court and the newly formed Juvenile Court that will come above the parapet in the not-to-distant future.

Mr. Speaker, I would like for us to send condolences to the family of Mr. Collins Fisher. Mr. Collins Fisher is a long-standing resident of Parsons Road, Mr. Speaker. His family gained prominence in the 1970s with as you know, Mr. Speaker, the Fisher case. I would like to associate the whole House with this, specifically the Deputy Leader. Mr. Speaker, the Fisher family came to Bermuda, Ms. Fisher came to Bermuda, and she had four kids. And she was married, and they had one kid with her husband. The four children who were not of the marriage were deemed not to be Bermudian. One day the then Minister of Immigration asked them to leave the school, and indeed because they were not of the marriage they were asked to leave the country.

This matter in the West Indian community, specifically in the Jamaican community, caused a lot of uproar that these children of the Fisher family after they got married were not considered children of the family and were not being given the right of Bermudian status. Mr. Speaker, this matter was appealed twice in its civil capacity in the Supreme Court of Bermuda. It then went to the Privy Council. The case was taken to the Privy Council by Mr. Julian Hall.

The Fisher family at great expense . . . Mr. Collins Fisher, who financed this on behalf of his children, and his wife, Eunice, worked three jobs seven days a week to take this case. In our community this was a first where a local immigrant family challenged the Bermuda Government all the way to the Privy Council. The Fisher family in our community, the Parsons Road community, they are heroes. They are folk heroes in our community. They were ultimately successful in this case, and the children lived and have had prominent roles in our country to this date.

We weep and we mourn with the Fisher family. We ask that the appropriate condolences be sent to the Fisher family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Caines.

MP Lister, would you like to make a contribution?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I would like to start off just in the words of Tupac,

> "And since we all came from a woman
> Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman . . ."

Mr. Speaker, in recognition of International Women's Day, it has been mentioned, but I would just like to add those few comments. We all came from a woman, so we all should respect and recognise and, just again—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: And again, Mr. Speaker, just remember that that would be your *mother,* your *grandmother.* You might have a *daughter, nieces*. Whoever they are, Mr. Speaker, they are all women. And we should all recognise them today on this International Women's Day.

And, Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of International Women's Day, I want to highlight another young woman. Back in December we recognised this young woman as she was a Bermudian on her college football team that won the NCAA Championship. Well, Mr. Speaker, from that, young Ms. Leilanni Nesbeth, she had signed a contract with the Chicago Red Stars of the National Women's Soccer League in America. So again Bermudians! I cannot say how many other professional women football players are representing Bermuda, but I would go to say she is probably the only one. So I would like to again congratulate her on—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Okay, there are a few [others]; I stand corrected.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: But I would like to congratulate her on signing that contract and that she will represent Bermuda well. And again as a young woman, we wish her a lot. She is young, 22. She has a long career ahead of her, so we wish her the best in that career.

And again, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member—

Mr. Caines, do you want to make a second one? Oh, okay.

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again in honour of International Women's Day, I would like congratulations sent to a daughter of the soil, a constituent of mine who flies between Bermuda and the Carolinas. I believe it is North Carolina. [Kennette Burgess] was recently named 40 Under 40, named a 40 Under 40 honouree. And this,

Mr. Speaker, recipients range from CEOs to educators, bankers, human resource professionals, community leaders and lawyers, in every sector. But we are fortunate that a daughter of our soil was named amongst these prestigious awards that took place a few weeks ago. Some of us will know Kennette's father, who recently passed away, Kenneth "Pop" Leroy Simmons. So he only did pass away last year. So I am sure it was an emotional experience for her to be able to accept this award without her dad being there, who was an inspirational influence in her life, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Does any other—

Minister Weeks. You have your three minutes, sir.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, colleagues.

I could not let this opportunity go by to associate myself with some of the remarks for International Women's Day. For all of the remarks of my colleagues previously, I want to be associated.

The Speaker: I think we have a very close person next to you sitting in the Chamber today.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Well, exactly. That is why I am up on my feet, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Because without getting up on my feet, I would run into trouble later on in the day.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So while we are congratulating women on International Women's Day, I want this Honourable House to make note and take note that there are three lovely women in our Gallery.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: They are three educators. And they are here to support the Minister in his speech, in his presentation today. One of the ladies in particular, Mr. Speaker, I am related to her, closely related to her.

The Speaker: You can't see but I'll tell you she is smiling all over the place right now.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, she is, she is. And I want to wish her and her colleagues a happy International Women's Day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Minister Burch.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, good morning again.

I would like to be associated with the congratulations being extended to the AME Church on their anniversary and conference.

I would also like to be associated with the condolences going to the Fisher family. MP Caines (who has left the Chamber) mentioned that they were from Parsons Road.

The Speaker: Yes.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Well, they might have been from Parsons Road when they had issues with the Privy Council and the Supreme Court. But they presently reside in Cedar Hill, Warwick, constituency 27, Mr. Speaker. And it is one of the few houses that when I canvass we usually had a conversation about politics and what needed to be done. And then we had a conversation about my second-favourite place on the planet, Jamaica. And so it was always a pleasant and lengthy exchange, I might add, canvassing that house. So I was quite surprised to learn of Mr. Fisher's passing. And I offer condolences to his wife and his family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None other.

We will move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Speaker: There are two Bills to be introduced this morning by the Minister of Finance/Premier.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning again, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

FIRST READINGS

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2024

GOVERNMENT LOANS AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bills for first reading, which according to section 36(3)(a)(i) of the Bermuda Constitution require the Governor's recommendation, so that they may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting: the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024; and the Government Loans Amendment Act 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: That takes us now, Members and listening audience, to the resumption of the annual Budget Debate. This morning the first item up will be the Ministry of Education, which will have five hours; and the remaining three hours is for the non-ministries later today, a total of eight hours.

As has been said before on each day, once we go into Committee the Speaker is out of the Chamber for those eight hours. And we will be in the able hands of the Panel of Chairs led by the Deputy Speaker. And once the Premier moves us forward, I will remove myself from the Chambers. I believe the Deputy Speaker has the first sitting this morning.

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25.

The Speaker: Any objections?

None.

Deputy.

House in Committee at 12:08 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024/25

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. And we will be doing [the Ministry of] Education this morning, Heads 16, 17, 18 and 41. This is a five-hour debate. And it will be headed by the Minister of Education, the Honourable Diallo Rabain.

Minister, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads now be taken under consideration:

- Head 16—Ministry of Education Headquarters;
- Head 17—Department of Education;
- Head 18—Libraries and Archives; and
- Head 41—Bermuda College

The Chairman: Continue, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget of the Ministry of Education which comprises the Ministry of Education Headquarters, Head 16; the Department of Education, Head17; the Department of Libraries and Archives, Head 18; and the Bermuda College Head 41.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 budget for the Ministry of Education is $142,589,000 and can be found on page B-132 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. This represents an increase of $2,742,000 when compared to 2023/24's original budget. The current account 2024/25 estimated revenue for the Ministry of Education is $262,000.

Mr. Chairman, the capital expenditure estimates for acquisitions and development increased from $6,085,000 to $8,012,000 in 2024/25. The number of

full-time equivalents for the Ministry decreased by 23 from 1,099 to 1,076 employees.

Mr. Chairman, it may not always be apparent, but the Ministry of Education accounts for nearly one-quarter of government employees represented across four union bargaining units. Recognising the significance of these unions, in particular the Bermuda Union of Teachers [BUT], is essential to our collective success. Our relationship has indeed faced its challenges with occasional disagreements. However, the constructive dialogue and valuable insights from our union partners, especially during our educational reform efforts, are encouraging and indispensable.

Mr. Chairman, our recent presentation on education reform to the Bermuda Trade Union Congress exemplifies our numerous steps to keep our union partners informed, engaged and actively involved. Establishing regular quarterly meetings with the Bermuda Union of Teachers, alongside bi-weekly sessions orchestrated by the Education Reform Unit [ERU], has opened the door for meaningful discussions and exchanging ideas. Furthermore, the Education Reform Unit's participation in the monthly meetings with our principals [organised by the Commissioner of Education], including BPSU representatives in various education reform working groups and education boards, underscores our belief in collaborative approaches.

I wish to emphasise, Mr. Chairman, that education and education reform are a collective endeavour. Achieving excellence requires all stakeholders' wisdom, experience and involvement. In this spirit I sincerely thank our union partners, particularly the BUT for their commitment to challenging us and contributing to developing a superior educational system for Bermuda. Together we are making strides toward a future where our education system reflects our community's strength, diversity and potential.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to note as seen on page B-132 that the revised budget for 2023/24 was adjusted to $142.589 million, a rise primarily due to recently finalised union-negotiated pay awards. These necessary adjustments which resulted in a $5.585 million increase from the original budget underscore our commitment to fair compensation for our educators.

Mr. Chairman, this year we have also undertaken a comprehensive review of the past three years' budgets to enhance our financial stewardship. This rigorous evaluation, which aims to identify and implement spending efficiencies, ensures that every dollar requested and allocated supports our educational mission as effectively as possible. I will discuss the outcomes of this exercise in more detail when addressing Head 17, the Department of Education.

Mr. Chairman, some may wonder why our proposed budget for 2024/25 does not match or exceed last year's adjusted figure. This question is valid and important. I feel it necessary to mention this to provide some clarity for the public and my colleagues opposite about the reasoning behind our budgeting decisions—particularly why our proposed budget for 2024/25, although higher than last year's initial budget, is set below the previous year's revised total.

HEAD 16—MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I commence the Budget Debate today by detailing the expenditure for the Ministry of Education Headquarters, Head 16. The mission of the Ministry Headquarters, which is found on page B-133, is *To provide strategic leadership and policy direction for education and lifelong learning*. The objectives of the Ministry Headquarters have been outlined accordingly on the same page.

Mr. Chairman, the commitment to educational transformations in the public school system remains the main priority. The Education Reform Unit, the project management office for the transformation initiative, has grown in capacity over the last year to meet the growing demands of our transitioning public school system. Mr. Chairman, the unit is led by Ms. Lisa DeSilva, an educator with over 25 years of experience. Including Ms. DeSilva, 10 Department of Education staff members are reassigned to the Education Reform Unit, and their salary continues to be paid by the Department of Education. Therefore, over $1 million of the Education Department's budget is directly allocated to the Education Reform Unit's resources. There are also three local consultants working with the unit.

Mr. Chairman, the unit is fully engaged in determining the changes that are necessary

- for the classroom such as curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment;
- in our schools such as ensuring they are more inclusive and culturally responsive, and the learning environments are fit for 21st century learning; and
- in the system itself including the way it is governed and funded.

We remain steadfast in our goal of enabling every young person to lead personally and professionally, compete locally and contribute globally.

Mr. Chairman, the workload of the unit involves 17 workstreams and working groups consisting of the following:

1. Inclusivity and Cultural Responsiveness;
2. School Choice and Admissions;
3. School Leadership;
4. System Leadership;
5. Professional Learning and Capability Building;
6. Learning Environments (including not only the physical space but also IT and transportation);
7. Learning Partnerships;
8. Personalised Learning;
9. Data and Metrics;
10. Resourcing and Budgeting;
11. The Education Authority;
12. Communications and Engagement;

13. School Transformation;
14. Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment, (which include not only our Bermudian frameworks but also the design of our Signature Learning Programmes, revision of the senior school curriculum aligned with the new graduation requirements and design of the Parish Primary School curriculum learning experiences);
15. Future Workforce;
16. Student Services; and
17. Early Years.

Mr. Chairman, this extensive listing of working groups provides insights on the breadth of work required and undertaken for impactful education reform. But it also indicates the extent and type of workforce and focused efforts needed to sustainably transform our schools and the Bermuda Public School System.

Mr. Chairman, in September 2022 the first two S1 Signature Learning programmes were implemented at CedarBridge Academy offering Trades and Professions in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM); and at the Berkeley Institute offering Health and Social Care along with Financial and Insurance Services. These students are now in S2, with another cohort entering in September 2023. At the same time our first P1 and P7 students experienced the new teaching, learning and assessment models at our first Parish Primary Schools in Warwick and Hamilton Parishes.

Mr. Chairman, as we have stated from the beginning, the journey to transform our schools is intentionally staged and phased. This means that teams are currently working to ensure that even more children and young people of Bermuda benefit from the transformation that is underway. I ask that you and the listening public bear with me while I explain what that looks like. Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming academic year starting September 2024, we will have students experiencing the new models in S1, S2 and S3 at our current Signature Schools and P1, P2, P5 and P8 at our current Parish Primary Schools.

Mr. Chairman, in September 2025 not only will these models continue to reach even more children and young people at CedarBridge Academy, the Berkeley Institute, Francis Patton and Purvis, but this is also the year where the following will take place:

- The next wave of Parish Primary Schools phase in for Smith's Parish on the Harrington Sound site, and in Devonshire Parish on the Elliot Primary School site.
- Our third Signature Senior School opens for S1 students on the Sandys Secondary Middle School site, offering Hospitality and Tourism and Education Services Signature Learning Programmes.
- The existing Signature Learning Programmes at the Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy are expanding to include Sports and Leisure Management, and Arts and Culture strands, respectively.

Mr. Chairman, September 2025 is also the point at which our Signature Senior Schools will become five-year programmes, the remaining Middle Schools will continue to be phased out, and our non-continuing Primary School sites will be closed or phased out, aligned with the rescoring process that is currently underway.

Mr. Chairman, this Ministry continues to work with the Ministry of Public Works to develop the individual site plans for the learning environments at each of our schools in transition and the master plan for school infrastructure development. Details of the plan will be finalised once the rescoring process is complete. Mr. Chairman, education reform also includes the ongoing work to establish an Education Authority. In collaboration with the Attorney General's Office, the legislation for the Authority will be tabled in this legislative year.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry continues media outreach to keep our stakeholders and the general public informed about the progress of education reform through the Education Reform Unit's public relations strategy. Most recently we aired our Education Reform 101 series over five weeks on TV. This series delved into the critical aspects of reshaping education in Bermuda. The key topics were Curriculum and Learning Experiences, Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Learning Environments and Graduation Requirements. We will continue media outreach to focus broadly on awareness of education reform progress as well as specific objectives that form part of the reform process.

Programme 1601, General

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, on page B-133 you will see that the Ministry of Education Headquarters has been allocated a budget of $7,177,000 for the 2024/25 fiscal year. Within business unit 26000, General Administration, $869,000 will support the operational and administrative functions of the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman, under business unit 26140, the total of $4,135,000 is allocated for operational expenses for the Education Reform Unit. This includes $221,500 for general office expenses, operations and supplies, and approximately $3,910,000 for consultants for media and other professional support services for professional learning, meetings and events, and professional technical services required for systems and school building infrastructure changes that form part of education reform. Of the $3,910,000, there are $707,856 is set aside for the Innovation Unit's consultant contract, and additional funding for anticipated consultancy for the next phases of education reform.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 26080 maintained the same level of budgeting as last year, $630,000. These funds are allocated for external grants and the Bermuda College Promise merit award programme.

Mr. Chairman, $1,543,000 has been set aside for business unit 26090. This business unit manages the administration of the Ministry's annual Scholarships and Awards programme. The Ministry continues to support students in their pursuit of tertiary-level education. Mr. Chairman, these awards are in place to improve Bermudians' access to education and training beyond senior school. As most of our scholarships and awards have a financial need criterion, many recipients would have had difficulty realising their post-secondary education goals if not for scholarship funding. Our scholarships and awards give countless opportunities to students to help them achieve academic and career success for the benefit of our economy and community.

Mr. Chairman, last year the Ministry received a total of 638 student application submissions, which is an increase of 187 applications compared to the 451 received in the previous year. We provided 72 scholarships and awards last year. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to remind you that the Ministry of Education is currently funding students at the following programmes and institutions:

- Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, St. John's University;
- Cardiff Metropolitan University;
- University of North Carolina;
- Acadia University;
- Dalhousie University;
- Diploma in Marine Engineering at the Landing School;
- Kings College;
- Liberty University;
- Xavier University;
- DeVry University;
- Virginia Commonwealth University; and many more.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to give examples of outcomes of past recipients. The 2021 Bermuda Government Scholarship recipient was awarded a scholarship for $35,000 for up to four years to study law at the University of Bristol. This student is currently completing a year as an exchange student at the University of Hong Kong.

Mr. Chairman, further, the 2021 Minister's Achievement Scholarship recipient was awarded a $25,000 scholarship for up to four years to study Human Resource Management at Temple University in Philadelphia. She recently graduated from her programme and is now working a full-time position in her career field at Appleby Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, in an effort to promote greater gender diversity in the teaching profession, the Ministry is launching a new awards programme designed to encourage and assist males to embark on a teaching career. Four new awards will be offered to male students pursuing teaching practicum experiences as we aim to inspire the next generation of male educators to bring examples of more men as role models into schools for the benefit of all students.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-134, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates are shown for the Ministry of Education Headquarters. Line one, Salaries, stands at $644,000 and shows a minimal increase of $26,000 when compared with 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, this year $44,000 has been budgeted for transport. This is a new expenditure for the Ministry and is for transportation for students to and from education reform Signature Learning Programme's Taster events where students get exposure to details of all of the Signature Learning Programmes available to them. Reserves are also budgeted for contingency programmes. For example, this year Purvis students were transported to and from the former Heron Bay school site to practice for Sports Day while the Purvis school field is not fully available due to construction onsite.

Mr. Chairman, the travel expenditure line item of $94,000 increased by $46,000 which is directly related to travel expenditure for education reform, conferences, visiting other jurisdictions that have been through reform that have fully implemented similar programmes as Bermuda, and training. Expenditure for grants and contributions increased by $163,000. The full breakdown of the $2,138,000 budgeted for grants and contributions can be found on page C-18 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, $3,685,000 has been budgeted for professional services. This reflects a decrease of $315,000 for consultancy services by the Education Reform Unit. Mr. Chairman, on page B-134, the number of full-time equivalents or employees in the Ministry of Education Headquarters remained the same as last year at six. Mr. Chairman, finally, on page B-135 performance measures for the Ministry Headquarters are outlined. The targeted outcomes for last year were either achieved or are in the process of being completed by the end of March of this year.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry Team comprises the Permanent Secretary, our Senior Policy Analyst, the Ministry Comptroller, the Scholarships and Awards Programme Manager, a Relief Policy Analyst, the Administrative Assistant/Accounts Officer and the Executive Assistant to the Minister and Permanent Secretary. Mr. Chairman, each team member has contributed to the success of the Ministry's work programmes. I sincerely thank the Ministry Headquarters team, the Education Reform Unit's team and the working groups for their continued support and diligence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my presentation of the budget for Head 16, the Ministry of Education Headquarters, and I will now move to Head 17, the Department of Education.

Mr. Chairman, I do note the time is 12:26. And instead of going into the next head, I would like to move that we go to lunch.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Not at this point? Continue. Okay.

HEAD 17—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I now present the budget for Head 17, the Department of Education. Under the Commissioner's leadership, the Department of Education is dedicated to advancing the quality of education for Bermuda public school students and families. The mission *To evolve into a top-tier 21st century education system* is complex and critical, especially as the Department works closely with the Education Reform Unit on transformative efforts.

Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-132, the Department of Education has allocated $117.5 million for the fiscal year 2024/25, an increase of $2.64 million over last year's budget. This increase primarily supports mandated salary increases and programme enhancements.

Mr. Chairman, following up on my presentation of the Education Ministry's budget, I would like to highlight our proactive steps this year. As found on page B-132, our proposed budget for 2024/25 sees an increase of $2.64 million over the prior year's approved figure. Yet it is essential to note the context of last year's revised budget, which at $120.4 million reflects an unplanned increase of $5.56 million due mainly to recently concluded union-negotiated salary agreements.

Mr. Chairman, this year we have rigorously reviewed the past three years' budgets to embrace the zero-based budgeting approach. This deep dive revealed instances of year over year overestimation with some allocations remaining unspent for consecutive years. Such findings were eye-opening, underscoring the need for a more disciplined and reflective budgeting process. Mr. Chairman, our objective is not merely to adjust the numbers but to fundamentally rethink how we reallocate resources. This shift in perspective is crucial as we embark on transformative education reform. The changes in our budget reflect a move toward more strategic and considered expenditure, ensuring that funds directly contribute to enhancing educational outcomes.

Mr. Chairman, this budget is not just a financial document; it is a testament to our commitment to ensuring every student has access to quality education. It represents a thoughtful reallocation of resources, prioritising efficiency and impact. As we proceed, I will delve into specific adjustments made within our business units detailed on page B-137, illustrating our strategic approach to funding education in these changing times.

The Chairman: Minister, may I interrupt you? If you can mark that and move that we adjourn for lunch.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I move that we adjourn for lunch.

The Chairman: We adjourn to two o'clock.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:30 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:01 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

HEAD 17—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members. We have resumed the Budget Debate on the Ministry of Education, Head 16, 17, 18 and 41. This debate is for five hours. And it is being led by the Honourable Minister Rabain.

Minister Rabain, you have the floor.

Programme 1701, Central Administration

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, picking up where I left off at programme 1701, Central Administration, the upcoming budget for business unit 27000, General Administration, will provide for the purchase of educational and office supplies needed throughout the school year. For the fiscal year 2024/25, expenses are planned to be reduced by $216,000 compared to the previous year. As mentioned, this adjustment reflects our commitment to efficient budget management while ensuring our schools are well-equipped with the necessary supplies.

Programme 27001, Office of the Commissioner

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this year the Office of the Commissioner which includes the Commissioner of Education, the Director of Academics, the Director of Educational Standards and Accountability (ESA) and an administrative assistant has been allocated $685,000. This marks an increase of $287,000 over last year primarily to support operational costs. This team leads strategic planning and staff supervision and supports education reform initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, additionally, the office funds a communications consultant to enhance its engagement with the school communities through a comprehensive communication strategy. This includes developing strategic communication plans tailored to the needs of

every school and conducting workshops to familiarise school leaders with these plans. Mr. Chairman, to keep our stakeholders informed, the Department of Education distributed three newsletters: *The Scoop* for public school families, *BPS Matters* for school staff and *The Link Express* for Department of Education staff. Last year 97 newsletters were issued providing avenues for feedback and engagement through mini-surveys and the BPSS Family Feedback Form, which received 72 submissions.

Mr. Chairman, communications plays a crucial role in ensuring that our messaging is coherent and aligned with the department's and the wider educational community's goals. The communications consultant is a member of the Education Reform Communications and Engagement Working Group. This helps to ensure that the department and Education Reform Unit [ERU] is better coordinated and aligned with the messaging sent out by the Department of Education to parents and BPSS [Bermuda Public Schools System] staff.

Human Resources

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27030, Human Resources, has been allocated a total of $701,000 to fund the salaries of technical and administrative staff, expenses to advertise and recruit staff, and monies for annual long-service awards to teachers and other employees who are members of the Bermuda Union of Teachers.

Staff Development

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this year the business unit 27031, Staff Development, budget has been minimally decreased from last year to $629,000. This funding supports the salaries of four mentor teachers and enables a range of local training and professional development activities. These initiatives are designed to boost the skills of our educators including teachers, support staff and Department of Education personnel, reinforcing our commitment to continuous professional growth across the board.

Mr. Chairman, key highlights of the professional training offered are as follows:

- Professional Development Days: These are allocated days within the school calendar dedicated for professional learning, led by the Department of Education, the Education Reform Unit and school leaders. This collaborative effort focuses on curriculum enhancement, new pedagogies and school improvement initiatives.
- Bermuda Teacher Induction Programme (BTIP): This is a specialised programme that lasts for two years for new Bermudian teachers, offering orientation, workshops, coaching and in-school support led by experienced mentor teachers.
- Focused Training for Early Childhood and Primary Education: This consists of ongoing training for preschool and primary school teachers in the Creative Curriculum for Preschool and P1 and specialised programmes like SEE-KS and SCERTS to strengthen preschoolers' social-emotional skills.
- Professional Development for Instructional Team Leaders: These are regular after-school sessions for primary and middle school subject leaders focusing on empowerment, data understanding and leadership in professional development.
- Specialised Training Programmes: These programmes consist of the following:
    - The Bermuda Maths Learning Leadership Programme, which I announced was being implemented in last year's budget brief. I am pleased to report that 15 public primary and middle school teachers completed this programme.
    - The Certificate for Intellectual Disability Aid Programme exemplifies our commitment to specialised high-quality training that enhances educators' skills and the educational experience of our students. Currently, a second cohort is working toward the completion of their certification.
    - P1 Teacher Reading course delivered by officers from the Department of Education. The course was based on the science of reading, and teachers were equipped with practical pedagogical strategies to be readily implemented in their classrooms.
    - The Instructional Coaching Institute is a 16-week Online Instructional Coach course that five officers are currently undertaking. The Instructional Coaching Institute [offers] a comprehensive foundational course that gives coaches and administrators from start to finish everything they need to know to become successful coaching partners. It is backed by more than 20 years of research conducted by Jim Knight and researchers at the Instructional Coaching Group.

Mr. Chairman, this year's theme, *Empower, Evolve, Excel!* underscores our dedication to fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement in education through targeted professional development and training.

Educational Standards and Accountability

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the funds allocated to business unit 27090, Educational Standards and Accountability, is $676,000, an increase of $31,000 over the prior year's budget. Mr. Chairman, the Educational Standards and Accountability [ESA] unit plays a pivotal role in overseeing the quality and performance of our educational institutions which include 17 primary schools, three middle schools, two senior secondary schools and the Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy. Mr. Chairman, the ESA team, led by an Assistant Director, focuses on enhancing leadership, teaching quality, services and programme offerings across all schools. The Assistant Director also supports the four school transformation teams, continuing our commitment to elevating educational standards and accountability. Through dedicated leadership and targeted support the ESA aims to ensure that every student receives a high-quality education that prepares them for success.

Attendance

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the budget for the Attendance business unit, previously under business unit 27095, has been incorporated into business unit 27090. This change supports the [salaries for] the registration and attendance coordinator and four school attendance officers. This dedicated team ensures daily school attendance compliance for children of compulsory school age. The coordinator leads the attendance officers and manages the annual school registration and transfer processes for all public schools.

Substitutes

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27160, Substitutes. Mr. Chairman, substitute teachers are essential to maintain educational continuity at our schools. They step in when regular teachers are unavailable due to illness or leave. In the past year a specialised group of substitutes supported our schools, especially during the critical phases of school transformation and redesign activities at CedarBridge Academy, the Berkeley Institute, Francis Patton Primary and Purvis Primary.

Mr. Chairman, for the upcoming fiscal year 2024/25, we have adjusted our strategy to have staff involved in School Transformation Teams [STTs] complete their tasks after school hours. This shift aims to lessen daily teaching and learning disruption, thereby reducing our reliance on substitute teachers. Consequently, the substitute budget (business unit 27160) has been adjusted to $3,380,000, marking a $260,000 decrease from the previous year. Mr. Chairman, as previously mentioned, the department has been challenged to adopt different methodologies than may have been used in the past. This budgetary decision reflects our commitment to financial efficiency without compromising the quality of education.

Mr. Chairman, the overall budget for the Central Administration programme is $6,528,000 for the 2024/25 fiscal year, which is $215,000 less than the previous year's budget.

Programme [1702], Student Services

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Student Services facilitates 13 essential programmes that provide direct services such as counselling, screening, early intervention and assessments across Bermuda's public schools for all students, and special education for students with exceptionalities or special education needs.

Behaviour Management

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27061, Behaviour Management. Mr. Chairman, this budget supports the crucial work of behavioural therapists in preschools and primary schools and funds two Alternative Education Programmes designed for students facing behavioural challenges. The total allocation for the upcoming fiscal year is $1,558,000.

Success Academy

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27062, Success Academy. Mr. Chairman, the Success Academy Primary Programme (or SAPP) was relocated to Paget Primary in September 2023. SAPP is designed to support students with social-emotional and behavioural challenges. With a focus on fostering positive behaviours for reintegration into mainstream classes, the programme currently serves six students and has the capacity for eight. It offers specialised and mainstream classroom experiences to facilitate this transition.

Mr. Chairman, the Success Academy Middle-Senior (or SAMS) caters to middle and senior students. SAMS currently supports nine students. This programme aims to help students develop positive behaviours for a smooth transition back to their mainstream school environments or to prepare for GED or Penn Foster programmes. SAMS emphasises restorative practices, social-emotional learning, academic programming and community service. Additionally, SAMS provides up to four weeks of short-term respite support for middle school students, offering temporary assistance before returning to their regular schools.

School Psychology

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27063, School Psychology. Mr. Chairman, this year $846,000 has been allocated to support our school psychologists, who play a pivotal role in addressing students' academic, behavioural and mental health needs. They provide crucial services including psycho-educational evaluations, counselling and intervention strategies. Integral to the Multi-tier System of Support (MTSS), the

psychologists work within a team to tailor interventions that support each student's unique needs, leveraging data from their assessments.

Mr. Chairman, post-COVID-19, the demand for mental health and behavioural support has surged. Our school psychologists are at the forefront, assisting in overcoming social-emotional challenges and trauma while guiding parents, teachers and schools in creating environments conducive to learning.

Mr. Chairman, despite a slight budget adjustment from the previous year, our commitment to empowering students through comprehensive psychological support remains steadfast.

Adapted Physical Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27064, Adapted Physical Education. Mr. Chairman, this year $313,000 has been allocated to support the Adapted Physical Education [APE] Programme delivered by three specialist male teachers. These educators are dedicated to ensuring students with diverse physical needs receive the necessary adaptations to participate fully in their school's regular physical education programmes. These adaptations are designed to align with the student's individualised education plans [IEPs] which follow the objectives of the standard physical education curriculum.

Mr. Chairman, the APE team also organises the annual Department of Education Adapted Physical Education National Track and Field Invitational. This event welcomes students from P1 to S4 with special [physical] needs, including those who have moved on to the K. Margaret Carter Centre and other facilities. Following its triumphant return after lifting COVID-19 restrictions, we are committed to making this invitational an annual event to celebrate and support our students.

Hearing

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27065, Hearing. Mr. Chairman, $305,000 has been allocated to support the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Programme. This funding supports the employment of a specialised teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing. This teacher provides tailored academic instruction and works closely with classroom teachers to ensure that all students' needs are met effectively during regular classroom activities.

Mr. Chairman, there are plans to expand sign language instruction to middle and senior school levels. Furthermore, the teacher will collaborate with paraprofessionals and educate administrative staff on the unique needs of deaf or hard of hearing students, enhancing school-wide awareness and support.

Vision

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27066, Vision. Mr. Chairman, a budget of $111,000 has been dedicated to the Vision Programme, focusing on supporting students with visual impairments. This funding ensures the provision of a specialised vision teacher, the necessary technical services, materials in accessible formats (including braille) and technology to guarantee these students have equal access to educational curricula.

Mr. Chairman, some key initiatives within this programme include the following:

- Continuing to collaborate with Vision Bermuda to facilitate the transition of senior school students with visual impairments to adult services.
- Enhanced focus on assistive technology, independent living skills, orientation, mobility training and social skills development.
- Partnership with Vision Bermuda and Workforce Development to prepare students for job placements including participation in orientation services, assessments and the Bermuda Job Board registration process.
- Encouraging and strengthening students' orientation and mobility skills through project-based learning opportunities at HSBC and Phoenix, where they had use of elevators and escalators.

Mr. Chairman, success stories from this initiative include students securing summer employment and scholarships for further education, demonstrating the programme's effectiveness in educational support and preparing students for the workforce and independence.

Office Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27071, Office Support. Mr. Chairman, the business unit Office Support has been allocated a budget of $678,000. This business unit serves as the secretariat for the Student Services section and funds the salaries of one Assistant Director of Student Services, two administrative assistants and four learning support teachers who provide services to students with special education needs.

Counselling

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27072, Counselling. Mr. Chairman, this year the Counselling Programme has been allocated $3,109,000 to support a comprehensive and developmental approach to student counselling. This programme is modelled on international standards and encompasses four key areas:

- Classroom Guidance;
- Individual Planning;
- Responsive Services; and
- System Support.

The aim is to foster academic, personal, social, emotional and career success for students, integrating

preventive and developmental strategies into the school's educational mission.

Mr. Chairman, research highlights the effectiveness of such programmes in improving student achievement and preparedness by offering preventive and intervention services, especially for mental health, within the school setting. Given the critical role of school-based mental health services, this budget supports the salaries for an Education Officer for Counselling, sixteen school counsellors for preschool and primary levels, nine for middle school, and one for alternative programmes.

Learning Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27074, Learning Support. Mr. Chairman, this year's Learning Support budget of $4.38 million supports the crucial work of two Education Officers for Special Education and Learning Support, and 38 Learning Support Teachers. These professionals provide special education services across the educational spectrum including preschools, primary and middle schools, the Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy and our trauma-responsive programmes at Success Academies. This budget allocation also covers essential assessment materials for accurately diagnosing students with special education needs.

Mr. Chairman, significant investment has been made in professional development for Learning Support Teachers, covering many critical areas such as the School Team Process, Pre-Referral Intervention, IEP and ILP planning and audits, and specific learning differences such as dyslexia and ADHD. This training ensures that our teachers can implement IEPs and ILPs effectively, collecting accurate data to support student learning.

Mr. Chairman, para-educators receive ongoing training to assist in meeting students' learning, behavioural and personal objectives. The Curriculum and Assessment division has facilitated all necessary access arrangements and exemption requests for standardised testing including the Cambridge Checkpoint assessments and IGCSE exams, accommodating students' diverse needs.

Early Childhood Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27076, Early Childhood Education. Mr. Chairman, Early Childhood Education has been allocated $142,000 which reflects the funding for the salary of the Education Officer for Early Childhood Education.

Paraprofessionals

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27079, Paraprofessionals. The Paraprofessionals unit has been allocated a budget of $6.384 million for the upcoming fiscal year. This reflects a decrease of $1.258 million from the last fiscal year. This funding is critical as it underpins the delivery of essential services by paraprofessionals and educational therapist assistants, who play a pivotal role in our education system. Their expertise and dedication are instrumental in supporting teachers, safeguarding the well-being of students and providing specialised assistance to students with diverse learning needs. This includes invaluable support for students with physical challenges and those who are deaf, are hard of hearing or have visual impairments.

Mr. Chairman, this budget allocation reflects a strategic approach to funding based on a thorough analysis of the past three years' budgets. The study aimed to ensure that our budgeting accurately mirrors our actual spending needs, allowing us to allocate resources more effectively across our educational programmes.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27083, Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD]. Mr. Chairman, this business unit has a budget of $696,000. This funding covers salaries for teachers and paraprofessionals working in ASD programmes across three primary schools, one middle school and one senior school.

Mr. Chairman, currently we have four ASD classes in primary schools and one ASD class in middle schools. This will not be enough to accommodate the transitioning students, and plans are in place to increase our ASD offerings at the middle school level. In the past couple of years, the approach has included blended programmes, allowing students to integrate into general education settings with and without additional support. This year five students are participating in such programmes.

Mr. Chairman, as the demand for ASD classes grows, we plan to increase the number of Functional Skills classes at the primary level to meet the rising projections from preschool enrolments.

Alternative Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27084, Alternative Education. Mr. Chairman, this budget supports the Success Academy Middle-Senior [SAMS] and additional alternative education placements for eight students who cannot be accommodated at SAMS. With the closure of Impact Mentoring Academy, we are exploring local alternative programmes to accommodate our students' needs. Currently, three students are enrolled in Adult Education with two more awaiting placement, increasing our alternative education enrolment to twelve students.

Mr. Chairman, educational therapists, assistants and the Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS) teams provide essential behavioural support across all

tiers, especially for students facing challenges. These supports include daily tracking schedules, crisis management plans, behaviour intervention strategies, and developing functional behaviour and behaviour intervention plans. Mr. Chairman, we are addressing an uptick in Tier 3 behaviours at the primary level by strengthening partnerships with agencies like the Department of Child and Family Services and Child and Adolescent Services. These collaborations, including the High-Risk Intervention Committee's monthly meetings, enhance our students' support network.

Mr. Chairman, we are also enhancing the use of Functional Behaviour Assessments (or FBAs) and Behaviour Intervention Plans (or BIPs) for Tier 3 students, with 33 currently requiring this level of support. Efforts to boost teacher support and monitor student progress include collaborative intervention plans and adopting technology solutions like Kickboard. Kickboard, piloted in eight schools, offers real-time behaviour assessment and progress monitoring, providing insights into students' school experiences and interactions.

Mr. Chairman, the Student Services Section provides an extensive range of educational services for our students with exceptionalities. The total budget allocation for Student Services, programme 1702, for the 2024/25 fiscal year is $19,783,000.

Programme 1703, Finance and Corporate

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, in this programme, business unit 27002, Finance and Corporate Services, with a budget of $732,000 employs a dedicated team of 10 staff members to manage the Education Department's financial operations. The team comprises a range of roles including a Departmental Comptroller (currently vacant), a Trainee Departmental Comptroller, a Financial Services Manager, a Payments Supervisor, a Salaries Supervisor, a Salaries Clerk, three Accounts Clerks and a Messenger.

Their primary responsibilities include

- offering financial advice to the department's senior management;
- delivering cost-effective financial services; and
- providing corporate planning solutions to the department, its employees and schools.

Mr. Chairman, directed by the Ministry's Comptroller, this team efficiently handles the payment of salaries for over 1,000 educators and staff, processes payments to suppliers and vendors and ensures the accurate reconciliation of leave entitlements. They are instrumental in identifying cost-saving opportunities and advising on financial efficiencies to support the department's mission of educational excellence.

Office Accommodation

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27003, Office Accommodation. Mr. Chairman, this business unit has a budget of $489,000 that funds the salary of the office receptionist and covers the costs for the annual rent, office maintenance, electricity and communication costs for the department's physical offices at 44 Church Street.

Educational Stores

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27040, Educational Stores. Mr. Chairman, this business unit has been allocated a budget of $483,000 which supports salaries for six staff and other expenditures such as rent, inventory, freight costs and gas/diesel. The Stores Section provides centralised purchasing, inventory management and distribution services to all public schools, Bermuda College and other government departments such as the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation.

School Transport

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27041, School Transport. Mr. Chairman, this business unit has been allocated a budget of $458,000 and funds the salaries of three bus drivers and two bus attendants to transport students who attend Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy safely to and from school and transports students in the ASD programmes in other schools. Two groundsmen who maintain school sports fields and one Labour, Transport and Safety Officer are also funded from this budget. This budget enables transport services for our most vulnerable population of children.

Buildings, Grounds and Equipment

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27042, Buildings, Grounds and Equipment. Mr. Chairman, this year the budget for maintaining our public schools' buildings, grounds and equipment is set at $1,112,000, a decrease of $222,000. These funds are critical for the Facilities Manager to oversee comprehensive maintenance across all public school facilities. This includes ensuring the functionality and safety of life safety equipment, elevators, alarm systems, water dispensers and HVAC systems, in addition to managing pest control and security services for middle schools and an alternative school.

Mr. Chairman, key priorities for this budget period are as follows:

- timely completion of maintenance tasks;
- ongoing training for Facilities staff on eco-friendly and health-conscious cleaning practices at Bermuda College;
- promptly address health and safety concerns; and
- regular cleanliness inspections to maintain high standards throughout the year.

IT Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 27050, IT Support. Mr. Chairman, for the fiscal year 2024/25 the Information Technology (or IT) section has been allocated $2,429,000. This budget supports the salaries of key IT personnel including an IT Manager, Computer Services Officer, Management Systems Officer and IT support officers who are essential for delivering and managing the department's IT strategy and services.

Mr. Chairman, key achievements, ongoing projects and priorities over the next year within the IT Department are as follows:

- Wi-Fi Enhancements—continued upgrades across all educational levels to ensure robust and accessible Internet connectivity.
- IT Security—ongoing improvements to the IT security framework to protect against external threats including regular updates and patches for hardware and software. And, Mr. Chairman, I would like to take the liberty to educate our listening audience and Members Opposite that the IT network for the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education is separate from the IT network that services the rest of government. They are two separate networks.
- Transforming IT Support—shifting from a reactive to a proactive education solution support model.
- Chromebooks and Laptops Distribution—expanding access to digital devices for students and staff.
- IT Operations and Service Delivery—enhancing processes, monitoring tools and service desk operations for improved IT service delivery and security.
- PowerSchool Ecosystem—Accelerating the adaption and integration of PowerSchool modules for enhanced operational efficiency.
- IT Security Awareness—Collaborating on standardised IT security training and phishing awareness campaigns.
- Wi-Fi Infrastructure—Further enhancements to ensure high-quality reliable wireless Internet access across educational facilities.

Mr. Chairman, in summary the Finance and Corporate Section provides key services and support to our public schools. It has been allocated $5,703,000 for the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Programme 1704, Preschools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, moving onto page B-138, the total budget for our 10 preschools for the fiscal year 2024/25 is $5,019,000. A significant portion, 94 per cent, is allocated to staff salaries, highlighting our commitment to quality early childhood education. The remaining 6 per cent covers essential operational costs such as resources, training, development, electricity, part-time cleaning services, telecommunication, office equipment and drinking water.

Mr. Chairman, our preschool curriculum emphasises a blend of student-led and teacher-facilitated learning. It focuses on math, literacy and language within an environment that encourages exploration and investigation. This approach ensures that progress is observed and documented according to each child's developmental stage.

Mr. Chairman, we have recognised the need to enhance our resources in response to an increased number of preschoolers with high needs requiring specialised attention for safety and learning support. Despite expanding the Growing Connects Programme at Prospect Preschool, the demand for tailored support has exceeded the additional spaces provided. As such, there is a planned increase in the budget to hire more early-childhood-trained paraeducators and educational therapists to ensure that all children regardless of their needs have equitable access to our preschool programmes.

Mr. Chairman, after a long hiatus, we are reintroducing a summer school programme for preschoolers requiring extra support to transition smoothly into primary school. This further emphasises our dedication to early childhood education and readiness.

Programme 1705, Primary Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, continuing on page B-138, the budget for our 17 Primary Schools for the fiscal year 2024/25 stands at $32,672,000. This allocation supports the operational costs of providing high quality education across these schools.

Mr. Chairman, significant achievements include the successful transformation and opening of Francis Patton and Purvis Primary Schools as Parish Primary Schools in September 2023. These schools introduced a Year 1 and Year 7 (previously referred to as M1) cohort and have begun implementing unique educational features and learning environments designed during their prototyping phase. In September 2024 a revised Year 2 and Year 8 (previously referred to as M2) will be introduced. To support these enhancements, their budgets saw increases of $763,000 and $771,000, respectively.

Mr. Chairman, Elliott Primary School and Harrington Sound Primary School are on track to transform into Parish Primary Schools by September 2025. Their budget increases, $157,000 for Elliott and $272,000 for Harrington Sound, will cover the necessary work to continue the System Transformation Team's (STT) work required to transform them into Parish Primary Schools. Mr. Chairman, I am grateful to the transformation teams, Department of Education Officers, and the Education Reform Unit staff for their dedication to the Parish Primary School initiative, ensuring a bright future for our primary education system.

Programme 1706, Special Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, continuing on page B-138, business unit 27120, Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy [DAME], provides dedicated services to students with severe to profound and multiple challenges and special needs. The programme's primary focus at DAME is to provide students with enriching education and development support, increase student independence and help them achieve their ultimate potential. Mr. Chairman, a total of $578,000 has been allocated for DAME, a decrease of $81,000 over the last fiscal year.

Programme 1707, Middle Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, we now turn to page B-139 for our Middle Schools. The 2024/25 budget allocation for the operation of our three middle schools is $14,678,000, reflecting a decrease of $160,000. Mr. Chairman, although the plan is to phase out middle schools as part of the education reform efforts, I want to assure the community that the leadership and staff at the remaining middle schools are committed to ensuring that our students' learning experiences and achievements continue to improve.

Programme 1708, Senior Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, continuing on page B-139, the Senior Schools [programme] provides grants for the Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy. The total budget allocation for 2024/25 is $28,887,000. Mr. Chairman, each senior school is provided with an annual grant for the operational management of their respective school. For the fiscal year 2024/25, CedarBridge Academy's funding increased by $1,520,000. The Berkeley Institute funding has risen by $1,280,000.

Mr. Chairman, students at the senior level continue to benefit from diverse local and international curricula and programmes which prepare them for post-secondary education, training and careers. In addition to the Cambridge International Curriculum, senior students take the Business Technology Education Council which specialises in work-related qualifications, City and Guilds, and Pearson. Students can also take advanced-level courses and participate in dual enrolment academics and applied technology programmes at Bermuda College.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to extend commendations and applaud the boards, teachers, staff and School Transformation Team members of the Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy for their commitment and dedication to the continued development of the Signature Programmes, which have entered their second year of existence.

Mr. Chairman, the signature learning pathways include the following:

- at the Berkeley Institute Signature School—
    - Health and Social Care, which strands include General Health and Social Care, Holistic and Allied Health Services, Medical Sciences and Services, and Social Sciences and Services;
    - Financial and Insurance Services, which include strands of Accountancy, Banking and Financial Services, Business Administration and Management, FinTech and Insurance.
- at CedarBridge Academy Signature School—
    - STEM, which includes Animal and Vet Sciences, Computer Science, Creative Technologies, Engineering and Environmental Sciences;
    - Trades and Professions, which includes the strands of Automotives, Carpentry, Cosmetology, Culinary Arts and Hospitality, Electrical, Horticulture, Textiles and Design.

Programme 1709, Curriculum, Assessment

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, staying on page B-139, the Curriculum, Assessment section covers funding for the Cambridge International Curriculum, City and Guilds, Penn Foster, system-wide reading assessments, Career Pathways, dual enrolment and all related curricular resources. The Department of Education annually invests in the Cambridge International Curriculum, enabling Primary 6 and Middle 3 students to undergo Checkpoint diagnostic assessments and sit for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) exams, which are essential for obtaining the Bermuda School Diploma [BSD].

Mr. Chairman, the assessments highlight literacy. Teachers need to possess strong teaching skills and apply culturally responsive methods that reflect students' backgrounds and experiences. The data from Cambridge diagnostic assessments and system-wide reading assessments are crucial for enhancing teaching and learning strategies.

Assessment and Evaluation

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Cost centre 27020, Assessment and Evaluation. Mr. Chairman, we are in our 10th year of administering Cambridge assessments and examinations. All Cambridge assessments, including reading assessments, are funded from business unit 27020, Assessment and Evaluation. The allocated budget for the continued and effective delivery of assessment and evaluation is $343,000. We are pleased to say that the assessments for learning are improving the approach to teaching and learning by creating feedback to improve students' performances.

Design, Development and Implementation

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27520, Design, Development and Implementation. Through the Design, Development and Implementation business unit, the Department of Education is dedicated to enhancing educational outcomes through comprehensive programming and skilled officers. This unit, focusing on Mathematics Interventions, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Languages, the Arts, ICT, and Physical Education and Health curricular deliverables, ensures consistent curricular delivery. The team of this unit has resumed curriculum monitoring and observations, as well as walk-throughs to ensure consistency in the delivery of curricula.

Mr. Chairman, here is a streamlined overview of our efforts across various units:

- Foreign Languages—Our efforts include introducing an Accreditation for Languages in Business course, expanding foreign language learning to primary schools, and leveraging AI technology to enhance language education. These initiatives aim to boost employability and enrich student learning experiences.
- The Arts—The Acting Education Officer for the Arts is developing culturally relevant fine arts pathways, emphasising community partnerships and professional development to elevate the arts within our curriculum.
- Information Computer Technology (ICT)—Adopting the Schoology Learning Management System marks a significant advancement supported by professional development sessions for teachers. This fosters innovative teaching and personalised learning experiences.
- Reading—The Education Officer for Reading is leading the adoption of impactful reading programmes and assessments including the University of Florida Literacy Institute [UFLI] Foundations programme to enhance phonics instruction across primary grades. Last year the Education Officer for Reading and the Education Officer for Early Childhood and Special Education teamed up to offer a 10-week course in guided reading to selected P1 teachers in the P1 classroom. This proved to be popular, and it will be followed up in the next few months with a writing course for P1 teachers to extend the knowledge shared in the guided reading course.
- Physical Education and Health—The Education Officer for Physical Education and Health leads professional development workshops, and new initiatives such as fitness testing and the use of heart rate monitors are underway to promote active and healthy lifestyles among students.
- Social Studies—Under the Acting Education Officer for Social Studies, project-based learning opportunities are being expanded, incorporating entrepreneurship and Bermuda's cultural heritage. Partnerships with local organisations and initiatives like the Legacy Lane Challenge enrich social studies education.

Mr. Chairman, each officer and programme plays a crucial role in our mission to provide a well-rounded and effective education system. Their work supports academic achievements and prepares our students for global citizenship and personal growth.

College Career Pathway

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27524, College Career Pathway, has been budgeted at $443,000. This business unit funds the Employability Skills programme, the Certified Nursing Assistant certification, and the EMT certification at Bermuda College. This cost centre covers the cost of the leadership management of two College and Career Pathways Officers. In addition, this cost centre covers the salary of the Applied Science Technology Instructor for our dual enrolment students in the Trades and STEM.

Early Childhood Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, on page B-139 is cost centre 27175, Early Childhood Education [ECE], a critical area that forms the bedrock of our children's future learning and development. This business unit encompasses Early Childhood Special Education and Quality Assurance, illustrating our commitment to transforming early childhood education through innovative initiatives and ensuring every child gets the best start in life.

Mr. Chairman, starting with The Basics initiative, we have introduced a parent education and coaching programme targeting families with children from birth to five years old. This programme is a cornerstone in closing developmental gaps before children enter primary school, offering personalised age-specific parenting tips via WhatsApp and SMS at no cost. To amplify this initiative, we invest in widespread engagement through social media, radio, digital ads and family events, ensuring continuous visibility and participation.

Mr. Chairman, we are laying solid foundations with developmentally appropriate practices and inquiry-based learning in our preschools and early primary classes. Introducing the Creative Curriculum Kindergarten (or CCK) in P1 classes exemplifies our approach, supporting children's growth across all developmental areas and tailoring education to meet each child's unique needs. The ECE Quality Assurance Officer plays a vital role in monitoring the fidelity and quality of CCK implementation.

Mr. Chairman, this school year has highlighted an increase in preschoolers identified with high needs, reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our youngest learners. Our response includes targeted professional training for teachers in SEE-KS and SCERTS

models, ensuring that we meet the diverse needs of all preschoolers, including those in the Growing Connections programme, and smoothen their transition into primary education.

Mr. Chairman, the Child Development Programme (or CDP), under business unit 27175, continues to be a beacon of support, funding the dedicated staff who tirelessly work to maintain accreditation and improve service quality. Despite challenges such as staff vacancies, the CDP has served 569 children and families this past fiscal year, offering various services from developmental screenings to early intervention support. However, the need for increased human resources is clear, as vacancies have led to long waiting lists for critical services. Mr. Chairman, recruitment and restructuring within the CDP are of utmost priority in addressing these challenges. Efforts to fill critical positions, such as the Family Counsellor and Early Intervention Supervisor, aim to enhance our capacity to provide timely and effective early intervention services.

Mr. Chairman, our dedication to early childhood education is unwavering. Through strategic investment, innovative programming and a focus on quality assurance, we are setting the stage for a future where every child in our care reaches their fullest potential.

Mr. Chairman, this budget covers the payment cost for After Preschool Care workers. The funding has been increased to reflect an increase in their hourly pay rate. There has not been an increase in more than 10 years. It has been challenging to fill positions as workers who are not employed otherwise find the pay covers insurance coverage with little left over. This year the hourly rate has been increased to be commensurate with the after-school care workers who serve primary schools. This budget also funds after-school care for Dame Majorie Bean Hope Academy.

Mr. Chairman, the total budget allocation for programme 1712, Early Childhood Education, that covers Child Development and After Preschool Care, is $1,767,000.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I now refer you to page B-140, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates for the Department of Education. This page provides an aggregate of the detailed line-item expenditures previously mentioned. The variances of significance for the categories are as follows:

- Salaries and wages increased by $1,985,000 (or 3 per cent) and $284,000 (or 8 per cent), respectively, mainly due to salary uplifts and the addition of personnel for the Signature Learning schools and the Parish Primary schools located at Francis Patton and Purvis Primary Schools.
- Other personnel costs decreased by $31,000 (or 7 per cent), reflecting a decrease in recruitment expenses.
- Training costs are $82,000 (or 27 per cent) lower, while Transport decreased by $15,000 (or 28 per cent) over the prior fiscal year.
- Travel costs decreased by $31,000 (or 63 per cent) over the prior fiscal year.
- Communication costs decreased by $75,000 (or 11 per cent), in part reflecting the completion of several IT support projects.
- Professional services decreased by $727,000 (or 34 per cent) due to a reallocation of funding for education reform to the Education Reform Unit established in 2023 and the realisation of expenditure efficiencies.
- Rental costs decreased by $363,000 (or 34 per cent) due to the IT and Facilities Sections being relocated to the same office space for efficiencies.
- Repair and Maintenance costs decreased by $109,000 (or 6 per cent) due to reduced COVID-19-related expenditures.
- Energy costs decreased by $316,000 (or 26 per cent) from the prior fiscal year due to expected efficiencies at Clearwater Middle School and Heron Bay Primary, which both were closed last year.
- Materials and Supplies expenditures are $432,000 (or 21 per cent) lower due to decreases in the purchase of inventory, assessment materials and office/stationery supplies.
- Grants and contributions increased by $2,565,000 (or 9 per cent), and funds have been allocated to support CedarBridge Academy's school redesign and system transformation work.

Mr. Chairman pages B-141 and B-142 show 1,047 FTE [full-time equivalent] posts, a reduction of 23 FTEs compared to 2023/24. Most of these relate to the decrease in paraprofessionals based on the previous year's spending. The department will continue to monitor and review the number of FTEs, ensuring both efficiency and effectiveness in staff resources.

Mr. Chairman, pages B-143 through B-146 list the performance measures for the Department of Education. These measures reflect the priority areas that will be monitored and for which school and department staff will be held accountable during the year.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the Department of Education and school staff for all efforts undertaken in education reform and general operations over the past year. I look forward to the achievements and outcomes in education reform over the 2024/25 fiscal year that will move us closer to our vision for a 21st century world-class public school system of learning for Bermuda's children.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation on Head 17, the Department of Education. I will now

move on to the Budget Estimates for Head 18, Libraries and Archives.

HEAD 18—LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Libraries and Archives plays a crucial role in providing access to information for research, inspiration, lifelong learning and recreation. Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Department of Libraries and Archives are found on pages B-147 through B-152 in the Estimates Book. The department's mission statement and objectives are stated on page B-147, along with a general summary of its expenditures. Mr. Chairman, for the fiscal year 2024/25, the total budget allocation is $3,247,000, marking a $162,000 increase over the previous year.

Mr. Chairman, this budget supports various units within the department, including Collection Management (business unit 28000), Adult Services (business unit 28060), Archival Services (business unit 28100), Youth Services (business unit 28110), Records Management (business unit 28120) and Administration (business unit 28130), each addressing specific community needs and departmental objectives.

Mr. Chairman, significant changes include the following:

- The Collection Management budget decreased by $68,000 due to the retirement of one full-time employee, which remains unfilled. Additional funds were added for digitisation.
- Increased budgets for Adult Services of $98,000 and Archival Services for $17,000 are attributed to mandated salary increases and programme enhancements such as website development and digitisation projects.
- The increased budget for Youth Services ($24,000) can be attributed to mandated salary increases and reallocation of funds to cover the cost of youth programmes.
- A slight increase in the Records Management Services budget of $7,000 for mandated salary increases.
- An increase in the Administration budget ($84,000) to hire student assistants, support a long-term succession plan and cover increased operational costs such as rent, electricity, vehicle insurance and maintenance.

Mr. Chairman, efforts to enhance service offerings continue including expanding e-book and e-audiobook access, support for job seekers, and introducing new programmes and partnerships catering to the community's diverse interests and needs. The department's commitment to digitising and preserving Bermuda's cultural heritage is also highlighted with plans for improved online access to historical materials.

Mr. Chairman, digitising Bermuda's materials is crucial for enhancing access to, preservation of and utilisation of these vital resources. In the next year the department aims to boost in-house scanning capabilities for historic documents and photos in the Bermuda Archives and upgrade the Archives software. This will enable online access to these materials. Prioritising digitisation supports future research and exploration and strengthens Bermudians' pride and understanding of their rich cultural heritage.

Mr. Chairman, the department's staff and all Bermudian professionals remain dedicated to providing exceptional service and support to the community with ongoing professional development to ensure their skills remain relevant.

In summary, the 2024/25 budget for the Department of Libraries and Archives reflects a commitment to enhancing community access to information and resources, supporting lifelong learning and recreation and preserving Bermuda's rich cultural heritage. This budget presentation underscores the department's ongoing efforts to serve the Bermudian community effectively and recognises the dedicated team's hard work and achievements over the past year.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to take this opportunity to commend the Libraries and Archives team for their commitment to providing quality service to Bermuda's residents and visitors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my presentation of the budget for Head 18, Libraries and Archives. I will now move to Head 41, Bermuda College.

HEAD 41—BERMUDA COLLEGE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Bermuda College's mission is *To provide the community with innovative programmes, training, support services and access to partnerships that lead to local and global success*. [The college] demonstrates its commitment to the success of its diverse student body by offering transfer programmes leading to success at the university level, professional and technical training leading to success in the workforce and preparatory programmes leading to success in the classroom.

Mr. Chairman, as found on page B-153, for the 2024/25 financial year Bermuda College has been allocated an annual grant of $14,653,901 by the Ministry of Education (as they were awarded last year), with an additional capital grant of $350,000 for campus maintenance and upgrades.

Mr. Chairman, the college is led by Interim President Dr. Branwen Smith-King and a Board of Governors chaired by Mr. Nasir Wade. It maintains high standards as an accredited institution by the New England Commission on Higher Education (or NECHE) and is working toward re-accreditation in 2025 to continue offering top-notch education.

Mr. Chairman, notable achievements for the past year include the success of the Dual Enrolment Programme, with 64 participants this past year and three dual enrolment students graduating from the

college before earning their high school diplomas in the May 2023 commencement. Twelve "students of excellence" were inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honour Society, joining the other 55 who have been inducted since the college's chapter was established in 2019. The college also partners with organisations like BEST [Bermuda Environmental Sustainability Taskforce] for environmental sustainability initiatives and hosts influential events like the annual Roche Science Week to engage the community in science and conservation.

Mr. Chairman, significant educational milestones were celebrated including the graduation of 102 students across various disciplines. The college also graduated 11 students with Bachelor's Degrees in Business Administration in partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University.

Mr. Chairman, in May 2023 the Athora Professional and Career Education [APACE] Division awarded 269 professional designations and Workforce Development Certificates that included 10 public high school students who received their Certificate as Nursing Assistants as part of the Education Department's Dual Enrolment programme with the college. A total of 72 high school students earned the City and Guilds Certificate in Employability Skills, underscoring the college's role in workforce development.

Mr. Chairman, financially the college's revenue comes from government grants, student tuition and other sources totalling approximately $19.1 million. Salaries and benefits are the most significant expense, accounting for 69 per cent of the budget. The college also invests in campus improvements and educational resources supported by the Bermuda College Foundation, which contributes to scholarships, programming and sustainability projects.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda College Foundation plays a critical role in supporting and enabling the college's efforts to modernise its campus and programmes. Bermuda is grateful to the donors who have supported the current Bermuda College Foundation Fundraising Campaign and shown their commitment to ensuring that all Bermuda residents have access to quality, relevant, tertiary education right here at home.

Mr. Chairman, to celebrate its 50th anniversary, the college has created a commemorative logo and postage stamp. In addition, several other celebratory activities are being organised. These will include a gala banquet next year.

Mr. Chairman, as I close, I wish to thank the board, executive, administration, faculty and staff of the college for their work throughout this year. And I look forward to working with them in the coming year to help students of all ages pursue their careers and personal aspirations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes the budget for Head 41, the Bermuda College, and my overall presentation of the 2024/25 budget for the Ministry of Education.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any further speakers?

The Shadow Minister for Education, MP Ben Smith, will make comments and ask questions.

Mr. Smith, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I would like to thank the Minister for his brief today and for giving the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers on this important Ministry.

Mr. Chairman, I will start on Head 16, Ministry of Education, page B-132.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: In the past we were told that the General Administration, there was a much larger budget for this under cost centre 26000. A lot of that had been moved to the Reform Unit. But if the Minister could just give us a little bit more detail on what exactly happened within the Administration outside of the Reform Unit, just so that we have an idea what has been taken out and what is being left behind.

On cost centre 26080, Grants for External Bodies, can the Minister please give a breakdown on these external bodies that will be receiving grants for this upcoming year?

Cost centre 26090, Scholarships and Awards, can the Minister let us know how many scholarships will be provided for the upcoming year? How many were provided for the year past? Can the Minister please provide how many applications there were for the scholarship so that we can see whether there was a higher demand than the number of scholarships that were actually able to be provided?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of clarification, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Yes.

If you do not mind it . . .

Continue.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If the Member would be minded to look at the Ministerial Statement I gave this morning on scholarships, I mentioned how many applications we got and how many awards we gave out as well. That was given this morning. So it is in the public domain.

The Chairman: Well, let the Member finish his questions and then you can give the answers.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, would the Minister be able to give us a breakdown whether there are students who graduate from private schools who will apply for some

of the scholarships that are provided by the government, and the breakdown of the difference between students who are graduating from public school and private school to see where we are giving this funding to? Because at that point of graduation they might still need further funding even though they might have been able to finish their high school education from a private institution.

Mr. Chairman, I know this is not something specific that the Minister might be able to answer right away, but every year we hear that there are a large number of private scholarships that go unclaimed. I have brought this up before, and I think it is an initiative that would be important if we could have some kind of collaboration with those private institutions. Because if we have a higher demand for students to get funding for education than what we are able to provide, then maybe [there could be] a little bit of collaboration on how we can have access to some of these funds that are being put aside from the private sector that are being left unclaimed. It seems that somewhere in there there could be some synergy that would help us to be able to develop our students so that they can get the education that is needed for them to be able to come back and participate in our economy the way we would like them to.

Mr. Chairman, cost centre 26140, Reform Unit. I am not sure if this is the exact spot, but can the Minister give us an update on where we stand on the Education Authority? How far away are we from getting the guidelines of what is going to be involved in it? And when can we expect to see it being implemented? As they would be going through this process to prepare for an Education Authority, can the Minister give us maybe an approximate cost of what it is going to cost Bermuda in order to have an Education Authority? Obviously, some of this is going to be moved from the Reform Unit into this Education Authority. But as they are going along, I am pretty sure they have started to look at what those numbers will look like to go into the future.

Mr. Chairman, one of the reasons that I think it is important that we start to look at the numbers . . . yes, education across the Island is looked at as a significant Ministry and important for how we develop our children going forward. But we will have all seen that there is a birth rate issue. Also, we are seeing a decline in the number of students who are participating locally in education. And we are getting closer to the point where it is 50 per cent public, 50 per cent private. So when we know that we have a budget of $142 million, it is going to be important to see what this looks like going into the future. As we start to reform, close schools and make adjustments, will we start to see a lowering of the overall cost of education considering that the numbers of students have decreased so significantly?

Still on the Education Authority, I know the Minister is still in the initial planning stages. But could they give us kind of an estimated number of people who will be part of that Authority? And if there is some thought in what the remuneration of the members of that Authority [will be] just as we start to move in that direction? Because I know that that will be an important portion of the reform of education going forward.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, it is difficult because there seem to be people who are being taken from different parts of . . . In order to get the education reform, they are coming from different areas. So can the Minister provide how many teachers who would normally be in a classroom are participating in the reform?

I know the Minister just said in his brief that they have made a shift toward having those who are participating now being able to work after school rather than being interrupted and taken out of the classroom. So it would be important to know what that number was for this past year so that we can see what interruptions (potentially) were occurring that now will be fixed going forward. As the Minister stated, they will now be working after school. And can the Minister let us know whether there has been a conversation or some kind of contract change that happens? Because now they are obviously going to be extending their hours. Or whether this is on a volunteer basis?

The Chairman: Member, if you can just cite the business unit when you ask the questions, it will make it easier for us to follow.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: I am still under business unit 26140, Education Reform Unit.

The Chairman: Two-six—

Mr. Ben Smith: One-four-o.

The Chairman: What page? Okay. I see. Page B-133.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay. There you go. Thank you.

Mr. Ben Smith: Sorry about that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: No problem.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, as we are going through the reform, obviously at some point we will be at the maximum needed of the members of the Reform Unit. But as we get able to move toward implementation, can the Minister let us know whether there will be a reduction in the size of the members who are needed for that unit? And then whether he envisions there

being a reduction in the cost associated with having to have this unit happen?

Mr. Chairman, the Minister attended a conference in Tokyo, which was to represent the Education Reform Committee, or Unit. Can the Minister give us a breakdown of the cost of that travel? How many members of the unit actually travelled? And can we get an update of exactly what the return was? Was there a specific report that was created? If there was a report that was created, is that something that could be tabled so that we can have a better understanding of what we got out of that trip? I just think it would be important. If this is helping us toward our total education reform, getting the details on that would be important.

Mr. Chairman, so the travel for this kind of conference, would all of this travel cost be covered by the Government of Bermuda for all of the members who would have travelled? If not, was there any sponsorship? Was there anything that would have kind of cut the costs for the government in order to attend the travel to Tokyo? Any of that kind of information would also be important for us to know.

Mr. Chairman, still under Education Reform Unit, the Reform Unit is responsible for the rescoring of the schools. I know that in the meeting discussing that there was going to be the potential of rescoring, obviously cost is impacted. Because the scoring had already happened or there had been a cost for that. Can the Minister give us an estimate of what the extra cost is of having to go through the rescoring process?

The Minister spoke that the rescoring process is still continuing. Can the Minister provide us the names of the exact schools that are being addressed in the rescoring? And can the Minister provide us when we should be able to hear what the rescoring is—obviously I know that he has a timeline—so that we can move forward in September of 2024 and then September of 2025? So the rescoring has to happen in order for him to be able to go back to all of the Members who were asking for the rescoring to make sure that everybody is understanding what the going-forward position is and how long that process will take.

The Chairman: Let me just remind you, Member, that a lot of information you are asking for has been in the public domain. And the Minister will deal with it accordingly.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, Mr. Chairman, as we are going through this reform process, it would be important to know how we are doing as we are going through. So the members of the Reform Committee, is there a way of doing appraisals each year so that we know this is how many people we have, this is how many people we need. What are we getting? What were the deliverables for that unit for each year? So that as we step forward we know that we are doing everything that we can to progress to our end goal, which is education reform. I know all of us are looking forward to having it done because education is important to our community.

So, Mr. Chairman, as the Minister stated, there were several members who were brought in from other departments—well, within Education—to be part of the Reform Unit. Was there a job description that was put out for each of the roles? Was it advertised? Was it advertised internally? How did we get to the point to actually bring in each person? The Minister actually said that there were also some local consultants who were going to also be brought in, or already are participating. Can the Minister let us know what the roles were that were expected for those consultants? And what services have they been able to provide to date?

The Chairman: You know, MP Smith, a lot of these questions you are asking have natural answers. As you would know, whoever is in Government, there is criteria, there are specifications one must have in order to sit on these boards, right? Some things that I just think . . . some of these questions are just a bit elementary and something that most of us should know. No one gets on a board just by picking people off of the street. I know you are not indicating that. But there are some qualifications necessary in order to sit on these boards. It is not willy-nilly.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. And, Mr. Chairman, I am not saying that anybody would be picked willy-nilly. I am asking for, as an example, if role number one was something specific, what were the criteria for that particular role? And then if that role was specific, was it advertised for that role to be specific?

The Chairman: The Board of Education, I think they are consistent when they advertise for a teacher. There is a requirement. I do not think they can shoot that down, you know. Those have got to be requirements.

Anyhow, continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-134—

The Chairman: One-three-four. Continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: Professional Services.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: The Minister noted that there had been a reduction in Professional Services. Can he just give us a breakdown of what services have changed in order to get to that reduction?

And, Mr. Chairman, the contract for the Innovation Unit was renewed for another year. Can the Minister give details of what the deliverables are for—

The Chairman: Where are you, Member?

Mr. Ben Smith: Still under Professional Services.

The Chairman: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, unless the Professional Services are going to come under another area. But I believe that part of the funding was coming from this area. So what deliverables were put in place for the Innovation Unit for the previous year that led to our renewing that contract? And what are the deliverables for this year so that as we go through we are able to gauge the difference?

The reason I am bringing this up is because everyone is going to say, *Well, it has this cost.* So if we are able to state, *This is what the deliverables were, and this is what was actually implemented and worked with,* I think then everybody is comfortable that you have value for money. So it is just asking the question to see if we can get a little further detail that allows us to put the price tag with what was actually being performed.

So, Mr. Chairman, considering that the reform of education has taken several years and we know it will take several more years, because this is a process . . . as the Minister has stated, you have to go through each step as you are adding Parish Primary Schools, you are adding closing some schools. Each of those reforms is taking time. So if the Minister can just let us know whether we are going to need to continue to have the Innovation Unit going forward, I believe it would be important for us to be able to say, *Yes, they will be part of this process going forward. They will be part of analysing each step, helping the Government to understand whether they were successful at each stage.* And if it is, then important to maybe make some changes.

So, if that is going to be the process, [I am] just asking whether we could know now that going forward this is a number that we should be expecting into the future while the reform is continuing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Moving on to page B-135.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Business unit 26000. So these are the performance measures. And this is under General Administration.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Consultation with key stakeholders. Can the Minister please give details on how the consultation was done with the teachers? Are there continuous meetings with the teachers to get input? The reason I ask that question is because the Minister stated that there has been communication with the union partners; I understand that. But the day-to-day teachers, is there a mechanism that allows them to have continuous input? As the changes are made, they are the ones on the front line who would have seen some of the impact. And if that communication is happening, is it happening where there are meetings that are going to be during the day? Or are there meetings that are held outside of school hours in order for them to have the time to give the input of what is happening within the education reform?

If possible, could the Minister just give us just an overview of what the initial feedback is that he is receiving on the two new Parish Primary schools from the teachers, the students and the parents? As we move through this process, it is always important . . . I know that the Minister has done, I would say, an amazing job from the standpoint of putting information out in multiple ways, from television and ads and social media. But this would be another opportunity for us to speak directly to the community on what the impact is in these changes so that as parents are looking to maybe enter their children into these schools, they can be comfortable about where we are going. It is just another opportunity to speak directly to what that feedback is, positive or negative, for the implementation of the two new Parish Primary Schools.

And, Mr. Chairman, just finally on this, obviously it has been noted quite a bit that there has been some negative feedback from West End Primary and St. David's Primary. On page—

The Chairman: When you say "obviously"—

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Ben Smith: Well, I apologise.

The Chairman: You have got to have some factual stuff.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. Yes.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Ben Smith: So in the public domain there has been some outcry from these two schools. If the Minister can just give us just a quick update on whether he has had some new meetings with them to kind of let them know that this process is happening and that he will be able to give them the answers that they are looking for, I think it would be a good opportunity to get that kind of feedback.

Mr. Chairman, I am now going to move on to Head 17.

The Chairman: Yes. Continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: On page B-137.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Starting on business unit 27001, Office of the Commissioner. Would it be possible for the Minister to give us an update on the relationship that the Office of the Commissioner is now having with the teachers and whether we have progressed to a point where any of that tension has been alleviated?

The Chairman: This is budget, you know. That is not an appropriate question. This is budget. That is not something I would even recommend that the Minister even consider at this point. If you are talking about numbers, fine.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: But that, I think, is inappropriate.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, business unit 27090, Educational Standards and Account.

The Chairman: Two-seven?

Mr. Ben Smith: Business unit 27090.

The Chairman: Oh, okay. [Two], seventy, ninety. Yes, I got you.

Mr. Ben Smith: So the Minister can correct me if I am wrong here. I believe that the School Attendance, which is business unit 27095, below there I believe that that was moved into this area. That is why that line is now zero. Can the Minister please provide data on the attendance numbers? Are we seeing an increase or a decrease in truancy, people not being at school? I think it is important that as we go into this reform, it allows us to look at the data specifically for . . . are we seeing our students attending class on a regular basis? And if there is a need to go out and get these students and bring them back to school, I believe that this is the area where that cost factor comes in.

Cost centre 27160, which is Substitutes.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So the Minister actually gave an answer that answered some of the issue that was seen here. I had been given quite a bit of feedback about what had happened in the last two budget cycles because there was a significant increase for the money toward substitute teachers. And then in this last year there was actually a need for more substitute teachers. Partially, I am gathering from the Minister's brief, that is because people from the Reform Unit are now being moved. So that is why we are able to now reduce that number, and it should alleviate the problem with the high need for substitute teachers.

The Chairman: So you want to know why the reduction in the cost?

Mr. Ben Smith: No. I believe the Minister has answered that part.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Ben Smith: So now I am moving into what has happened with substitute teachers, [which] is the demand that came for substitute teachers would have been, one, because there were teachers who were out of class because they were in the [Reform] Unit. But there potentially are other reasons why we had a demand for substitute teachers, which is the question I am now going to ask.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Ben Smith: Is the Minister able to give us any data that they have been able to collect when it comes to long-term absenteeism for teachers, whether there are teachers who have been missing for . . . We do know that there are some teachers who have been out on unpaid leave or paid leave due to suspensions. Is that number part of the reason why the Minister has had to have a large number of substitute teachers? So can he give us some data around that which lets us know whether that was one of the reasons why that substitute number had grown the way it had?

So, Mr. Chairman, if there is the need to have a substitute for an extended period of time, could the Minister let us know who then is responsible for putting together the lesson plan? Does that now then fall to the substitute teacher? And the reason I ask that question is because if we had a large number of substitute teachers in this last year, could the Minister let us know whether that would have had any impact on the learning of the students that would have been interrupted by that long-term—

The Chairman: We are doing budgets here. We are doing budgets. It is about numbers, dollars and cents.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, the issue would have been that we had to increase that number significantly in order to pay for a large number of substitute teachers.

The Chairman: Yes. Mm-hmm. I think the question is, Why has it decreased or increased? And let him explain it.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: I think that is the appropriate question.

Mr. Ben Smith: One second, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes. Take your time.

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, cost centre 27061, Behaviour Management. So I note that there had been a reduction in the budget for Behaviour Management for last year's budget. And now there is an increase. Can the Minister give us an indication of what would have caused the increase in the budget?

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27062, Success Academy. The Minister gave quite a bit of detail on what was being provided from Success Academy. But the budget number is only $8,000. So I am just wondering, is funding coming from somewhere else in order to achieve all of those things? If the Minister can just explain how . . . Because I made the note that there seemed to be a lot happening there. But $8,000 does not normally match in Bermuda for the amount.

The Chairman: Continue.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: It covers all of it.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 27063 [School Psychology].

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, considering that the Minister stated that there had been quite a bit of need for these services, I am just wondering if the Minister can explain to us why we would have a slight reduction as opposed to . . . The importance of this, I would have thought maybe we would have seen an increase in this area. I know that as we prolong out of COVID-19, but there still would have been an impact from that and the need for that kind of resource and support. I think that everybody would be in agreement that we should be giving that. So can the Minister just explain to us whether he found some efficiency there that allowed him to do that? If not, just an explanation of why that would be [decreased].

The Chairman: I thought he covered it. But go ahead.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, business units 27065 Hearing, and 27066 Vision.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: The Minister gave us some details on both of these. Can the Minister just let the listening audience know, Is this performed in multiple schools? Or are they going to a specific school? Just so that we understand, you know, are these individuals going to support multiple places? Or are students going to one specific school?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: Cost centre 27074, Learning Support.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: The Minister stated that there seemed to be the need for more learning support. I believe he said that by looking at the numbers that they are getting from preschool. Can the Minister give us . . . is it a percentage? Can he give us some kind of idea of what that increased need is? Just so that we have an understanding. Because obviously as that goes, they need more support, which is going to have more cost going forward into the future. So just can he give us a little bit of data that give us an understanding of what may be needed as we go forward?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: Cost centre 27079, Paraprofessionals. This is a significant support system within education presently. Could the Minister just give us some details on whether there will be a shift in the need for paraprofessionals as we move forward?

The reason I ask that question is because, if not, as we move forward in the reform, if there is going to be a reduction in the need for them, then obviously it will have a reduction in the budget going forward. Because as you go through the reform, there will be teachers who are being shifted from schools that are closing down, which then potentially means that the paraprofessional will be less relied on. So if the Minister can just give us some clarity on that so that we can have an indication on whether this will have a future reduction in the budget as we go forward.

Business unit 27083, Autism spectrum disorder. (Just Autism?) Can the Minister let us know whether the Ministry is the one that is being responsible for educating everyone in that particular area? And how many students are we talking about? Is there a growth in the number of students? Just so that we have an understanding [of] the cost for autism and whether that specific funding is something that, because of the analysis they are doing, we should see an increase in or a decrease as—

The Chairman: I think you would know. We would hope that we would be decreasing it. So that is not something that I think you would know until somebody is diagnosed on and whatever. That is a difficult one. It could go either way.

Just one second, Brother Smith.

Panel of Chairs, we will change at this moment.

We are doing the Budget Debate on Education. And the next Chair would be the Honourable [Scott] Pearman. Thank you.

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Members.

We are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

And we are in the middle of a five-hour (I believe) Education debate. We have heard at some length from the Minister, the Honourable Diallo Rabain. And we are now having questions from the Shadow Minister, MP Ben Smith.

MP Smith, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am on page B-137, now moving to programme 1703, Finance and Corporate.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ben Smith: Business unit 27041, School Transport. The Minister spoke to some of the costs that are being incurred in order for this Transport number. Can the Minister let us know whether there had been any thoughts of also using transportation in order for the Bermuda School Sports Federation in order to get transportation to certain events, whether there had been a request for some of that kind of transportation?

Mr. Chairman, if there is not a request, can the Minister let us know whether there is a cost to specific schools if they have to transport, or does that come directly from parents having to transport? Just so that we know whether there is a cost to each school if this number is not where the transportation would happen for that question.

Mr. Chairman, cost centre 27042, Buildings, Grounds and Equipment. Presently we have two schools that would have been going through a renovation in order to transform them into Parish Primary Schools that would have a cost associated with it. Can the Minister let us know whether there were any increases or decreases from the original estimate for renovating these schools? And whether there were any issues with the renovation that might have increased costs or savings that were found as they went through the renovation process for both of those Parish Primary Schools.

Mr. Chairman, during the consultation process for Parish Primary Schools, it was stated that they were going to be art facilities, Maker Spaces, gardens and outdoor spaces. Can the Minister let us know whether that was factored into the budget for renovation of these schools? And if that was part of the budget, whether those spaces have actually been implemented and the students can look forward to using them going forward?

So, Mr. Chairman, my next question is on pages B-138 and B-139.

The Chairman: Yes, 138 and 139. Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Which is going to cover programmes 1704, Preschools; 1705, Primary Schools; 1707, Middle Schools; and 1708, Senior Secondary Schools. So, on these pages we are given the overall costs for each of these facilities. And the Minister stated that . . . I believe he said 94 per cent of the costs for the schools is actually salaries and 6 per cent is for other expenses.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Ben Smith: So the Minister has just stated that this was only for preschools. Could he let us know what that breakdown is in the other categories?

The Chairman: That was preschool?

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, the 94 per cent was only preschools. So I am asking the Minister if he can give us what that percentage is for the other levels of school.

And considering that one of the factors that we are looking at when it comes to closing schools is going to be the number of students who are in those schools, I think it would be important for us to know the amount of money that each school costs. Can the Minister break down for us how many students we have in each of the classes? So that we as a population have an understanding of what the cost is for these schools. I believe that this going forward helps the argument that the Minister is making toward this reform. It is necessary from the standpoint that you cannot run facilities at a high level of cost when you do not have enough students to be in that school.

Specifically, can the Minister give us details on Heron Bay Primary and Clearwater Middle School because although there was a reduction in the budget from last year to this year, there is still a cost that would seem to be more than just the incidentals? So last year I believe the response was that some of that would refer to salaries. And if that does refer to salaries, can the Minister let us know where those teachers have moved to or where the employees have moved? Is it a different school? If they moved to that school, did we have teachers who moved out from those classrooms?

How did we close two schools and continue to have that amount of money, the cost for each of those schools being Heron Bay is still $712,000 and Clearwater is $1,435,000? So as I stated, there is a reduction, but it is still quite a significant number. So can the Minister explain what that cost is associated with for the two closed schools? And if it is salaries, where have those teachers or support staff gone to?

Can the Minister please provide the number of students who started at the beginning of the school year in the new P7 at Purvis Primary and Francis

Patton? And if there is a change, can the Minister please provide what the classroom numbers are to date?

Mr. Chairman, page B-140, Employee Numbers.

The Chairman: Yes, Member, 140.

Mr. Ben Smith: Could the Minister let us know whether—

The Chairman: Page 141, actually, the Employee Numbers I think it is. Yes. But we have it.

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: I am sorry. I was looking under Salaries, and I was just going to speak to . . . That is why I was on page B-140. I was going to—

The Chairman: Yes. I see Salaries in the top box under Expenditure, yes.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Ben Smith: That covers the employment of the teachers. So the question to the Minister is, Can the Minister let us know whether there are any teachers and/or principals who are holding the acting position? And if they are holding the acting position, is there a difference in the salary they receive under acting as opposed to having the full-time job? Just an understanding of what that is and whether there will be a process toward moving these people from the acting position into a full-time. And whether that process is part of the reform process and that is why we have not moved to full-time.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-143, Performance Measures, the first number under Central Administration, programme 1701.

The Chairman: At the top of page B-143?

Mr. Ben Smith: Correct.

It states, Percentage of performance appraisals completed for school and Department of Education staff. And it was discontinued. Can the Minister let us know where I can find where that information would be now, considering that seems to be an important performance measure for us to know whether there were appraisals completed? With that I ask, Are performance appraisals completed for teachers? How often are these performance appraisals completed? And the reason I ask these questions is because when we are talking about the budget, we have to know that the money that we are paying is being followed-up on to make sure that we have teachers performing at the highest level in front of our students. Not calling out specific teachers; it is just a mechanism that allows you to know that when you are paying money for employees, appraisals are being done so that we can make sure that we are getting the best out of the finances that are being paid by the government.

Still on page B-143.

The Chairman: Yes, 143.

Mr. Ben Smith: Programme 1702, Student Services. It states under psychoeducational assessments that 90 per cent were completed. What was the outcome of the assessments? Were 90 per cent of the cases dealt with satisfactorily? And what is the process for us to get to 100 per cent?

Programme 1703, Finance and Corporate Services, it says that there was a revised forecast for 2023/24 of 75 per cent for fire drills. Can the Minister explain why that was not 100 per cent? Health and safety inspection carried out in each school per annum is 100 per cent. Can the Minister give us an idea of what is inspected? And does he believe that once a year suffices? Can the Minister provide us whether any issues were found during the inspections from last year?

Programme 1704, Preschools. The percentage of preschool students who meet the established standards of literacy and numeracy is 90 per cent. Can the Minister give us a number of the students who were assessed to reach this 90 per cent number? Can the Minister please provide us what is being done for the 10 per cent of preschool students who are not meeting the literacy and numeracy levels? Can the Minister explain the "percentage of quality classroom lessons based on system indicators and criteria used during system instructional rounds"? What does 80 per cent mean? And what is the quality of the 20 per cent?

Page B-144.

The Chairman: Yes. B-144.

Mr. Ben Smith: This is [programme] 1705, Primary Schools.

The Chairman: Yes, I see that near the top.

Mr. Ben Smith: There is a measure that shows the targets for improvement in math, reading and writing. Can the Minister please provide us details on what happens when these improvements are not met? What is the level that these assessments are being compared to? And what are we doing when we are not achieving the levels that are expected? Does this compare to other jurisdictions? Can [the Honourable Minister] give us an idea of where the comparisons come from?

Programme 1707, which is Middle Schools, still on page B-144. The percentage improvement that is forecast is lower in middle school than is expected in primary. Can the Minister explain [the reason for] the lower forecast? Can the Minister provide us what

percentage of middle school students are taking the IGCSE English and Math exams?

The levels of assessment in reading, math and writing are 60 per cent, but there is a forecast of 85 per cent passing IGCSE. Can the Minister please explain how we move from that level to the high level of achievement?

Mr. Chairman, it says we are reaching a 90 pass for City and Guilds for English and Math. But there is an assessment of 60 per cent in reading, math and writing for assessment. Can the Minister please explain?

On page B-145, [programme 1708] Senior Secondary Schools, Percentage of schools achieving their school improvement objective for reading. This measure was 50 per cent. But now it has been discontinued. Can the Minister please explain why this has been discontinued? And what can we expect as the new assessment?

The Chairman: That is the top line under [programme] 1708 on page B-145?

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: [It states] Students gaining college acceptance. Can the Minister please explain what is expected to get to the acceptance level, and is this for entry into Bermuda College or international colleges and universities? The original forecast was for 85 per cent for 2023/24 but was revised to 60 per cent. The target in 2024/25 is 60 per cent. Can the Minister let us know whether this percentage acceptance rate is of an acceptable level compared to other public education systems, or whether there has been an analysis done?

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: One second, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

For the benefit of Members and members of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the coming budget year 2024/25. This is a five-hour debate on the Ministry of Education which will include and has included Heads 16, 17, 18 and 41. The debate is due to conclude at 6:38 pm. We are now having questions from the Honourable Ben Smith.

Please continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, [on page B-145,] "Students passing Advance Placement exams with a score of 3 or higher," the target is 80 per cent. Can the Minister provide us with what percentage of students take these Advance Placement exams?

On page B-146 . . .

The Chairman: Yes, page B-146, Performance Measures.

Mr. Ben Smith: [It states] 92 per cent of students pass with a Bermuda school diploma. Can the Minister please give us an indication of what assessment is done to receive the Bermuda school diploma and what is that . . . what does that certificate give them access to? Does that allow them to go to Bermuda College? What is the step that comes from receiving the Bermuda School Certificate [BSC]?

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, those are my questions for now. I'll let the Minister begin some of his answers.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Minister, you have had a series of questions in relation to Head 17 from the Shadow Minister.

Minister, you have the floor. It is the Minister, the Honourable Diallo Rabain.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, without embellishing too much, I purposefully wanted to leave a lot of time for questions on this particular one because I recognise that there is a lot of misinformation out there about education. And one of the ways to dispel some of those myths is to have questions that can be answered so the public can have a reasonable understanding of what is going on in Education.

But with that said, I am pleased with the questions that have been asked. I am a bit shocked at some of them that have been asked by the Shadow Minister of Education, but I believe we have some 59 questions that my team has recorded. So it is quite a bit that has been . . . and I do want to start with the last one.

The Chairman: You have ample time, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Ample time. I do want to start with the last one, the question asked about the Bermuda school diploma.

Mr. Chairman, there is a graduation requirement in order to earn the Bermuda school diploma. It is the graduation certificate that is internationally known of what you get from graduating from public school. It is the only diploma that you can have that allows you to apply to, whether it be the Bermuda College or overseas tertiary education entities because it proves that you have achieved a level within the Bermuda public school system and you have graduated based on the graduation requirements. Currently those graduation requirements are a minimum of three international exam passes as well as satisfactory completion of the rest of the credit hours that you need in order to pass. That is three IGCSE [International General Certificate

of Secondary Education] exams. It is just what we use as our international benchmark.

There are other avenues for graduation that are provided for public school students whether it be through the City & Guilds or through Penn Foster, but it is an internationally recognised certificate that says that you graduated from high school. So I do hope that this answers that question because out of all the questions that were asked, that was the most shocking one.

What is the currency of that particular diploma? I mean, that particular diploma is . . . Interestingly, if I can embellish a little bit, I was having a conversation with two of the private schools here recently and we were talking about at one point in the past all schools, public or private, were required to have that diploma. And at some point prior to my time, prior to all of our time, it was a diversion away from that. And private schools were allowed to . . . the private schools have their diplomas [which] are accredited by overseas institutions and the like. But at some point it was required that everybody in Bermuda required that. Why we went away from that, you know, I have not really had an opportunity to research on that.

But starting at the beginning with Head 16, which would cover the Ministry of Education . . . there were answers here and now they are not [here].

The Chairman: They have disappeared have they, Minister?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Every single one of them has completely disappeared.

The Chairman: All right. While you are finding those answers, Minister, we will do a plug for the Parliament (shall we?) for a moment and tell the listening public what they are listening to at the moment. Which is of course the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, i.e., Bermuda's budget for the year 2024/25. And that is broken down into a series of debates for various ministries and this particular debate is a five-hour debate on the Education Ministry. And you have been hearing on the radio the Minister for Education, the Honourable Diallo Rabain. And you have been hearing questions from the Shadow Minister for Education, the Honourable Ben Smith. And this is broken down into four heads in the Budget Book. For those who are following along in the Budget Book, mainly Head 16—the Ministry of Education Headquarters; Head 17—the Department of Education; Head 18—Libraries and Archives; and Head 41—Bermuda College.

And at this moment the Minister is just trying to locate answers and I think he may have them. I'm not sure.

Minister, no doubt you will interrupt me when you have got them but for the moment I will just explain why we have paused for a moment.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I will attempt to answer some that I do know while—

The Chairman: No problem.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —they are figuring out—

The Chairman: We'll bowl a few overs until the reserves come in.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —what is—

The Chairman: And again, for the benefit of the listening public the Minister is supported by the professional civil servants who would obviously have some of those answers at their fingertips to assist.

So Minister, you have the floor. And I appreciate you may not follow in the same order as the questions were asked.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, they say that repeating the same thing over and over and expecting different results is the definitive of . . . it is the definition of insanity. But I do believe that it is worth repeating. Some of the questions . . . I would say probably a good portion of the questions that were asked about Head 16, especially around the Education Reform Unit, the answers are already out there in the public domain. But we will answer them here because they have been asked.

But what I do . . . and when I say repeating the same thing, is that I repeat my offer to the One Bermuda Alliance to allow the Education Reform Unit to do a presentation of what it is that they do, how they do what they do, and what it is they are attempting to accomplish by doing it the way that they are doing it. And I believe some of the questions asked would easily come out of that type of presentation.

And so I want to start—

The Chairman: To be fair, Minister, some of the questions are being asked for the benefit of the public even if the person posing the question knows the answer already. Right?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I do know that and a lot of our public already do know the [answers] because they do come to our sessions.

The Chairman: Indeed.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And they do get that.

But I do want to begin with the scholarship. The question was, How many scholarships are awarded? That was actually something that was given in my Ministerial Statement this morning, so I would just grab the Ministerial Statement and it speaks to . . . or was it in the Ministerial Statement or was it in the brief? I think it was in the brief when we talked about scholarships.

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Ah! There we go!

Last year we received 168 applications. This was an increase of 187 from the previous year when 141 were received and we issued out last year 72 scholarships and awards in total. We are looking to issue 103 . . . I believe it is 103 this year. I do apologise. There were 96 issued eventually last year. And we are looking to issue 103 this year. And why I say *eventually* is if you look at our scholarships, they will always denote up to the amount. And so after we issue them, there are several students who do not spend all of those funds.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And whatever funds retain, we call people up and say, *We've got money for you.* And we send it out. So we have the initial group that we issue, and have the official ceremony and everything, but there are always students who come after the fact that we issue awards to because we found more funding whether it was from funding that has remained or if we have looked somewhere and found some funding and bring it over. That is one of those budgets you will always hear me state, *I want to see it at zero at the end of the budget year because we are helping our students to get off to school.*

There was another question about the breakdown of scholarship applicants between private and public schools. I do not think we actually have that data because every Bermudian is allowed to apply for a scholarship from the Bermuda Government. As long as you have demonstrated you are . . . you can prove that you are Bermudian and that you have attended a minimum of five years of schooling in Bermuda, you are eligible to apply. And while some of them are finance-based, there are some that are academic-based, and some that are for students with exceptionalities. So there are criteria there. Some are for strictly technical educations so there are criteria there. But anybody who applies and meets the criteria is considered and they will be given a scholarship. Perhaps that is something that can be considered to use, to put in place, to actually record how many are from private school, how many are from public school. But at this time because we take everybody, we just leave it alone with that.

One question was asked, Can you give an update on the Education Authority? I can tell you that there is . . . as from the brief that was . . . now it is telling me that I need permission to look at the document.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Well, I'll tell you what, while—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: No, no, no, I am—

The Chairman: —you are fighting with your document, Minister—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm still answering the question.

The Chairman: I am just going to recognise that we have one of your Senators in the Gallery.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: So I am just going to recognise formally Senator Lindsay Simmons from the other place who is here with us today.

So welcome, Senator.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Minister, when you are ready you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay. Apparently they have sent me another document which I am requesting access to.

The question was about the Education Authority and the Education Authority . . . the intention is to submit the legislation this year. It is not an overnight thing that will happen. There will be multiple phases to that.

The Education Authority Working Group is working on getting that done. And we will keep the House and the public updated with that as soon as we are ready to go with it. So it is not something I want to pre-empt because there are all sorts of legal things that are being asked and various bits and pieces around that. So as we are able to discuss that more fully and how it will be formed, what it will look like, cost and different things as they are worked out we will continue to ensure that the public is updated.

But the idea is to have the legislation drafted and submitted in this legislative session while we . . . and the continuing on of that. It is a massive undertaking. It is something that has never happened in Bermuda before. We are talking . . . as you would have heard me speak to earlier this . . . in my brief, that the Ministry of Education represents almost a quarter of the staff of the entire public service. And moving that many people from inside of the public service to an entity that operates outside of the public service is not something that can reasonably happen overnight. And it is not something that we are going to have all of the answers for right now as we move through the various stages to actually develop that. [You] would know when we did the . . . when the One Bermuda Alliance did the Bermuda Tourism Authority and that was only maybe 40 people and it was an undertaking to actually have that happen.

Again, the cost of the Education Authority was one question. As I said, this information we are just unable to provide that at this time. And the same [answer] for, Can you give an estimated number of persons who will be a part of the Authority and their pay.

There was question, Can you provide the number of teachers who have participated in Education Reform in this past year? There are 97 educators, classroom teachers, school leaders, education officers involved in school transformation and other committees and working groups of reform. This is a demonstration of the widespread dedication to collaboratively redesign our public school system.

But I can say, and I think it can clear up one of the . . . part of the question that was asked, the tone it was asked was . . . these teachers are not pulled out of the classroom and they are gone all week. They are pulled out for specific times during the day and that is when we talked about we are now looking at revamping that. And so instead of being pulled out for say two hours at the end of the day, how can we do more of that after school hours . . . to not have the disruption? But on occasion there are times when they are pulled out for all-day workshops and those sorts of things, so we are really looking at how we can move forward.

And this speaks to what we talked about in Education Reform of what we are doing. As we are doing it in phases, we are looking to see how we can improve on what we have done before and provide better service than what we have done. And so that is where we are looking at with that.

Have there been any contract changes for teachers participating in Education Reform? The answer is no. Teachers are paid for overtime work when they work outside of school hours.

Will there be a reduction in the size and cost of the ERU [Education Reform Unit]? This was not anticipated for this budget year.

Can you give a breakdown . . . you asked about the trip that we took to Tokyo, and you asked for a breakdown of the travel and how many people accompanied me. There was one person who accompanied me. That was the head of the ERU. The cost of the trip was $9,585.70 which is found on the travel site for Ministers. So that is in the public domain.

It is not listed here but you did ask, What was the outcome of that trip and what did we actually find? We were able to visit schools. We were able to, first of all, contribute to GELP, which is the conference we attended over there. It stands for Global Education [Leaders Partnership]. And these are countries from around the world that are actually participating in education reform and the things they are doing. It is an opportunity to actually sit and talk and share notes and compare challenges, and different things that they are having so we could get an opportunity to see how they are solving it.

What I do find interesting with the two that we have gone to thus far is that there are a lot of questions being asked about some of the things we are doing. Because they think some of the things that we are doing are quite novel and innovative. And what we are doing and the way we are approaching it, and one of the things that really captures everyone's attention is the fact that we are introducing an Education Authority. And so many countries are saying, *Well, how did you even manage to get your Government to agree to this?* And so that is one of the things that we kind of get asked questions about when we are there.

We also visited schools that have implemented . . . some schools in Tokyo that are implementing things like signature programmes and the like that is sort of what we are trying to do, not exactly what we are trying to do, but sort of what we are trying to do. So we get to see some of these things in operation and talk to them about some of the challenges and things that they are [having].

There are some institutions in the US that we are looking at as well. They have instituted the same . . . one particular institution that we almost went to last year probably had the signature school concept in place for about five or six years. So they have gone through a lot of teething problems and it is easy to talk to people who have done it versus us completely reinventing the wheel.

The singular thing that I think is most important in what we are doing is it has to be Bermudian-based and it has to be applicable to our country. So you can't just take something that someone is doing elsewhere and just plop it down there. It has to be sensitised to what it is in Bermuda. And that is when we talk about inclusivity and cultural awareness as one of our workgroups to ensure that what we are doing fits into what it is that Bermuda needs in terms of what our education system needs to elevate itself to. And so those are some of the things that we get from there.

And I can say, to improvise on your question, we have been approached by some Caribbean countries. They have called us and said, *We would like to sit down and talk with you.* As a matter of fact, a few weeks ago we had . . . it was the University of . . . the Ministry of Education from Barbados contacted us. We had a very good Zoom call and they were able to ask questions about some of the things [we] are doing and how [we] are approaching it. So that is what we are looking to do form these partnerships with other countries so we can compare our notes and actually see how we are doing, what we are doing, how they are doing things and if there is some synergy that we can get from that.

What is the estimated cost of the rescoring? This is a question, Honourable Member Smith, you have asked me before. I don't quite understand that because the scoring process involves us doing everything we did before. And there was never really a cost associated with that because it is public officers doing their everyday job. Doing what they would normally do to come up with this stuff, I guess, and so I am not quite sure what you mean by the *estimated associated extra*

cost, because it is not something we have actually factored in.

But what I can say is that all of the schools that we had agreed that we would do the rescoring have been contacted. They have been asked to get in contact with us and we will be setting up meetings. I believe they will start next week. Maybe some have not contacted [us]. But the idea is that each school will be able to come and represent their school and answer questions specifically addressing the history and legacy component with that. There has been . . . utilising the History and Legacy Working Group, as well as some technical staff, they have come up with what we try to get to . . . our questions that could be asked, that could reasonably be compared against each other.

It is really difficult when you are talking about history and legacy because what is important to me is not as important to you. But we have tried to come up with some way where we can ask these questions and get those types . . . and pull those types of answers out of these groups that will represent these schools. And tabulation will take place based on that and then the rescoring will be made public. And once that rescoring is made public, we will move forward with the continuing on with the Education Reform and that is coming up with the phased-out plan, of when schools will phase out, how they will phase out and different things like that.

The names of the schools to be rescored. I stated this before. Every parish that has more than one primary school except Devonshire . . . and Devonshire has Prospect Primary and Elliot Primary in it. And the reason why that parish was not done is because Elliot Primary was designated to become the Parish Primary School, and Prospect Primary was designated to become the School for Exceptionalities. So it did not make sense going back and forth with that because both of them would still remain, eventually, with that.

The scoring . . . I just saw a message pop up on my screen. What the actual . . . the only cost that the rescoring has done, it has delayed our reform process. We have had to push things back at least another year. And so . . . and that is where the . . . so the cost for that is really us not being able to improve our education system for our students. That is the real cost of that. And so the longer we maintain the system that we do have and not transform, the longer our students do not get the benefit of the new process.

Can we have an assessment of the Education Reform programme? Yes, there will be an assessment of the programme.

Were the jobs advertised for the ERU reassignment? This is an interesting question because you are not the first person who has asked that question. And I kind of wonder where that came from. This is the . . . the Education Reform Unit is a reassignment of public servants. There are no new people there. There are no new people hired. And so they are reassigned to a . . . basically it is a project management office that has been built up and then persons are reassigned. And ironically I believe the only person who has not been . . . well, I want to say asked, is probably the leader. But she was asked to say, *Would you lead this up?* The rest of the persons came out . . . who are in that unit, are persons who the Department of Education, through the Commissioner, said, *We have identified this person. Can they come on?* And in some cases we have gone through the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth person before we finally were able to say *Yes, you can have this person to come over there.* And so it was done in that fashion.

So it wasn't like you picked people and said, *This person goes. This person goes. This person goes.* Except for Lisa DeSilva who is leading it up. That was the person. We needed somebody to lead it and then talking with her, to say, *Well, who do you need on the team? What is the skill set you need on the team?* And it was just put out there.

I know with the principals who are there, even with that, it was something that was just put out to all the principals, we said, *We are doing this. This is the type of skills that we need. Do you want to join?* That sort of thing. So that is how it was actually . . . that is how those persons came about being on that team.

You asked about the consultants who are on there. There is a consultant who deals with the data and metrics. There is a consultant who deals with the project management of the infrastructure and there is a person who deals with communications. And so those were the skills sets that were not readily available within the Department of Education. And so it was always that we would look and see. We always recognised that there were some other things that are coming in there that we do not normally do within the Ministry of Education that we would need to put things in place. And that is the only reason that there are consultants, because if they were already employees of the government, they would have been just asked to be reassigned.

So I think that kind of answers the role you asked . . . What are the roles of the consultants in the ERU? Because sometimes it gets confused with what Innovation Unit [IU] is doing there versus what these consultants are. But they are doing their special part. Innovation Unit is our change process consultants who are helping us to move Education Reform forward.

And one question was, Can you give a breakdown of the reduction in Professional Services? It was reduced because some of the work was carried out this year, i.e., training. What we had invested for the previous year has been completed and so it is not being carried over to this year.

What deliverables were put in place for IU this year? Yes, there are deliverables related to each of the 17 workstreams outlined in the brief. I think it is . . . without speaking too much out of school, I would say that when we first started this process it was, Help us figure out how we move forward to where we want. This is

where we want to go, how do we get from "A" to "B"? So there was consultancy to say, *Well, here are some things you would need to put in place in order to get to that part.* Then it was the actual putting those things in place to get to that part.

Now it is more of assistance to ensure that there are Bermudians trained to continue this training forward. And that is the position the Innovation Unit is kind of in now. So, the amount of work that they were doing, say the last year, is not as much as what they were doing this year in terms of the leading out on the work. It is more of a support role for the Bermudians who are now leading out on the work.

Now that we have the Education Reform Unit virtually staffed, there are still a few spaces that still do not have the right people we need to have in place, but these are persons . . . they are all Bermudians leading out in these work groups and they are the ones who are basically leading them now with Innovation Unit providing support services to help them and ensure that they are getting . . . they are able to move this work forward.

Will you need Innovation Unit going forward? At this point I am not going to say yes and I am not going to say no. And I preface that by saying, *Whatever needs to be done in order for us to improve our school system and to make sure it is more equitable for our students, will be put in place.* And I do make zero apologies for that. So if we have to bring Innovation Unit back, we will bring them back. If we can bring them back with a reduced work load, we will bring them back with a reduced work load. But we will not stand and say, *They will be gone by tomorrow,* because we just want to satisfy persons who want them gone tomorrow.

But what we will do is ensure that we keep the people who need to be place in order to move Education Reform forward as well as it can. But the ultimate goal is that this work will be done by Bermudians for Bermudians in its totality at some point in the future. And I can see the way the team is working now, that that goal is much closer today than it was yesterday. Obviously.

How was consultation done with teachers and is there continued consultation? The approach taken to the change process is one where teachers, leaders, and community members work together to understand the unmet needs and opportunities of the school communities; design and develop new practices and approaches to address these and then testing those propositions to ensure that they are able to be delivered and achieve the changes we are working toward for student and academic well-being outcomes. Many opportunities at the site of each school in transition and in the communities they serve are offered through stakeholders to provide the feedback. These opportunities will continue and are shared both by the school and using the communication channels of the Education Reform Unit. These guys are always in schools developing things with teachers and doing stuff with the teachers. As I said, I will [gladly] take you inside and you can actually see this stuff. It is actually mind-blowing to see the actual work and the amount of work they are doing, and the amount of volunteer[ing] that some of these teachers are doing as well.

When are the meetings held with teachers? As stated in the brief, after school and during designated professional learning time in schools and in the system. Just as an aside, just to expand upon that, this year as we have moved through Education Reform, 50 per cent of all Professional Development is dedicated to Education Reform, in this particular year. And we look to maintain that. When we first started it was only a few select teachers and now it is across all schools, not just the schools going through transformation. Because the idea is that once your school starts, we do not want you starting at zero. We want you to already understand what some of these concepts are in order for us to move forward.

What has been the feedback from the two new Parish Primary schools from teachers and parents? As we have all changed processes, as to be expected, the feedback is mixed. I have attended PTA meetings myself and there are some that are like, *Yeah.* And some are like, *Go back to the old system.* So we are always going to get that. But one thing that is universal is the support for the continued improvement of the outcomes for our students for Bermuda. And everybody actually gets that part. We all . . . all we want to do is have our students having a better outcome.

So, with both Purvis and Francis Patton, I will not stand here and say that it has gone perfectly because it has not. But [what] I will say is that we continue to work with the issues and work the problems and work their pain points and move forward. And again, I refer back to our process of doing this in phases. So we do not have 10 primary schools that are all having the same issues. As we move through, we are going to improve on what we have done before. And I know this year we have already put things in place based on the lessons learned from how we got to where we got last year with our buildings not being completed on time and teachers not being in place and different things like that.

Have there been any new meetings with West End and St. David's Primary? Our meetings continue to . . . meetings have been held and will continue to be held. And you heard me talk about the rescoring process which means we . . . the team that is doing the rescoring process will be meeting with the representatives of the schools that will be undergoing the rescoring process. I do know that there is a member or members of West End Warriors, a part of the West End Primary team, and with St. David's Primary I know they have been quite vocal and have been sending the permanent secretary all sorts of bits and pieces of information. So I assume when this meeting comes, the appropriate people will be there. For obvious reasons, as the Minister I am not actually involved in the day-to-day work of that because I do want the work to be done and

as transparent as possible without any inference of any sort of bias and pushing of any way.

You asked about the attendance officers or those not here, it just says, [27095] moved to 27090. But I know you are talking about attendance officers because I mentioned that before. Yes, they moved. We mentioned that last year as well that they moved. Thankfully, in next year's budget, if I am still here, which I predict I will, hopefully, that will fall off because there will not be any more . . . you won't even see it anymore because there won't be anything left for that.

Do attendance officers have to go out and find students and bring them back to school? This is not the protocol. Collaborative measures are taken to address a student's return to school. The school counsellor, student, parent and if necessary outside agencies.

So we are getting into Head 17, Mr. Chairman, which is the Department of Education, with some of these questions.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you. Page B-137. Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And the next question I have here is, Why do we need substitute teachers? The answer is provided in the brief on page 22.

So I will flip to page 22 of the brief and see what they have here. And it says, *Substitute teachers are essential to maintaining educational continuity at our schools. They step in when regular teachers are unavailable due to illness or leave. In the past a specialised group of substitutes support our schools, especially during the critical phases of school transformation and redesign.* I do want to expand on that. One of the things . . . and I want to expand on that as well. It is a question that kind of ties in to the question you had about para as well. Throughout school it is very difficult to predict how many people are going to be out sick. It is very difficult to predict someone is going to have something happen in their life that prevents them from being in school. It is very difficult. So, the number of substitutes used per year actually just fluctuates.

And I know . . . it is something that I have challenged. And you see where I said in the brief, *We have challenged to come up with what is a better mechanism that we could possibly do so we don't avoid these wild swings.* So that is something that I have challenged the commissioner at the Department of Education to do, but I have also challenged the Education Authority Working Group. That is one of the things that we need to really think about. How do we, you know, kind of even that off in some way, shape or form so we kind of have an expenditure that we can count on? Because I have seen this as . . . we have seen us . . . I have done a supplemental for all of a sudden, you know, substitutes go crazy. I know during COVID-19 years they were just crazy going. But there has got to be a different way to approach that and I am sure . . . again, it could be just looking at how other jurisdictions actually do it and see if we could come up with a way of kind of levelling off that. And understand that there should be some fluctuation but I would expect, and hopefully in the future, as we transform the system, we are not having these wild swings that we tend to see from time to time.

What is the date of long-term absences for teachers and is this why you need more substitute teachers? Again, explaining, we really just don't know how that . . . and it says here, before I read it, that long-terms can fluctuate. You just never know. Someone could fall down and hurt their leg and be back to work in a week. Another one could fall down and hurt their leg and they are gone for six months. You just can't predict that.

Who puts the lesson plans in place for long-term substitutes? Long-term substitutes provide the lesson plans and have assistance if needed from the year-level teacher, teacher leader, or the principal.

What caused the increase for behaviour management? At the launch of Success Academy for girls we needed to hire additional staff to meet the specific needs of female students. An additional educational therapist was hired for female students. I do want to say that at the primary level . . . both of the Success Academies have traditionally been all males, but they actually have females in them now.

Where is the funding for Success Academy coming from? I think I kind of whispered to you. That is out of the alternative education. And it is weird because I saw that in the budget line item and that is actually a budget line item that has been put in there because Success Academy had reached out at one point and said, *Okay, we have everything to operate but we would like to have funds to do things for our students.* You know, graduation ceremonies, parties, and different things. And so that is what that little bit of money was put in there for, but how it became its own line item, I'm not really sure how that happened. The PS would not be able to explain because that was before her time.

Why has school psychology been reduced? At the purchase of online software, the budget for tangible assessments was reduced. And also one post was transferred to 27061. I am not sure what cost centre that was . . . behavioural management. It says somebody was transferred there and they got software in place that actually does a lot of the manual work faster.

Are children going to one or multiple schools for Vision? It says here that Vision students are allowed to go to the school of their choice.

And if you allow me, Mr. Chairman, I am still trying to get into this document that says I am denied.

The Chairman: Modern technology.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. Let's see if I am able to get in now. Ah! I am in there!

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay. Now let me catch up. (What question was I on? Question 35.)

The Chairman: Of 59, I believe you said there were in total.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay.

What is the increase needed for learning support? It says, increase to fund teachers and programmes for the increase of the number of students with special needs. You would have heard me say in my brief that we are finding more and more students coming into our system who have these particular needs. You know, it is an issue that is rising. And actually, [this] will feed into a question you had that I do not think was fully captured here but I really did want to . . . I really . . . I wrote some notes here to ensure that I answered that.

It says here, additional comments, there are 75 students (let me just make this a little bigger) at Child Development Programme that are on the wait list for developmental assessment from a psychologist. Mr. Chairman, 42 children of the 72 *[sic]* children have also been referred for autism assessment. To give you an idea of what it is we are actually dealing with, and if the listening public is not fully aware, the Child Development Programme is a free service for all parents to get their children tested and looked after. I believe it goes from zero to three, where a lot of these assessments take place. Unfortunately, it is free but we do not have 100 per cent participation in this programme.

So I urge any parent out there, or a new parent, to consider having your child go through this and you could capture something that you never saw or you didn't realise was there that could also lead to better outcomes because we are capturing it earlier and are able to put interventions in place in order to ensure that our students get that necessary rectifications that they need.

Will there be a need for paraprofessionals moving forward? Again, I think I answered that where I said that it kind of fluctuates. It says here that we can provide that information at a later date, but it is just one of those things. The qualification for a paraprofessional to be in the classroom and in some cases it is . . . I would say . . . I as at a school . . . and a personal one. I was at a school the other day and we were speaking and they had gotten students who had not gone through any of the processes but they were obviously students who needed additional help. And they were saying, *Well, what do we do? The student just showed up at the door.* And they are now struggling to kind of . . . the school is struggling to kind of make it through.

So that is an indication, you know, if we knew, we could have had something there before this child even made it there. But that is just the nature of the beast that we are dealing with. And as we move forward these are the types of things you capture to say, *Well, how can we do . . . what processes can we put in to actually do this differently as we move forward?*

Is the Minister responsible for everyone in that area and are there a number of students? Yes. There are currently . . . and you asked about students . . . I believe this is the one about autism. There are currently 42 primary, 6 middle school, and 10 preschool students within our system. And that was [27083], if you wanted to follow . . . yes, autism.

Business unit 27041, [School Transport] has there been a request for the department's transport for the Bermuda School Sports Federation [B.S.S.F.]? As of today there have been no requests. None that I know of. And for clarity, Bermuda School Sports Federation is a registered charity. And so they can . . . so I am not really sure how they operate to get the events on.

And you also asked, when schools go on assignments, is the Department of Transportation used or do parents have to transport? It says, schools organise their own transport to B.S.S.F. events. Parents do not have to transport students. They are encouraged to be in support of their PTA participating in B.S.S.F. events. And that is an interesting question, but when we did talk about Education Reform and we talked about the movement to Parish Primary Schools one of the entities talked about that was transportation . . . and the need for Bermuda to develop a sort of intraschool bus system. Whether it is minibus, whether we have our own minibuses that go back and forth. So that is something that when you look about the future of education in Bermuda, you recognise that this is something that actually does need to be in place.

As I mentioned in the brief, Dame Marjorie Bean [Hope Academy] has three buses. One was donated and the department issued another one. I know while I have been Minister, I made the suggestion that we use those to transport our autism students around. Because once they go to Dame they kind of . . . they are there for the day. So that does happen as well. So those buses and those bus drivers are used to transport students at our various schools to programmes like WindReach and such. So we do kind of get that done. But in terms of schools getting to the B.S.S.F. events, schools do tend to organise through various means, parents pitch in, and they kind of do have minibuses and stuff. They do get them there.

Was gardening, Maker Spaces, et cetera, included in the budget and other operations . . . Parish Primary Schools? The short answer to that is yes. Those things are factored in. If I remember signing off on something, it was some gardening crew that was signed off to do projects at Francis Patton and Purvis. And I do know [with] Maker Spaces you would have heard in the brief by Junior Minister Swan where he talked about [how] we are partnering with [the Ministry of] Culture to create Maker Spaces within schools as well. And so that is on the way.

Schools. What is the difference between primary schools and special schools, salary versus other?

I don't remember hearing that one but I can tell you there is no difference. They are all under the . . . they are all . . . all of our employees are paid under the collective bargaining agreement. So whatever category they fall in, that is what they would be paid.

You are looking puzzled. I'm just reading what is here.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: It says, What is the difference between primary schools and special schools? And then it has salaries versus other.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay.

The Chairman: I think the question, Minister, if I recall, was that he had taken you to page B-138 and had put the 94 versus 6 per cent comparisons which you clarified was for preschools.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. Yes. And then he asked—

The Chairman: And then asked you about—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —about what were the percentages?

The Chairman: Correct. I think that was where we were.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay.

The Chairman: Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry, MP Smith.

We would obviously have to get that information. It is not something they [would] readily have here.

Heron Bay and Clearwater. What is the cost for and where are the teachers? That is an interesting question. Because it is a question I have been asking since the beginning of September as well. There was a more substantive answer here so I guess when it disappeared and it came back . . . but I remember reading the substantive answer because it was something I have been asking for.

One of the questions I wanted to know was why is it still appearing as a line item and the schools have now been closed over a year. The issue is that the teachers, while they are in different locations, the Government process is these mythical PID numbers, that everybody talks about, have to be moved from one department to another department. And these numbers have not been moved yet. So while these teachers are in a different location, teaching, their numbers are still registered against those particular schools. And so that is why it is still there. And we are still trying to figure out, you know . . . So what I have asked for what we are looking for and we can possibly provide them, hopefully, is that we have said, *Well, forget about the PIDs, where are the teachers? Just let us know where they are.* So we are hoping to get that report at some point. Because I didn't realise they were waiting for the PIDs to move, because that's . . . I am like, *What happened? We have been asking for this for months, for that part.*

Are there any teachers holding acting positions? Do they get extra pay? Will they move to full time under Education Reform? To use the term that a former Minister used to use, *It is like a Hollywood movie around here. Everybody is an actor.* Right? That is what it feels like when you are walking through the Department of Education sometimes. There is a concentrated effort to clear up all these acting positions because the issue that we have with acting positions . . . the way government works, if someone is acting . . . so for example. If a principal is going to act somewhere else, they still occupy that principal role. So you cannot appoint a principal there. So you have to put in an acting principal there. And until this person is either resigned from being a principal or assigned to that role, this person remains acting.

And so it is like that within government. Whenever someone moves to somewhere else, they act up and someone comes, and in some cases, they just stay in this position for a ridiculous number of years and it really should not happen.

And so I do know that the Permanent Secretary is really looking into that and looking to slowly clean up all of these acting positions that are all over the place within Education. But anyone in an acting role gets paid what that position pays. However, the issue we have when it comes to other parts like the pension and different things like that, they are still pensionable in the role that they hold, not the role that they are acting in. And so that is when multiple years become an issue.

This is why it has been looked at and there is rife through the Department of Education and it needs to be cleaned up. And it is actually being very ardently addressed at the moment to get those sorted out. Because it just should not, some of these positions should not have gone on for the number of years they have in this way.

What is the percentage of performance appraisals discontinued and where can I find the information? Performance appraisals take place annually for the Department of Education and school staff. This information is held at the Department of Education.

What is the outcome of psycho-educational assessments and what needs to be done to get to 10 per cent? I guess we are waiting for that answer.

Why wasn't health and safety 100 per cent? Due to ageing facilities, there is constant health and safety issues to address. That is one of the issues with

our buildings. Our youngest primary school building is 50 years old, or something. And some of these things are just built with things they should not have been built with. And there is constant . . . and one of the great fears is the summer works, when you are having to go in and do summer work on a building and you think you are just painting a wall, you take down something and all of a sudden, oh, there is whole issue here. And some of those times . . . and that sometimes causes delays in school openings and different things. And it is really getting to the point where you know, we do just need to come in and do some radical things to our buildings.

Why are health inspections conducted once a year? Health and safety inspections are conducted throughout the school year, not just once a year.

How many preschoolers make up the 10 per cent falling below target? Twenty out of the 266 preschoolers make up the 10 per cent falling below target. The 10 per cent receive specialised teaching and made progress throughout the school year.

What needs to be done to get the percentage of quality classroom lessons higher? Professional development, speaking to rigour and relevance inquiry approach to teaching and learning and ESA.

Explain why middle school percentages are forecasted to be lower. It could be driven by the specific cohort of data as student profiles look differently each year.

How to increase achievement of IGCSE in middle school? We increase achievement by . . . and I can speak to this personally as a parent with a child who just finished middle school. It says here, we increased achievement in IGCSEs by identifying first the students most proficient to do IGCSEs with teachers competent to deliver effectively, then we prepare those students. I think your question was, we had one line that talked about math achievement and English achievement and you had another line that said there is a high percentage of passage. IGCSEs in middle school are effectively doing these exams two years before they are supposed to ready to do it. So only students who are at that level are given the opportunity to do the extra work, because it is extra work.

As I said, I can speak to it as a parent of a student who did two IGCSEs and passed at the middle school level. [There] is regular work and then they do additional work just to get them prepared for that. So it is not something that every student can handle. And it is typically with students who can handle it are the ones who do it and then it normally leads to the high percentage of passes. Kind of like our private schools.

How are we reaching 90 per cent in City & Guilds in reading? But there is an assessment of . . . it says 6 per cent but I think it is a 60 per cent of math and English when we are getting . . . It says here we will have to come back with a response to that. And I can actually see somebody still typing the [answer] there.

Percentage of schools achieving their school improvement plan objective for reading. It was 50 per cent. It has now been discontinued. When can we expect the next assessment? Again, that is some information . . . because when . . . I looked in the [Budget] Book because you said it has been discontinued for two years. And just [to] say we don't have that information readily on hand. But we will try and obtain that at a later date.

Is student gaining college acceptance percentage acceptable compared to other public education systems? We do not have an analysis or comparison to other jurisdictions. The percentage is acceptable given the criteria to be admitted to college meets the entry standard requirement. As I said, I talked about it earlier, my first [answer] was the high school diploma that is issued gives you the opportunity to attend. Of course there are extra classes depending on, you know, you might be trying to . . . an ivy league school, you need a little extra, AP courses and different things like that. But it is capable of getting you into a university. And I was thinking, well, maybe some people just don't apply. You know, that could be one of things that goes there.

But it is something to monitor and I am hoping that the Education Reform Unit is listening because that is one of those things I would like to see them actually look at and see what is going on there. Because when we go to the graduation ceremonies, there is always this . . . everybody is going off to school. So I am not . . . so I get you when you are saying there is 60 per cent. When I go to Berkeley graduation and CedarBridge graduation, it surely isn't 60 per cent who are saying they have been accepted into university or accepted into Bermuda College and different things. It is actually, typically, I would say maybe around 15 per cent, at most 20 per cent who say they are going directly into the job field. So that did . . . when you pointed it out, it actually stands out for me as well. So, I do thank you for that.

What percentage of students take AP exams? About 1 [per cent] to 3 per cent of senior students do AP exams. I would posit that that is an actual low number and it is probably something that does need to be looked at as well.

The Chairman: Sorry. I did not actually hear. What was that 1 per cent?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: That was . . . it is at 1 per cent to 3 per cent—

The Chairman: One to three. Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —of our students do AP exams. And actually, that gets me down to the last question. But they have given me more information about your last question about the diploma. And it says, it is an accumulative GPA of 2.0 over four years. In addition, students must meet 24 credits—remember I did

say credits, but I did not say which ones—consisting of language arts, math, sciences. IGCSEs are required in those three subjects. Language arts, math and science, and then social science and electives and community service hours are part of their criteria as well to get your Bermuda school diploma.

I think I answered all the questions. Actually, there is not one there . . . I had here that the Shadow Minister asked about the need to close schools. I think when you talked about it, you were asking about what is the cost savings of closing schools and such. And this is something I really want the listening public, and all of us, to understand.

What we have recognised is that our school system is inequitable in the way we distribute our resources. And if you have a school . . . as you saw, as we talked about, there are more students who need specialised services. There are more students who are coming in with issues that need those resources there. And if you have got a school that has four students in P5 and another school that has four students in P5, you can combine those, have one teacher, and then you have freed up a resource that is greatly needed. But at the bare minimum we have to have a teacher in both of these classes. And when you have a teacher in both of those classes, it may be at the sacrifice of having a resource that one student in one of those classes really needs some little extra help. And so this is when we look at it.

So it is not necessarily a cut across the board in terms of the cost of operating the school system. It is an exercise of looking at how we can more effectively use the resources and the funding that we do have to ensure that our students get the necessary services that they need. As you have heard me read in the brief, we are seeing more and more incidences of autism, of behavioural issues, and different things like that. And like I said, if you have got two or three . . . in some cases you have three schools, you know. In some areas we have three schools . . . in one parish we have schools where the total number between all of the schools is less than the number in one school somewhere else. And so we have to really look at that and see how we [can] be more equitable in the way that we distribute our resources.

The other part about that is the way education has been funded goes, this is how many students I have, this is how many classes I have, this is how many teachers I have. It does not take into account the demographic that is actually coming to that school. And what the resources that that demographic needs are in addition to just having a teacher in the classroom. And so we have never looked at it from that perspective and that is part of the revamping of education.

How do we look at it? How do we look at a better funding model that ensures our students get what it is that they get so they can be the best that they can be? Because at the end of the day Bermuda graduates too few citizens (and that is between public and private schools) for us to leave anybody behind. We actually do need to put things in place to ensure everybody at least gets the opportunity to excel to the point that they will be a productive citizen in our country.

And so with that, Mr. Chairman, . . . and I do apologise for looking at the Shadow Minister.

The Chairman: No problem at all.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And with that, Mr. Chairman, I think I have gone through . . . I think it has literally been 60 questions, or something. So I will sit and if there is anything else I will definitely answer that.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

We have been hearing responses to questions which have been given by the Honourable Minister for Education, Diallo Rabain.

Is there any Member who wishes to speak?

I see the Honourable Member and Shadow Minister Ben Smith.

MP Smith, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I would like to thank the Minister for the fulsome answers that he has provided so far. His last set of answers were touching on a question that I believe has not been answered. And that was because of . . . you know, we have the overall cost for each school, if we could get the breakdown of the class sizes, everything that the Minister just said alluded to, you know, there are three schools in one particular parish, this is how many students total. It would be really good if we were able to know the actual numbers so when we are comparing to the overall cost of the school, we are looking at those correct numbers.

There was another question that I asked which was specific to class sizes of P7s for the two Parish Primary Schools, September and then present. Is there any difference at all? I want to know whether it has grown, whether people have moved out, because as we are going through this transition obviously some of those things will happen as parents are making decisions based on the changes that are happening. So if the Minister could follow-up on those two questions, that would be helpful.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

I will switch to this other document I have which may be more fulsome. I may have missed that one where you are talking about . . . as you saw, for some reason the document . . . Oh, I think I found it here.

What is the number of students in P7 who started in Francis Patton and Purvis? And indicate if there are any changes to those numbers. That is the

question. Okay, year 7, Parish Primary School enrolment.

Francis Patton started with 15 students in September 2023 and the enrolment continues at 15. Purvis Primary started at September 2023 with 24 students and currently has 11 students. That means a difference of 13 students with one student pending transfer at the end of the 2023/24 school year.

I do want to qualify that. I know Purvis Primary has had more issues than Francis Patton with some of the construction work that is going on up there. And that has led to a challenge in the confidence of some of those students. But I do believe the last report we had, the bulk of those students . . . one of them went to private and the rest of them went to Sandys Secondary Middle School because they were P7, so they are going to middle school.

And so things have been put in place . . . there has been a lot of work that happened at Purvis to . . . there are things that happened at the beginning of the year that were not ideal. And I don't . . . and some of it has to do with personnel matters. And I do not want to go into personnel matters because they are private. (But we have a private conversation about that. [They] have really not led to good outcomes.) But we have resolved those and I think they are in a good wicket now.

And one of the things that surprised me was we had, you know, they did some professional development up there and I saw some videos from some of the teachers who were saying, you know, *This is great! This is great!* Which really caught me off guard because the one time I went up there the teachers were like, *Argh!* But then . . . that gives me confidence that they are doing some of the things to right that ship. And we definitely are looking to have that building up there finished for September of this year. And they will have . . . they will probably be one of the more well-resourced primary schools once those buildings are completed, moving into the next year.

The other question you had, which is an interesting one, and I do actually see here because I see I wrote it down because I did not see it in here. And that is the cost per school. This is an interesting question for public school because I tend to ask . . . and I am not being facetious when people ask me that. And they say, *Well, you guys pay $20,000 per student.* And I say, *Well, what type of student?* Because in the public school, you know, are you talking about a student who is on the autism spectrum [where] we [have] got a reduced student per teacher ratio, where they put all these different things in place.

Are you talking about a student who has a physical disability and we now got to modify the school just so the student can get around? Are we talking about a student who is hard of hearing? Are we talking about a student who is vision impaired? Are we talking about a student who has behavioural challenges and now we have a psychologist, behavioural therapist and different things that are now assigned to that particular person? Or are you talking about a student who has both parents at home, comes to school, does their work, goes home? You know, because it . . . it is very difficult for me to justify saying, *Okay, it is $10,000 per student.* When I know that in one class one student may have a total bigger cost than another student in that class. But I get what you are saying.

And the department . . . it came to my attention last year that the department does produce a report on the number of students in both public and private schools, the number of teachers in public and private schools, the number of spouses of Bermudians, the number of . . . So, they have this report that they produce on a yearly basis. And I did promise, once I found out, that this report would be made public. Because the public needs to know this. And it is something that I still intend to do.

My promise to the Commissioner is that I would want this report published by January of this year. Because it comes out at the end of . . . they have a day that they call, like the recording day. I think it is like October 31. And whoever is in the school on October 31, that is the date that they use. But it did come and it had some errors. We sent it back to say, *Can you fix this?* And I know that the revised one has come but then we were into budget stuff and we didn't really do anything with it. But it is something that I do want to put out to the public. At the minimum, publish on the website. And so people will be able to go there and see what the number of students was four or five years before to what we have now. How many students in what primary school and different things like that.

I will also refer MP Smith to a Ministerial Statement I did in here probably around October, when I talked about an update on Education Reform. And I explicitly talked about the number of students in every primary school currently, because it was at that time already (October 31). So that is why I think it was October. And I published that. And it was . . . I will say it was an eye-opener for people to say, *Whoa!* But this is how many students we have. But we do have the numbers for middle school. We do have the numbers for senior school. We do have the numbers for special schools. And I am making the commitment now live and direct that we will publish that report and that report will be in the public domain.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

We have been hearing responses from the Minister for Education, Diallo Rabain.

Is there any other Member who wishes to speak in the debate?

There being none . . . Okay. Minister. You have the floor. And that will conclude the debate. And if you would like to move your heads.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, thank you, Members for your questions. It is always a pleasure to talk about education. It is

always a pleasure to get the facts out into the public domain. And once again, I will let anyone know we will not shy away from answering any questions, even the hard ones that point to things that we need to do better.

And so with that, Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 16, 17, 18 and 41 be approved as—do I say as printed? Or as corrected?

The Chairman: As corrected I believe but . . .

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, because there are—

The Chairman: As corrected, yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —corrections.

The Chairman: As printed and corrected because—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: As printed and corrected.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 16, 17, 18 and 41 be approved as both printed and subsequently corrected.

Is there any objection?

There being no objection; it is approved.

[Motion carried: Ministry of Education, Heads 16, 17, 18 and 41 were approved as corrected and will stand as part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25.]

The Chairman: And further . . . No. We are not rising and reporting progress, are we? We are moving on to the next debate.

And the next debate is a three-hour debate. Both for the benefit of the Members and members of the listening public, the second and final debate for today is the debate on the non-ministries. Which if you are following along in your Budget Book are Heads 1, 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101.

And just to make that a little bit more sensible, rather than a bunch of numbers, those non-Ministry departments in the Budget Book that I just read out are in fact the Governor and Staff; Legislature; Office of the Auditor General; Human Rights Commission; Parliamentary Registrar; Ombudsman's Office; Internal Audit; Information Commissioner's Office; and last but not least, Privacy Commissioner's Office Head 101.

So all of those heads are now for debate in a three-hour debate commencing at 5:09 and concluding at 8:09. I am now looking to see who on the Government's side will be leading this debate. I believe it is the Minister Vance Campbell. Is that right, Minister Campbell? This is yours?

Hon. Vance Campbell: Most of it.

The Chairman: Most of it.

Hon. Vance Campbell: I will be ably assisted by Minister Furbert and the Premier himself.

The Chairman: Okay. So we are going to have split roles, but at the moment we are going to have you lead off, are we Minister?

Hon. Vance Campbell: That is correct. I am going to start the process. If the Premier is not here when I finish, then Minister Tinee Furbert will lead off with the first brief.

The Chairman: Fantastic. Minister Campbell, you have the floor.

Hon. Vance Campbell: —on Human Rights. So—

The Chairman: If you are jumping around, perhaps you would just make clear which heads you are dealing with so we know.

Hon. Vance Campbell: We will.

The Chairman: Thank you. You have the floor.

Hon. Vance Campbell: And so, Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads: Head 1, Governor and Staff; Head 2, Legislature; Head 5, Office of the Auditor General; Head 56, Human Rights Commission; Head 63, Parliamentary Registrar; Head 85, Ombudsman's Office; Head 92, Internal Audit; Head 98, Information Commissioner's Office; and Head 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

It has been moved that the various heads just set out by the Honourable Minister be taken under consideration.

Is there any objection?

There is no objection.

Minister, you have the floor. Please move the heads when you are ready . . . sorry, please speak to the heads when you are ready.

Hon. Vance Campbell: So, as I stated, Mr. Chairman, Minister Tinee Furbert will lead off with Head 56, Human Rights Commission.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

We now are to hear from Minister Tinee Furbert on Head 56, Human Rights Commission.

Thank you. Minister, you have the floor.

NON-MINISTRY HEADS

HEAD 56—HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am pleased to present the 2024/25 Budget Brief for Head 56 on behalf of the Human Rights Commission, a non-ministry office, found on pages B-17, B-18 and B-19 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission is Bermuda's National Human Rights Institution and the statutory body charged with the promotion and protection of human rights in Bermuda. The Human Rights Act 1981 was enacted by the Bermuda Legislature in December 1981, and shortly thereafter in early 1982 the Commission was established to administer the Act.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission is comprised of seven public officers together with five to twelve independently appointed Human Rights Commissioners. The head of the public authority is the executive officer who serves as accounting officer for the Commission and is responsible for maintaining a sound system of internal controls that safeguard the public funds and assets.

The Commission is administratively accountable to the Minister with responsibility for Human Rights, the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, in accordance with section 13(5) of the Act, the Commission receives a budget allocation from the Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, in 2022 the Selection and Appointment Committee who is established by section 13A of the Act appointed a panel of 13 members to the Human Rights Tribunal. This followed amendments to the Act in 2021, which marked an important step in ensuring that Bermuda has an independent Human Rights Tribunal that can efficiently and expertly adjudicate human rights cases. The establishment of the independent tribunal served in strengthening an important pillar in Bermuda's human rights framework. The amendment created a clear separation between the role and the function of the Commission and the tribunal, as the panel members are independently appointed by the Selection and Appointment Committee and are not members of the Commission.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission's vision is a Bermuda that honours human rights for all. Its mission is found on page B-17. As it relates to the provision of services to the public, the Commission's objectives are

- to inquire into and investigate human rights related complaints of discrimination and harassment;
- to resolve human rights complaints through mediation;
- to facilitate effective administrative support for human rights tribunals;
- to educate the community on the principles of human rights, inclusion and equality;
- to work with stakeholders to promote the protections afforded under the Human Rights Act of 1981 and to uphold the principles of human rights for all;
- to inform the government of human rights matters inclusive of those that require the development of policies designed to strengthen protections;
- to influence and support the development of Bermuda's human rights laws and policies;
- to maintain a team of highly competent professionals to manage the daily operations of the Commission; and
- to act independently in accordance with the Commission's statutory duties and to continue to strengthen the Commission's ability to function with the requisite independence of a national human rights institution.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to now draw your attention to page B-17 of the Estimates Book—

The Chairman: Yes, page B-17.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

—where you will note that the Commission's original budget for financial year 2023/24 was $1,347,000. The budget for the upcoming financial year 2024/25 is $1,380,000, which represents a 2 per cent increase of $33,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission is comprised of three business units: business unit 66020, Office of the Commission; business unit 66030, Appointment Committee; business unit 66040, Tribunals. I will speak to the allocated expenditures for each.

Business unit 66020, Office of the Commission. The Office of the Commission provides

- strategic operational management of the Commission;
- complaint management and dispute resolution services;
- coordination of education and outreach initiatives to the community on principles of human rights; and the
- provision of policy recommendations to the government on local and international human rights matters.

The budget allocation for the financial year 2024/25 for business unit 66020 is $1,296,000, an increase of $138,000. The increase will be addressed further in the subjective analysis.

Business unit 66030, Appointment Committee, the budget allocation for financial year 2024/25 for business unit 66030 is $24,000. The increase of $23,000 reflects the cost associated with the statutory requirement of the Selection and Appointment Committee to make appointments every two to three years in accordance with section 13B of the Human Rights [Amendment] Act 2021 with the last appointments occurring in 2022.

Business unit 66040, Tribunals. The budget allocation for financial year 2024/25 for business unit 66040 is $60,000. The projected expenditures within this business unit relates to the statutory functions of the Tribunal who is responsible for adjudicating human

rights complaints referred to the tribunal. This budget allocation represents a decrease of $128,000.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis for Head 56 can be found on page B-18. Salaries, the full-time employee headcount for the Office of the Commission is eight. And the budget allocation for Salaries for the financial year 2023/24 was $711,000. The budget for the financial year 2024/25 is $846,000, an increase of $135,000, or 19 per cent to align three job descriptions: the executive officer; the manager, finance and administration (formerly an administrative officer); and the project officer with functions preformed within the organisation to be reflective of the roles and responsibilities of the institution.

Professional Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The 2024/25 budget accounts for $293,000, a decrease of $153,000, or 34 per cent. This is mainly attributable to the completion of a one-off web development project in the prior year, and reorganisation enabling phasing out previously outsourced roles and responsibilities.

Within this allocation $123,000 represents costs for the Communications' consultant and a vendor for the development of policies and procedures to progress the implementation of the Commission's 2023–2025 Strategic Plan. In accordance with sections 14F, 14J and 15(1), $17,723 is allocated to the Commission's Voluntary Mediation Programme. Also, in accordance with section 18(1A), funding of $47,250 is allocated to the court costs in relation to litigation where legal counsel is conflicted. The Commission intends to intervene in a tribunal manner or due to capacity challenges.

Within this budget, $54,000 is allocated for the remuneration of Tribunal panel members to perform their statutory adjudication functions; $10,000 for the remuneration of the Selection Appointment Committee; and $14,800 for contracted services to provide administrative support to the Selection and Appointment Committee and Human Rights Tribunal.

The 2024/25 budget accounts include $18,900 for a new initiative for Annual Managed IT Services, IT and Telephone Services.

Other expenses within the Professional Services include costs associated with the Disability and Inclusion Speaker to promote and increase awareness and inclusion, the duty to accommodate and increase the understanding of duty-bearers and rights-holders, a temporary office manager and legal intern.

Rentals. The budget allocation for rentals has increased by $13,000 primarily as a result of an increase in rent. In comparison to the 2023/24 rent allocation of $116,000, the 2024/25 budget of $129,000 accounts for an 11 per cent increase in rental costs, the first increase within eight years.

Repair and Maintenance. The budget allocation for Repair and Maintenance has increased by $16,000 to $48,000. This reflects an annual cleaning service as the office (post COVID-19) has increased hosting in-person meetings, such as educational sessions, lunch and learns, mediation sessions and tribunals.

Mr. Chairman, the remaining line items are at minimum changes. Employee numbers, page B-18. Mr. Chairman, you will note that there are eight full-time equivalent positions for the Human Rights Commission for fiscal year 2024[/25]. This is one more than 2023/24 as explained previously for line item 1, in the subjective analysis.

Performance Measures

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the department's performance measures can be found on page B-19 of the Estimates Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission has a statutory duty to try and resolve complaints that arise out of allegations of discrimination or harassment. As well, the Commission provides education and guidance on the protections afforded under the Human Rights Act 1981.

Mr. Chairman, the complaints management and dispute resolution processes involve several stages which I will briefly outline below.

Ahead of sharing the key statistics for the 2023 calendar year, the executive officer performs a screening function of all complaints filed with the Commission and has statutory powers to investigate complaints, collect evidence and refer meritorious complaints to the Human Rights Tribunal. Throughout the complaint-handling process efforts are made to facilitate the resolution of the complaints.

During the 2023 calendar year, there were 150 intakes received by the Office of Human Rights Commission which represented a 28 per cent increase from previous years which saw 108 intakes; 74 per cent of the intakes received were resolved within the calendar year with 26 per cent of intakes remaining ongoing.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission provides a robust triage and referral process to assist the public in finding a resolution to their query or complaint in the event their matter does not appear to fall under the jurisdiction of the Human Rights Act of 1981. During the period various intakes, once screened, were referred to the Labour Relations Office. Additional referral agencies included the unions, the Department of Health, the Ombudsman of Bermuda, the Bermuda Health Council, the Bermuda Police Service, Age Concern, advocacy groups and non-profit organisations such as the Women's Resource Centre and CURB in referrals for independent legal advice.

Mr. Chairman, when a matter is referred for investigation, in the first instance parties are offered the opportunity to engage in the Commission's Voluntary Mediation Programme. Where parties agree to participate, efforts are aimed at assisting the parties to mutually resolve their complaints by bringing parties to a complaint together with an independent mediator who assists them to achieve a resolution.

In 2023, parties of 10 matters participated in mediation, three matters were resolved through mediation, two matters did not result in a resolution, there are currently five matters still actively engaged in the mediation process. Based on a review of matters currently before the Commission, it is anticipated that approximately 11 matters will be engaged within the mediation services provided by the Commission during the financial year of 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, following an investigation where a complaint appears to have merit, and it appears unlikely that the parties can resolve the complaint, the executive officer shall refer the complaint to the Human Rights Tribunal for adjudication in accordance with section 18(1) of the Act. After hearing a complaint, the Tribunal shall determine whether the Act has been contravened and may order any party to do any act or thing that constitutes full compliance with the Act and may order any party to rectify any injury caused to the complainant in the form of financial restitution. Any order made by the Tribunal under section 20 of the Act shall be made an order of the Supreme Court and is enforceable in the same manner as an order of that court.

Mr. Chairman, there are seven cases before the Tribunal for adjudication and, based on historic trends, this number is expected to rise approximately [to] 12 before the end of the financial year of 2023/24. If these historic trends continue throughout the financial year of 2024/25, a further five cases will be before the Tribunal bringing this number to as high as 17 cases through the financial year.

Mr. Chairman, throughout the financial year the Commission's commitment to creating awareness of the Human Rights Commission and educating Bermuda's residents about their human rights, has driven their strategic communications and educational initiatives. Their comprehensive plan featuring focus groups, stakeholder engagement, lunch and learns, media interviews and an impactful awareness video, justify the Commission's budget allocation for communications and public awareness.

Participation in a range of panel discussions, presentations and engagements reflect the Commission's education mandate in support of rights awareness as exemplified by the Commission's Human Rights Day activities including a 90-minute in-person education session and panel discussions. Their commitment to collaboration and inspiring individuals to make a difference underscore the significance of their communication efforts.

Mr. Chairman, the communications strategy deployed throughout the fiscal year appears to have resulted in an increase of understanding amongst the public of their human rights. The Commission, its functions and their role in Bermuda as they have indicated, a 28 per cent increase in reporting on human rights contraventions which is demonstratable of the public's growing knowledge of the rights available to them. Where these matters appear to be meritorious, they will be referred onward to the Human Rights Tribunal unless resolved sooner through the mechanisms such as the Commission's Voluntary Mediation Programme.

Mr. Chairman, on 21 March 2024, the Human Rights Commission will host a Human Rights Conference. This event will define human rights and pave the way for meaningful discussions on inclusion and access and the role each one of us has in ensuring human rights are fully embraced. For more information, I invite Members of this Honourable House to visit the Commission's website humanrights.bm.

Mr. Chairman, looking ahead to the next financial year, the Commission aims to intensify its impact to ensure transparency and accountability. The Commission's strategic plan will be publicised with a particular focus on disability awareness and inclusion. The Commission's overarching goal is to maintain a consistent drum beat of human rights education, reinforcing dedication to promoting awareness and understanding in Bermuda.

The Commission will remain focused on the implementation of the organisation's strategic plan which incorporates a communication plan aimed at increasing engagement with various stakeholders throughout the community to empower the public in understanding their rights and responsibilities, to increase the public's knowledge of their human rights, the human rights framework in Bermuda, and the full scope of services provided.

The Commission's plans include doubling the number of hosted lunch and learns, introducing a podcast, and conducting quarterly media interviews. Strengthening their social media presence will be a priority by fostering increased online engagement. The advancement of policy recommendations remains at the forefront of the Commission's focus to fully modernise and align the organisation with the requirements of the National Human Rights Institution [NHRI] and ensuring that adequate resources and support remain available for the Human Rights Tribunal to fulfil their statutory mandate to adjudicate complaints.

Mr. Chairman, the work of the Commission is necessarily dynamic and it is committed to ensuring that the processes, procedures and governing legislation remain relevant and responsive to meet the needs of our society. As the Island's National Human Rights Institution, the Commission remains at the forefront of efforts to uphold the protections and aspirational spirit of the Human Rights Act 1981.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Human Rights Commission for its dedication to the advancement of human rights in Bermuda and for stewarding the Commission's statutory mandate with integrity and excellence.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation on the financial year 2024/25 budgetary allocation for Head 56, the Human Rights Commission.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

That was Minister Furbert addressing us on Head 56, Human Rights Commission.

We are now going to hear from the Honourable Premier, on Heads 1, 2 and 5. Namely, Governor [and Staff]; Legislature; Office of the Auditor General.

Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman.

Just to repeat, I will be doing Heads 1, 2 and 5 at this time before I hand over to the Minister of the Cabinet Office who will be doing the rest of the particular non-Ministry briefs.

HEAD 1—GOVERNOR AND STAFF

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to present the brief for the Governor and Staff, Head 1, found on pages B-7 through B-9 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

The mission of the Governor and Staff, which is on page B-7, is *To enable the Governor in exercise of his or her functions set out in the Constitution and to work in harmony with the community for a stable, prosperous and well-governed Bermuda.*

Mr. Chairman, the Governor and Commander in-Chief of Bermuda is appointed by His Majesty the King by commission under his sign manual and signet and shall hold office during His Majesty's pleasure. This office is in accordance with the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968. The special responsibilities of the Governor include: external affairs, defence including the armed forces, internal security and the police.

Part of the objectives of the Governor and Staff include maintaining law and order, maintaining stable governance and providing the protection of the independence of the judiciary and the offices appointed by the Governor at his or her discretion, impartiality of the public service and integrity in the administration of justice.

Mr. Chairman, the department consists of a total of 13 full-time staff who assist the Governor in discharging responsibilities for the well-being of Bermuda. This includes three staff, shown on page B-8 of the Budget Book as allocated to the Deputy Governor's office. During the 2023/24 financial year, ceremonial functions and representational activities were limited due to developments at Government House. However, on 2 June 2023, Her Excellency the Governor hosted a Garden Party at Government House in celebration of His Majesty's birthday. A first in over 70 years. Unfortunately, King's Birthday Parade was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. Her Excellency the Governor participated in the annual Peppercorn Ceremony held on 26 April 2023, read the Throne Speech from the Government on the 3 November 2023, and laid a wreath in the Remembrance Day Ceremony at the Cenotaph in remembrance of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty on 11 November 2023.

Mr. Chairman, I now turn my attention to subjective analysis of current account estimates of Government House for the 2024/25 financial year.

Mr. Chairman, the total budget allocation for the Department of Governor and Staff in respect of fiscal year 2024/25, as shown on page B-7 of the Budget Book, is $1,410,941 which represents an increase of $49,000, or 4 per cent over the allocated budget for 2023/24.

Governor's House—Cost Centre 11000

Hon. E. David Burt: The proposed budget for the Governor's Office section of the Department of Governor and Staff for 2024/25 is $1,113,560, an increase of $45,927, or 4 per cent when compared to the budget allocation of $1,067,638 for fiscal year 2023/24.

The Chairman: Premier, if I could ask you to just pause for a second.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

The Chairman: I'm sorry. Your numbers do not seem to be adding up with the numbers in the Budget Book. It may be—

Hon. E. David Burt: Now, that would be a problem.

The Chairman: It may be that they were revised and that I don't have the revision. But the Budget Book in front of me does not seem to tally unless I'm mistaken. I think it's page B-7. They are not far off; they are just not spot on.

Hon. E. David Burt: These are rounding errors, I think.

The Chairman: No problem.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes. Because . . . that is . . . so when I am saying $45,927, it is just saying $46[,000]. So it is rounding errors.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: These are the specific and actual.

The Chairman: You are giving me precise figures—

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

The Chairman: —where the ones in the Budget Book have been—

Hon. E. David Burt: Rounded to the nearest million.

The Chairman: I am grateful for that clarification.

Please continue. You have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, this increase is due to an increase in wages to cover the cost of living increases, an increase in rental, mobile equipment funding at the temporary residence, an increase in electricity charges and an increase in uniforms budget for the next Governor.

The Governor's office experienced an increase in operational expenses for 2023/24 to meet temporary accommodations costs and increase in wages.

Deputy Governor's Office—Cost Centre 11010

Hon. E. David Burt: The proposed budget for the Deputy Governor's Office for financial year 2024/25 is $294,000, *[sic]* an increase of $3,000, or 1 per cent when compared to the budget allocation of $294,000 for financial year 2023/24. Just to be clear, this year it is $297,000 and last year was $294,000.

The Deputy Governor's Office includes the Deputy Governor and two other staff to perform the functions of the Deputy Governor as stipulated in the Constitution.

There are no other operational expenses associated with this cost centre. And the budget allocation for this office remains similar to the last financial year. We just had a $3,000 difference.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn Honourable Members' attention to page B-8, of the subjective analysis of current account estimates. And I will go over the specified major changes.

Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry increased by $13,000. The projected increase of $13,000 or 1,300 per cent, compared to the financial year 2023/24 in uniforms is to meet the cost of the ceremonial uniform for the new incoming Governor.

Rentals. This projected increase of $3,000, or 23 per cent for the financial year in line item 8 on page B-8, is in anticipation of the King's Birthday Garden Party in June of 2024, and an increase in the associated rental fees necessary at the temporary location for the Governor. The allocation within this budget line for ceremonial land now to be used for two additional ceremonial parades this financial year. And that will be for a departure parade for the existing Governor or the current Governor, and an arrival parade for the new Governor. The projected increase of $10,000, or 12 per cent for financial year 2023/24 is due to an increase of electrical charges within Government House and at the temporary residence.

Mr. Chairman, it should be noted that Government House was initially constructed in 1892. It seems in my history there were some wars in that day. I think that is the Spirits Act [1890], as well, maybe original Revenue Act [1898], yes. And [Government House] has deteriorating infrastructure which will require substantial capital investment to provide a safe working environment for staff and a safe residence for the Governor and Government of Bermuda staff who now reside in a temporary location.

Moving on to Capital Expenditure which is related to that commentary, Mr. Chairman.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: The Capital Expenditure for Government House is listed on page C-4 of the Budget Book. And the allocation for the fiscal period 2024/25 is $2,684,000. These funds have been allocated to begin funding the large scale major capital project at Government House. This significant increase in capital funding will allow for the replacement of the existing roof, changing out of various windows and remediate various water ingress into the house. The one thing I just need to say, Mr. Chairman, is that I know there is a lot of commentary around the Governor's house, whether the work was done this year, last year or next year, the Governor would still have had to move out of the house given the scale of the changes that needed to happen.

Output Measures

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the output measures for Government House are listed on page B-9 of the Budget Book. And if there are any questions that the Honourable Members of the Opposition may have, I will be happy to answer those.

In closing, I would like to thank the staff of Government House for their tireless and dedicated service. Their support allows the Governor to fulfil her role in providing a stable, prosperous and well Government of Bermuda.

This concludes my presentation on Head 1.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier.

Before you move on to the next head for the Legislature, we are just going to change the Chair. I will hand over to the Honourable Scott Simmons. Thank you, Premier.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you, the Honourable Member, Scott Pearman.

For further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The

Premier is on Head 1, Governor and Staff and the Premier was taking his notes from page B-9.

I recognise the Honourable Premier. You have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. I must say that you look rather resplendent in your purple today.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Premier.

It is in recognition of Women's—

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, I understand. International Women's Day.

The Chairman: International Women's Day. Right.

Hon. E. David Burt: I've got it.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would like to move on to Head 2, which is the Office of the Legislature, which I am sure involves all of us.

The Chairman: Yes, Mr. Premier. Head 2.

HEAD 2—THE LEGISLATURE

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I am proud to present the Budget for Head 2, the Office of the Legislature, as found on pages B-10 through B-13 of the Book of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

The Legislature is of course critical to Government in presenting and achieving its legislative agenda and policy objectives while also providing the forum for parliamentary oversight of the conduct and effectiveness of Government programmes and the management and accounting of the people's purse and Government spending. Part and parcel of this work is the appropriation of funding to the Government through the annual Budget Debates and approval of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure by Members of the Legislature.

The Legislature's mission statement as found in the Budget Book is *To facilitate parliamentary oversight and administrative support for a parliament that is responsive to the people of Bermuda.*

Mr. Chairman, the total expenditure, as shown on page B-10 is estimated at $5,441,000, an increase of $67,000 over the approved 2023/24 budget. As seen on page B-11 there are seven full-time equivalents in business unit [12000]; 47 Members of the Legislature in business unit 12010, Ministers and Members; and one full-time equivalent in business unit 12015, Opposition Leader's office.

Business unit 12002, Youth Parliament provides for funding for the activities of Bermuda's Youth Parliament and some compensation for the Youth Parliament Coordinator and Youth Advisory who oversee Youth Parliament activities and debates.

Through business unit 12000, Administration, the Parliamentary staff led by the Clerk to the Legislature provide a reliable and impartial administrative and support services for both Houses of the Legislature, the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate, and the parliamentary committees. This includes providing quality service on proper parliamentary procedures and practice to an accord with Standing Orders of each House. Administrative and clerical support services, research and IT services, legal advice where needed and other professional support services in ensuring that the House, the Senate and their parliamentary committees have adequate funding and resources to support their operations and fulfil their responsibilities.

As of February 2024, the House of Assembly remains composed of eight women (22 per cent) and 28 men (78 per cent). The Senate is composed of seven female Senators (64 per cent), and four male Senators (36 per cent).

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Senate is seven female Senators and four male Senators. Yes, you will note that the supermajority of Progressive Labour Party Senators happen to be female.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: We will move on to parliamentary staff, Mr. Chairman, as there is a little bit of interpolation, and revisionists matters from—

The Chairman: Don't forget to keep me included.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Carry on, please.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Current parliamentary staff is as follows:

- Acting Clerk to the Legislature, Mr. Clark W. Somner, serves as Head of Department and Clerk to the House of Assembly. He is the Accounting Officer of the department and oversees the parliamentary staff and operations of the department, the House, the Senate and the parliamentary committees, including the management of all aspects of the legislative process and procedural advice and guidance to the Presiding Officer and Members.
- Assistant Clerk, who is also the Designate Deputy Clerk, Mrs. Kara A. Beale, assists the Acting Clerk and serves as Clerk to the Senate and several parliamentary committees. Assists the Clerk in the management of the department

operations and all aspects of the legislative process including procedural advice and guidance to the Speaker and President of the Senate, Committee Chairs and Members.

- Parliamentary Information Officer, Mr. Derek P. Lamb, who is responsible for all aspects of Hansard production and editing, including digital recording and House and Senate proceedings, manages and populates and updates the Parliament website, SharePoint, and social media pages; actively coordinates provision of various IT services for the Office, for Members of the House and Senate committees including extensive liaison with service providers, IDT and the House and Grounds Committee; online streaming of proceedings, and information research services for clerks and Members.
- Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Arnold Allen, is responsible for active liaison with the House and Grounds Committee, the Speaker and Clerks in coordinating maintenance matters at Veritas Place and at Sessions House and Grounds, active liaison with the Speaker and clerks on security and safety arrangements at Veritas and Sessions House in coordination with Bermuda Police Service and service providers, and aide to the Speaker and performs ceremonial duties in House proceedings and events such as the convening of the Legislature.
- Administrative Officer, Mrs. Nadine Place, manages office operations including administrative and logistical support services for the Clerk and presiding officers, the procurement of office supplies, equipment furnishings, cleaning and other office services, as well as food and catering for members of the staff, responsible for the purchasing and payment of billings and maintaining financial accounting records per Financial Instructions. [She] is responsible for all aspects of salaries and administrations for staff and Members of the Legislature and for administering the personal data and information records of all Members of staff.
- Administrative Assistant to the Clerk, Ms. Andrina T. Smith, provides administrative and secretarial support service to the Office of the Legislature, the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, as well as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House, assists the Clerk in the preparation and distribution of House Order papers and Minutes, official correspondence and communications, and assists with the annotation of House and Senate proceedings, and performs other duties as may be assigned to the Clerk.
- And finally, the Aide to the Opposition Leader, Mrs. Judy Benevides, provides administrative and secretarial support to the Opposition Leader, including administration of the office operations.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: You will note on page C-4 of the Estimates Book some $250,000 has been allotted in fiscal [year] 2024/25 for capital development programme 75230, Parliament Building Refurbishment. It is anticipated that the Supreme Court will be able to vacate Sessions House finally in 2024/25. As you will note, as we covered in the budget for the Minister of Public Works, the extensive amount of funds that have been allocated in this record capital account estimate to ensure that Dame Lois Browne-Evans Building can accommodate all Supreme Court matters, therefore allowing the Supreme Court to vacate Sessions House and allowing us to begin in earnest with the full renovation of the matters related to Sessions House.

The Chairman: Members will be elated.

Hon. E. David Burt: As will I, because I can have my office back.

The Chairman: Exactly.

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Not this year. They are going to move so we will begin the work next year.

Clearly, $250,000 cannot do the work that is necessary. But Mr. Chairman, after which time substantial capital works on the second phase of the extensive internal renovations of the building may begin. I know that all members and staff are anxious to see this work progress forward.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: The Parliament building refurbishment project, including the maintenance and repair facilities of the Sessions House and its precincts fall under the remit of the Parliamentary House and Grounds Committee, chaired by the Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Derrick V. Burgess, JP MP, honorary cousin to all.

Current Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: I will now turn my attention to the specific current account Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure in the four cost centres of the Legislature.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman.

The total allocation for the Legislature for fiscal year 2024/25 is shown on page B-10 of the Estimates Book is $5,441,000 which represents an increase of

$67,000, or just over 1 per cent when compared to fiscal year 2023/24.

Administration—Cost Centre 12000

Hon. E. David Burt: The objectives for the Legislature's Administration cost centre 12000, for fiscal year are clearly stated in the Budget Book, so I do not necessarily have to repeat those matters because they are read the same every year.

But of course it is to provide the support (which I mentioned) which were outlined by all of the various members of the Legislature. But one important note is that another matter that they must also do in addition to supporting all of us here in the Legislature in the exercise of our duty, they also have responsibility to improve public understanding of the importance and leading role of the Legislature and the governance of Bermuda in informing and educating public servants and public officers about the legislative process and their role within it.

Administration cost centre 12000, found on page B-10, has a budget of $1,296,000 which represents an increase of $18,000, compared to the previous budget year. This budget covers administrative salaries, office supplies, data lines for Members' tablets, software maintenance for both Internet and Hansard systems, along with overseas Hansard transcribers.

Additionally, the provision of funding is allocated for the Speaker of the House and Members of Parliament for legal services.

Youth Parliament—Cost Centre 12002

Hon. E. David Burt: The total budget is $6,000 which remains the same. This funding covers office supplies and administrative expenses relating to the Youth Parliament and stipends for the Youth Parliament Coordinator and Youth Advisors conducting Youth Parliament meetings, debates and other activities.

Ministers and Members—Cost Centre 12010

Hon. E. David Burt: As we all know, the responsibility of the Legislature is to enact laws, fund Government spending and initiatives, and to hold the Government to account through its parliamentary oversight function. Legislature should be fairly remunerated for carrying out their legislative and constitutional duties. The total [budget] for cost centre 12010 found on page B-10, is $4,007,000.

I would like to note at this point in time, of course, Mr. Chairman, as according to the Ministers and Members of the Legislature (Salaries and Pensions) Act, as amended, I have with the advice of the Opposition Leader, the Speaker of the House, and also the President of the Senate convened the Parliamentary Salaries Review Commission which is supposed to meet every two years, which has not met since the pandemic, to go ahead and to consider these matters and to report as the law requires them to report every two years, so we are certainly past due for a report on there, and any report of which they have will come to the Legislature for debate regarding salaries. I would of course note that there has not been any pay change for Members of the Legislature since 2008, 15 years.

The Chairman: So noted, Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: And of course, Members of the Executive are paid less than they were in 2008.

The Chairman: So noted and minuted, Premier.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: But that is just a fact. So that committee is meeting and I know that there are people listening and they will say, *Ooh!* But it is the law that they are required to meet every two years. That is not David Burt, that is the law, so we are trying to make sure that we at least hold it according to the law. It is very difficult to follow all the various laws sometimes. It requires a significant amount of work as we are trying to do our things, but we want to make sure that at least that process is completed as per the law.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

Opposition Leader's Office—Cost Centre 12015

Hon. E. David Burt: We know that the role of the Opposition Leader's Office is important and non-partisan administrative aid is required and needed to oversee it operations. (I'm not sure how non-partisan, but we will continue.)

Currently there is one part-time administrative assistant working in the Opposition Leader's Office under the supervision of the Opposition Leader. The funding of this cost centre totals $132,000. The Opposition Leader's grant for fiscal year is $86,000, which is found on page C-17 which represents an increase of $11,000, or 15 per cent, when compared to fiscal year 2023/24. That is a lot higher than other departments, Craig, what is going on over there?

The increase in grant funding is provided to cover increased office rental and operation costs. The additional funding of $46,000 covers the salary of the administrative assistant.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. E. David Burt: Subjective analysis is found on page B-11. The most important matter is that salaries increased by $71,000 and the increase in $71,000 is to adjust increase in salaries from some adjustment in

funding for parliamentary staff which is based on the recent review of the . . . the . . . no. Oh, Christ.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I went to church yesterday. I am going to get myself in trouble.

The recently concluded union negotiations and all of the salary uplifts that accord to members of the staff.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

Yes, staff salaries funding based on the latest CPA/BPSU [Bermuda Public Services Union] salaries and the approved regrading of two senior posts within the Legislature.

Communications

Hon. E. David Burt: Communications estimate for 2024/25 is $94,000, a decrease of $8,000 compared to 2023/24 estimate. This funding covers cost for telecom, cell phones for the presiding officers, and data lines for members' and staff tablets.

Professional Services

Hon. E. David Burt: The estimate is $398,000, an increase *[sic]* of $18,000. This funding covers various professional services for the Legislature including the digital recording, online streaming, radio broadcast and Hansard production for the proceedings of the House, local consultancy services, overseas services including the transcription of digital recordings for the Hansard, legal services provided for the office, the presiding officers of parliamentary committees and funding for the establishment of an oversight committee. A decrease of $18,000.

Mr. Chairman, Members may recall that the Government indicated in the 2023 Throne Speech that a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee would be established to examine matters surrounding the September 2023 cyberattack on Government systems. The Legislature Office anticipates using some of its professional services funding to provide secretarial/clerical support services for the work and operations of that Joint Select Committee following its establishment by this Honourable House.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. E. David Burt: The estimate for 2024/25 is $123,000 versus $127,000 in the last fiscal year. This funding covers software maintenance of some $91,000, cleaning services, photocopier maintenance contracts, pest control and maintenance of security apparatus and equipment.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. E. David Burt: The Grants and Contributions for the Legislature Office can be found on page C-17 of the Estimates Book. The estimate is $171,000 which is an increase of $26,000 over the 2023/24 funding. Members will note that $85,000 has been allocated for the annual grant to the Bermuda branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [CPA] increase of $15,000 over the 2023/24 grant. The increase is intended to cover annual membership fees in both the CPA and the Caribbean Regional CPA for the Bermuda branch as well as the anticipated increase in personal attendance and participation in overseas CPA conferences and seminars by members and staff.

The annual grant of $86,000 has been allocated for the Opposition Leader's Office, an increase of over $11,000. As I mentioned before and indicated, this grant is to cover higher office rental and operation costs. It is important to note that costs do increase every year. I know you all like to attack other increases, but this is just the fact.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Carry on, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Performance Measures

Hon. E. David Burt: The work and activities of the parliamentary staff and Members of the Legislature, the House of Assembly, the Senate and the Parliamentary Committees, and our Youth Parliament, as well as statistics on the number of Bills and other legislation passed by the Legislature, reports and papers tabled, the number of visitors to the Parliament website and Facebook and Instagram page, and the number of persons who access the streaming of our House and Senate proceedings can be found on pages B-12 and B-13.

The Legislature continues to receive positive feedback concerning the Parliament website and the Hansard. As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, Members use the Hansard as a research tool to gather information for debates. Streaming of our parliamentary debates is also useful and can be accessed on the parliament.bm website.

Moving to performance measures and focusing on professional development opportunities and certification in parliamentary practice and procedures are encouraged for both Members and parliamentary staff. This past fiscal year, our clerks actively participated in selected training programmes, and online meetings and discussions of the UKOTP CPA [UK-led UK Overseas Territories Project] Clerk Leadership Group. I had to look that up last night to understand what UKOTP is. But it is under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—

The Chairman: It is.

Hon. E. David Burt: —for development of Overseas Territories' Parliaments.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: The former Clerk to the Legislature, the Acting Clerk and the Assistant Clerk also conducted a DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] training course in April 2023 on "Understanding Standing Orders" and "The Legislative Process" for senior Government directors and heads of departments.

Honourable Members Ms. Lovitta Foggo, Ms. Susan E. Jackson, Senator Arianna Hodgson and the Designate Deputy Clerk Ms. Kara Beale formed the Bermuda delegation participating in the annual 45th CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Regional Conference held in the Turks and Caicos Islands in July 2023. The theme of the Conference was "Building a resilient region in the face of global challenges."

Honourable Member Ms. Susan Jackson represented Bermuda at the CPA Regional Caribbean Public Accounts Committees and Trade Scrutiny Workshop hosted by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago last month; and Senator Leslie Robinson is set to represent Bermuda at the 2024 Westminster Seminar in the United Kingdom next week.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I must take this opportunity to recognise the hard work, dedication and professionalism of the Legislature staff, which is a very small contingent, especially when compared with other smaller parliaments in the Caribbean region and internationally. The Presiding Officers and Members of the Legislature are obliged to commend the staff for their commitment and service in helping us to meet our responsibilities in performing our legislative and oversight duties to the best of our abilities throughout a very busy parliamentary calendar. And at this time, of course, before I close, I would like to extend thanks on behalf of all Honourable Members to the hard-working staff of the Legislature.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Premier. So noted.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

That concludes my brief on Head 2. I am happy to move to Head 5.

The Chairman: Carry on, Premier.

We are still in the Committee of Supply. Go right ahead, Premier.

Just to remind Members that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2024/25. The Premier has completed Heads 1 and 2, and he is now going on to Head 5.

Premier you have the floor.

HEAD 5—OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

I will now move on to Head 5, which is the Office of the Auditor General. Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Auditor General follows the standard budget process as is the case with all ministries and departments [and] uses the ZBB approach. Once the budget office numbers are determined internally and inputted into ZBB, the office seeks formal approval of their budget from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Office of the Auditor General. This committee is appointed for the duration of the life of parliament under [Standing Order] 34(4) of the House of Assembly, according to section 45 of the Bermuda Constitution Order. This committee has responsibility for ensuring the office's tools and funding to carry out its responsibilities and to ensure that the independence of the office is not compromised.

A detailed budget submission is presented to the committee each year by the Auditor General at a formal meeting set aside for this purpose wherein the Auditor General highlights the performance of the office for the current year and justifies the office funding requirements for the upcoming year. This meeting was held on December 7, 2023. Once the committee is in agreement with the budget request, a formal submission is sent to the Minister of Finance by the Committee Chair noting the bipartisan support of the committee. The Ministry of Finance will then officially acknowledge and indicate whether it approves the budget requests supported by the committee.

Mandate and Mission

Hon. E. David Burt: The mandate and mission of the Office of the Auditor General is under the Bermuda Constitution and the Audit Act 1990. [They] provide the legislative mandate for the Office of the Auditor General, and the primary responsibility is to assist the House of the Assembly in carrying out its oversight responsibilities relating to government spending and accountability for the use of public money.

The mission of the Auditor General, which is derived from its legislative mandate, is *To add credibility to the Government's financial reporting and to promote improvement in the financial administration of all government ministries, departments, and all other entities for which the Government is accountable to Parliament.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to expenditure overview, the committee reviewed the proposed office budget of $4,447,296 in the December 2023 meeting.

The total current expenditure that was approved by the Ministry of Finance for Head 5 is now estimated to be $4,197,759, which represents a decrease of $16,000, or 0.4 per cent from the prior year's approved expenditure.

Now what I do want to say is that of course as stated the committee sends a letter to the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance reviews. We go through various figures and respond back to the Auditor General. I will state, Mr. Chairman, that the Ministry of Finance under my hand as Minister of Finance did send the official note to the Chair of the Committee [on the Office of the Auditor General] regarding the budget change between what was requested and what was actually provided.

And the basis for this . . . and I can just be completely transparent. When I was going through all of the estimates, we typically, as all other government departments, did get an uplift for the salaries that were based upon the recent Collective Bargaining Association. However, upon further review, we also went and looked to the experience and spending experience for various departments in 2022/23. As can be seen in the Budget Book, there was a significant underspend from the Office of the Auditor General in the 2022/23 fiscal year and upon the matrix that we use for other departments that had underspent their allocation 2022/23. So, there was originally supposed to be an uplift, but upon the review of looking at those various items and the need to find more money for capital to assign various monies, et cetera, that funding was reduced to this level.

Now, it was not reduced to the same level that other departments in government were reduced based upon spending because we are cognisant of the role that the Auditor General has to play. But I just wanted to explain the reason for that increase. But the letter was sent to the Auditor, and it was copied to the Chair of the Committee [on the office of the Auditor General]. I am happy to share that letter with Honourable Members of the Opposition in case they wish to see it, but the Chair may have shared that letter already. I do not know.

The Chairman: Right. That is fine. Thank you, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, [I am] just stating that there has been a movement of funds amongst the various operating line items as follows.

Subjective analysis, $3,326,000, an increase of $110,000. On Salaries, this increase over the prior year just relates the increase in salaries for 28 full-time equivalents. The office did not fill all posts for fiscal year 2023/24, but all posts are expected to be filled in the entire 2024/25 [fiscal year]. Seventy per cent of the Office of the Auditor [General] petitioners are contract workers on work permits of three years.

An ongoing challenge for the office and also the Office of the Accountant General has been the ability to attract a full complement of qualified professional audit staff. This problem has been exacerbated due to a shortage of professional accountants and an extremely competitive local market. And just like whether it is with the Accountant General or whether it is with other departments, persons will come and then will get job offers from the private sector, which are far outside of the standard government pay scales for auditors and accountants. And this is why the aforementioned review is taking place to make sure that we can remain competitive to actually retain the necessary qualified staff to carry out these particular functions. So, it does not just affect the Government, but it also does affect some of the non-ministry departments that are engaged in these particular activities.

The Chairman: That issue remains a challenge, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: A significant challenge. The market for professional accountants is quite competitive, and office salary ranges are comparable with similar positions in government but remain uncompetitive with salaries in the private sector.

The office strives to provide a supportive and collaborative workplace for our students to thrive and grow. Now the office employs three Bermudian students pursuing professional and academic designations.

Professional Services

Hon. E. David Burt: Professional Services is budgeted at $330,000, a decrease of $177,000 from last year, or 35 per cent. This is the next most significant expense for the office and includes services for contracted audits and expert advice as needed. This represents a decrease in funding for services provided from professional accounting firms as the office expects to bring some audits back in the House. We also expect to continue to use contracted firms to aid the department in meeting their legislative commitments, to aid the department in their peak work closure in the summer months, and for unexpected separations that may happen in the office.

Repairs and Maintenance

Hon. E. David Burt: Repairs and Maintenance is at $129,000, an increase of $46,000 from last year. This primarily relates to the additional cost for cloud storage and software maintenance agreements—cloud storage for caseware to upgrade the working paper software to the cloud in order to modernise operations and overcome Legacy software challenges. From a risk perspective, the office will reduce the amount of inherent risk from potential system failures.

Travel

Hon. E. David Burt: Travel is $14,000, which is an increase of $3,000 from the prior year. Staff auditors pursuing their professional designations may travel to attend training and development courses in pursuit of their professional designations as face-to-face training is resuming. Additionally, the Auditor General and team members may attend training for the long-term sustainability of the office, and this is critical to keeping abreast of emerging auditing trends and participation in the round-table discussion to support and influence matters impacting our jurisdiction from the development of auditing methodology, practices, and professional development with standard setters such as the Public Sector Accounting Board known as PSAB.

The office also takes an active role in the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors and the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions, and the Auditor General is a member of the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institution's Executive Committee.

Revenue

Hon. E. David Burt: The Revenue estimates for the Office of the Auditor General are $581,000, a decrease of $247,000 from last year, or 30 per cent, which represents audit fees charged to certain auditees such as government-controlled organisations and public funds. It is anticipated that the revenue collected from these 14 entities for both current year accounts and accounts in arears . . .

Employee Numbers

Hon. E. David Burt: Employee Numbers estimates are 28 full-time posts. Of the 28 full-time employees, Bermudians fill 10 posts. Out of the 10 Bermudian staff, three are students, four [are] professionals, and three [are] support staff. The balance, as stated, are contracted workers.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on the Capital Expenditure. The Office of the Auditor General has a capital budget of $24,500 for laptops and desktops that have surpassed their lifespan and are no longer running efficiently.

As a note, Mr. Chairman, this amount is approximately $6,000 less than originally requested and as provided from the Auditor General, as I am reading from the brief. This means that not all laptops and desktops earmarked for replacement due to age or productivity loss will be replaced this fiscal year. In the short term, the office will make adjustments internally to reduce risk associated with performance or productivity decline due to inefficient machines.

At this point in time, Mr. Chairman, I will just state from the record, as Minister of Finance, if the Chair of the [Committee of the] Auditor General and the Auditor General do come and say they need this, I will certainly see if I can find the $6,000 because we are putting a significant investment into IT infrastructure in government noting that it is necessary now, and I would hate for the Auditor General to be shorted from not making that similar investment. So, noting this, which did come in the brief, I am happy to make sure that we can find the funds so they can switch out all their computers as it is important to make sure we get that work done.

Output Measures

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to Output Measures, to continue to support the House of Assembly to hold the Government to account and to improve the public service, the office intends to do so by fulfilling the constitutional mandate by completing the following audits: 54 financial statement audits, 8 financial statement reviews, 2 nonfinancial audits, and release annual reports as per the legislation. The above measures will be hampered (as always stated by the Auditor General) from accounts that are not presented to the office in a timely manner, but we will certainly speak to that. I think we spoke to that before, that there are challenges.

Also, just as the Auditor General is short, the Accountant General's Office is similarly short due to the uncompetitive salary nature for these particular offices and the fact that these persons do go to the private sector as salary is more competitive there. We discussed that when we were in Committee of Supply dealing with the Ministry of Finance, and the ongoing review, will help to assist that. So, it is a challenge with that because it just comes from the fact that there is a lack of available staff that will work for the Government or the Auditor General at the rates that are currently being paid.

Current Year Achievements

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to current year achievements, the office expects to complete approximately 48 financial statement audits and reviews as of March 31, 2024. Financial statements, or asset auditor examinations, of an auditee's financial statements, in these examinations the auditor expresses an opinion on whether the financial statements prevent information on the auditee's operation and whether [their] financial position is presented fairly and complies with auditing standards generally accepted in Bermuda or Canada.

Every year the Office of the Auditor General audits the financial statements of the accounts of the Senate, the House of Assembly, all government departments including the Public Service Commission, and all courts of Bermuda per the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 and the Audit Act 1990.

In addition to the completion of financial statement audits and reviews, the office also releases public interests reports, attended virtual training with the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions [CAROSAI], and the United Kingdom's National Audit Office. They also carried out training on public sector accounting and auditing standards to ensure that all staff were kept abreast of the new and evolving standards and meet continuing professional development requirements.

During the year, the office rolled out a new risk assessment and system of quality management, which required them to revisit their supporting forms, checklists, communications, letters, and evaluation forms. The result was newer ways of working that will strengthen the quality of the Auditor General's work. The quality of the office field work and opinion appended to the accounts audited remain the office's priority. Hence, the office continues the use of targeted training, coaching, and mentoring to build and strengthen the capacity of staff. The office also provided a minimum of 20 hours of continuing professional development to team members on auditing and accounting pronouncements to assure adherence to accounting and assurance standards and methodology for financial and nonfinancial audits.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to plans for the upcoming year, the Government's risk landscape continues to change. And the office is building an agility to respond to the emergent risk. Presently, the office continues to work with various stakeholders across Government and the industry partners that I mentioned before, CPA, CAROSAI, and CCOLA. That would be the Caribbean and the Canadian.

The following do continue to have an impact on the office's audit assessment and strategies:

- environmental hazards from coastal erosion and hurricane frequency;
- malicious attacks from cyberattacks to infrastructure;
- errors of significant judgment, such as impairment and obsolescence of tangible capital assets and other assets in addition to disclosure requirements; and
- the increased number of fraud risk factors in terms of pressure and opportunities due to changing landscape and conditions.

The office will build on the work that they have done so far to provide the Public Accounts Committee, and the House of Assembly and the Parliamentary Standing Committee the same high-quality financial and nonfinancial audits to support accountability.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to note the staff of the Auditor General are independent of the Government. This independence enables the office to conduct its auditing and reporting responsibilities fairly and objectively. As the Consolidated Fund is one of the priority audits with annual November deadlines, they will continue to work with the Account General's department to ensure that the deadline may be met, the death covenant requirements complied with, and penalties avoided.

In closing, the Auditor General would like to acknowledge her exemplary staff for their hard work, dedication and continued commitment to the office mandates. The office will continue to support the House of Assembly and the Public Accounts Committee in holding the Government to account and to help improve Government's financial reporting and public services through their high-quality audits for the benefit of Bermuda's citizens.

With that, Mr. Chairman, that concludes my particular contribution. And I know that the Minister of the Cabinet Office will continue on the other heads for the non-ministry departments.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Premier. He completes his Heads 1, 2, and 5.

I recognise the Honourable Minister Vance Campbell. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to present the brief of the Parliamentary Registrar, Head 63 found on pages B-20 throughB22—

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: —of the Estimates and of Revenue and Expenditure.

The Chairman: That is fine. Go right ahead, Minister.

HEAD 63—PARLIAMENTRY REGISTRAR

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Parliamentary Registrar is *To independently manage elections and promote voter awareness in Bermuda to facilitate free and fair elections.*

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Registrar is appointed by the Governor under the provisions of the Parliamentary Election Act 1978 and as such is required to discharge the duties conferred or imposed under the Act. The Parliamentary Registrar is subject to the general direction of the Governor and in the exercise of her statutory duties is assisted by such member[s] of public officers as may from time to time be authorised to be employed.

The Parliamentary Election Act 1978 as amended, the Municipalities (Election) Order 2011, and the Bermuda Constitution Order 1978 are the instruments by which the activities of the Parliamentary Registrar are governed.

Mr. Chairman, the staff at the Parliamentary Registrar consist of five full-time positions under the

direction of the Parliamentary Registrar, Ms. Tenia Woolridge.

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Registrar remains dedicated to enhancing our procedures for voter registration and overall upkeep of the Parliamentary Registry. They persistently evaluate the quality of our service and empower their staff through ongoing training to uphold excellence in service delivery. In recent years, the Parliamentary Registrar's office has introduced various initiatives aimed at bolstering departmental efficiency aligned with the Government's vision for a progressive administration. These efforts encompass the implementation of electronic records management systems to transition towards a paperless environment. Additionally, the adoption of cash-receiving systems ensures meticulous and precise recording of revenue collection.

Amendments to the Parliamentary Election Act 1978 have been enacted to facilitate accessible and impartial voting for all stakeholders involved in the election process. Furthermore, internal software utilised for the maintenance of the Parliamentary Registry has undergone updates to enhance functionality and effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Registrar's office has officially entered election preparation mode, diligently undertaking tasks essential for the smooth operation of the next general election which is constitutionally due on or before February 5, 2026. Concurrently, the Constituency Boundaries Commission appointed by Her Excellency the Governor in September 2023 persists in its efforts contributing to the ongoing evaluation of the constituency boundaries of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I now turn my attention to the specific estimates of expenditure and revenue in the five cost centres of the Parliamentary Registrar's office.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the total budget allocation for the Parliamentary Registrar's office in respect of fiscal year 2024/25 as shown on page B-20 of the Budget Book is $1,279,000, an increase of $24,000 from the original budget for 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, proposed budget for the Administration of the Parliamentary Registry, which is cost centre 73000, for 2024/25 is $823,000, an increase of $52,000, or 7 per cent over the original budget for 2023/24. The rise in expenditures is evident in the Salaries section attributed to accommodating an extra election support officer essential for aiding in election preparation and execution. This cost centre encompasses various expenses related to the department's daily operations such as administrative office supplies, registration forms, and the maintenance of departmental equipment. Given the department's responsibility for issuing apostille certificates, funds within this cost centre are allocated towards the upkeep of the cash-receiving system as well as covering additional expenses arising from credit card fees. These resources ensure efficient management of the apostille certificate issuance process.

Mr. Chairman, the proposed budget for the Constituency Boundaries Commission cost centre 73005 for 2024/25 is $173,000, a decrease of $59,000, or 25 per cent over the original budget in 2023/24. Her Excellency the Governor officially appointed the Constituency Boundaries Commission on September 12, 2023. Despite encountering a setback due to an unfortunate cyberattack, the Commission intends to resume its activities later this month. Funds allocated to this cost centre will be utilised for administering the Commission including provisions for travel and accommodation expenses for overseas members involved in the Commission's work.

General and Bye Elections

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, [regarding] General and Bye Elections, cost centre 73010, the proposed budget for this area for 2024/25 is $251,000, which represents an increase of $91,000, or 57 per cent from the original budget in 2023/24. The rise in this cost centre is directly linked to the anticipation of the next general election. According to legal mandates, the next election must be held no later than February 5, 2026.

Municipalities Elections

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, Municipalities Elections, cost centre 73015, the proposed budget allocation for this section is $32,000 and has been allocated for municipality elections. This is a decrease of $49,000, or 60 per cent from the original budget in 2023/24. This budget encompasses provisions to support two extraordinary municipal elections should the need arise during the next fiscal period. Additionally, the Registrar is mindful of the imminent court proceedings regarding changes to the Municipalities Act 1923.

Mr. Chairman, if I now move on to Election Reform Research, this is cost centre 73017.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Election Reform Research

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Election Reform cost centre has not been allocated funds for the fiscal period 2024/25. This decision is attributable to the prioritisation of resources towards the ongoing work of the Constituencies Boundary Commission and preparations for the next general election. Consequently, funds for this cost centre will be deferred for the current year and re-evaluated during the next budget cycle.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn your attention to page B-21 the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates.

The Chairman: Yes?

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Vance Campbell: Professional Services is decreased by $11,000. Over the next fiscal period, it is anticipated that the majority of funds allocated for this object code will be directed towards financing the operations of the Constituency Boundaries Commission. This encompasses covering sitting fees for Commission members along with expenses incurred for consultants engaged to facilitate the Commission's work.

Advertising and Promotion increased by $2,000. In the 2024/25 fiscal year, the Advertising and Promotion budget is set at $121,000 reflecting a $2,000 increase compared to the previous year. This budget is chiefly divided between the Constituency Boundaries Commission and the General Elections cost centres. Its primary purpose is to disseminate information to voters regarding any alterations to constituency boundaries and pertinent election-related updates. The Parliamentary Registrar intends to utilise diverse channels to reach voters effectively throughout the preparation and execution phases of the upcoming general election.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for Materials and Supplies stands at $66,000 for the fiscal year 2024/25, a decrease of $9,000. This allocation encompasses printing expenses and additional supplies required for daily operations as well as resources necessary to support election preparation and conduct including those utilised by the Constituency Boundaries Commission.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for the Repair and Maintenance object code is $61,000. This is decreased by $22,000. These funds primarily cover the weekly cleaning of the office and the cleaning of premises utilised during the election period particularly for halls rented where additional cleaning costs are incurred. Additionally, a portion of these funds will be allocated toward software maintenance for our internal registration application as well as covering expenses related to software subscriptions.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for Other Expenses decreased by $2,000 and is $46,000 for the fiscal year 2024/25. Within this allocation, provisions are made for bank charges and credit/debit card commissions associated with the new cash-receiving system. Additionally, funds are earmarked for occasional courier services, replenishment of uniforms for election workers, and procurement of food and water supplies.

Mr. Chairman, if I can now move on to revenue.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Revenue

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, Revenue is generated from the issuing of apostilles. Total revenue for the 2024/25 fiscal year is estimated at $250,000, which is unchanged from the approved budget for 2023/24. The Parliamentary Registrar's office remains committed to delivering prompt and timely issuance of apostilles certificates to our international and private sector clients. In line with this commitment, we have enhanced our processes and procedures to facilitate more accurate financial reporting of revenue collected by the department. These improvements ensure greater efficiency and transparency in the service provided.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I extend my sincere gratitude to all the staff of the Parliamentary Registrar under the leadership of Ms. Tenia Woolridge for their unwavering commitment and dedication to their duties throughout the past fiscal year. *Your hard work and dedication are truly appreciated, and I look forward to our continued success in the future.*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Members, just as a reminder, we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Minister is on his heads.

Go right ahead, Minister.

HEAD 85—OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to present the budget for Head 85, the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda—

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: —found on pages B-23 through B-26 and C-9 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman is an independent, non-governmental official who investigates complaints from the public about the administrative actions of public authorities. The role of the Ombudsman is to strengthen governance through the promotion of fairness, accountability, and transparency.

Mr. Chairman, the office works for the good of the public and those who work for the public. The office provides an impartial form of alternate dispute resolution which is flexible, accessible, and less costly than adjudication through the courts. Anyone who feels they have been unjustly treated by an administrative action by a public authority may bring their complaint to the Ombudsman. A family member or other suitable person may make the complaint if a person is unable to do so on their own behalf.

Services are free, confidential, and available to everyone. Even if a complaint is outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, the office can assist by providing information or by making a referral to another body that

can investigate the issue raised. The Ombudsman aims to put things right if they have gone wrong.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman's mission is *To protect the interests of the public by providing independent resources and interventions for individuals with complaints about public services while influencing improvement in standards of those services to ensure people are treated fairly.*

To achieve its mission, the aims of the Ombudsman's Office are:

- to deliver an efficient, accessible, and responsive service that effectively resolves complaints;
- inform the public service of developments, principles, and practices of good administration;
- facilitate improvement of public authorities' complaint-handling processes;
- improve stakeholder satisfaction with the quality and impact of its service; and
- remain aware of administrative best practices, emerging trends and issues both locally and through its international networks; and
- strengthen best practices and internal processes for enhanced team performance and development.

The core values of the Office of the Ombudsman are fairness, impartiality, confidentiality, and independence.

Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman is to receive complaints and investigate any administrative action of an authority for the purpose of deciding whether there is evidence of maladministration on the part of the authority. Wherein an investigation is conducted, the Ombudsman makes recommendations to the authority concerning any administrative actions that formed the subject of the investigation and more generally about ways of improving its administrative practices and procedures.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman advocates alternative dispute resolution and is addressing more complaints with informal resolution wherever it is suitable to do so. The office encourages the preservation of relationships between government authorities and persons with complaints. In addition, as an office of last resort, the Ombudsman also assists complainants by directing them for assistance to a more appropriate authority. The office always aims to assist whenever possible those who do not know where else to go for help.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman's Office was established in Bermuda by the Bermuda Constitution (Amendment) Order 2001, and it is governed by the Ombudsman Act 2004. The office opened on 1 August 2005. Section 93B(2) of the Constitution protects the fundamental characteristic of an Ombudsman's office, which is its independence, by stipulating that in the exercise of his functions and jurisdiction, the Ombudsman shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.

The Ombudsman submits an annual report of his operations to the Speaker of the House with copies to the Governor and the President of the Senate. The accounts of the Ombudsman's Office are audited annually and reported on by the Auditor General.

Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda continues to be highly regarded by regional and international ombudsman institutions and colleagues. Its memberships include the ombudsman associations of the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, as well as the African Ombudsman Research Centre, and the International Ombudsman Institute. Such relationships provide the Bermuda office with valuable assistance and access to the best available information on current practices and procedures.

Mr. Chairman, I will now move into the expenditure overview.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I now turn my attention to page B-24.

The estimated budget for 2024/25 is $1,050,000, an overall net increase of $33,000 when compared to the revised budget for 2023/24. Variances between 2023/24 original estimates and 2024/25 estimates for amounts with a net change of $10,000 and over are as follows: Estimate for Salaries increased by $33,000 as a result of salary increases for all staff members by 2.25 per cent on April 1, 2022 and 2.25 per cent April 1, 2023.

Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for six full-time employees, all of whom are Bermudians, shown on page B-24 is $742,000. These positions are Ombudsman, Deputy Ombudsman, two investigation officers, a manager of finance and administration, and an executive administrative assistant. The Ombudsman also engages service providers and technical and professional advisors as required.

Capital Expenditures

Hon. Vance Campbell: Moving on to capital expenditures, Mr. Chairman, for 2024/25 fiscal year, there have been no approvals for capital purchases.

And Mr. Chairman, this brings me to the end of the Office of the Ombudsman's budget information. Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to thank the Ombudsman and staff for their commitment and dedication to their duties on behalf of the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: That is fine. Go right ahead, Minister.

HEAD 92—DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDIT

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget for Head 92, the Department of Internal Audit found on pages B-27 through B-29 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department on Internal Audit is *To provide independent, objective assurance and advisory services to improve operations and internal control systems.*

Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be $1,055,000 for 2024/25 and represents a decrease of $115,000, or 10 per cent less than the estimate for 2023/24. This decrease is due primarily to the reduction in salaries as one senior auditor position is unfunded and can be found in line item 1, Salaries, in $95,000 and corresponding decreases in related personnel costs and training line item 2, Other Personnel Costs, of $5,000 and line item 3. Training. of $2,000.

As the department requires less mobile phone services, office supplies including copier paper, and filing systems due to greater use of electronic forms, the 2024/25 estimates for Communication and Materials and Supplies have decreased. Line 4, Communications, $5,000 and line item 10, Materials and Supplies $7,000. There is no capital expenditure, Mr. Chairman.

Manpower

Hon. Vance Campbell: If I now move to manpower found on page B-28, the total estimated full-time equivalents and funded positions for 2024/25 for the department is nine, representing eight professional staff, and one administration officer. The department's funded posts are comprised of one director, one administrative officer, one internal audit manager, one IT audit manager, one senior auditor, one IT audit senior, and three internal audit officers who are working towards obtaining a professional internal auditor qualification.

The internal audit officer positions are Bermudian-only training positions to encourage and train Bermudians in the internal auditing profession. The administrative officer, IT audit manager, and one internal audit officer vacant posts are currently being recruited for and are expected to be filled early in fiscal year 2024/25.

Performance Measures

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, if I move to Performance Measures, the department's Performance Measures are on page B-29 of the Budget Book and the results are as follows. The department achieved all of its engagement and activity reporting staff utilisation and continuing professional development outcomes during the year. The number of recommendations issued from audit projects totalling 32 related to remediating identified weaknesses in internal control systems, governance, and/or risk management activities. As a result of follow-up procedures performed, the department recorded 25 management actions, which were implemented by the agreed-upon date. The department issued four audit reports covering operations, financial, and IT systems, and two surprise compliance audit reports for a total of six audit reports issued during the year 2022/23. It is anticipated that the department will issue three audit project reports and three compliance reports by the end of fiscal 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, there were no major policy changes during the year. I will now move into plans for the upcoming year.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, plans for the upcoming year [are] to execute the department's 2024/25 approved audit plan to conduct six audit projects and five compliance reviews [and] to continue to train and develop staff especially the three Bermudian internal audit officers as they work towards obtaining their CISA, which stands for Certified Information Systems Auditor and/or CIA, Certified Internal Auditor, professional qualifications whilst gaining work experience in the internal audit field.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to thank the Department of Internal Audit staff for their commitment and dedication to their duties over the past fiscal year.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Just a reminder that we are in the Committee [of Supply] for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25, and the Minister has just completed his brief on Heads 63 and [85]. Those are Heads 63, 85, and 92.

Minister, go right ahead.

HEAD 98—INFORMATION COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 98, the Information Commissioner's Office found on pages B-30 through B-35 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner is an independent public office established in 2015 and mandated to promote public access to information and oversee compliance with the Public Access to Information Act 2010, or PATI Act. For clarity, the Information Commissioner is a separate office from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner which was established in 2020 and has remit for oversight of the Personal Information Protection Act 2016.

The PATI Act, Mr. Chairman, affords Bermudians and residents the right to make PATI requests for records held by the Government and other public authorities. It also requires the Government and public authorities to make certain information available without

the need to make a PATI request. The purposes of the PATI Act enshrined in section 2 includes to increase transparency and eliminate unnecessary secrecy to the greatest extent possible within the provisions of the Act, increase the accountability of public authorities, and inform the public about the activities and decision-making process of public authorities.

According to the most recent annual national public awareness survey conducted by the Information Commissioner's office in February 2024, Mr. Chairman, 77 per cent of the respondents believed that creating and enforcing the PATI Act represents an important public investment, and 86 per cent believe that the right of access to public records is important to them.

The institution of the Information Commission is an essential part of the PATI Act's framework that safeguards the public's PATI rights. The Information Commissioner's mandate is set forth in Part 6 and Part 7 of the PATI Act. The Information Commissioner promotes public access to information by engaging in public awareness and outreach activities concerning the rights afforded to Bermudians and residents by the PATI Act. The Information Commissioner also provides guidance for and oversight and enforcement of public authorities' compliance with their obligation under the PATI Act. Finally, the Information Commissioner conducts reviews of decisions taken by public authorities under this Act in response to PATI requests, and she issues legally binding decisions when necessary. The mandate of the Information Commission is singularly focused on the compliance of public authorities with the requirements of the PATI Act.

To safeguard the institution's necessary independence, the Information Commissioner is not subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority by virtue of section 50(4) of the PATI Act. The Information Commissioner is, however, subject to accountability through similarly independent institutions. Namely, the accounts of the Office of the Information Commissioner are subject to annual audits by the Auditor General, and the decisions by the Information Commissioner are subject to judicial review by the Supreme Court. The Information Commissioner's 2020/21 audited financial statement was tabled in both Houses of the Legislature in July 2023. The audit of the Information Commissioner's 2021/22 accounts is in progress, and the office is currently preparing the file for the 2022/23 accounts.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner also remains accountable to both Houses of the Legislature through the filing of her annual report. The Information Commissioner's annual report highlights the work of the Information Commissioner's Office, or ICO, during the budget year as well as provides figures from the calendar year for the PATI requests received by public authorities and the disposition of those requests. The Information Commissioner's 2023 Annual Report was tabled in the House of Assembly this morning, 8 March 2024.

I will now move into the expenditure overview, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: That is fine. Go ahead, Minister.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure for 2024/25 allocated to the ICO is estimated to be $1,116,902. I believe the Budget Book would show $1,117,000. It is rounding.

The Chairman: It does.

Hon. Vance Campbell: It represents an increase of $39,168 from the 2023/24 original budget of $1,077,734.

Salaries and Wages

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the amounts for Salaries and Wages for 2024/25 increased by a total of $105,000 when compared to the 2023/24 original budgeted amount of $860,000. As seen on page B-32, there has been an increase of one additional full-time equivalent in the employee numbers in 2024/25. The Information Commissioner's Office currently has eight employees consisting of the Information Commissioner, Acting Deputy Information Commissioner, Senior Investigation Officer, Manager of Finance and Administration, Investigation Officer, two temporary additional Investigation Officers, and a Project Officer. The increase in 2024/25 represents the hiring of an administrative assistant to support the work of the ICO. That is the bulk of that increase.

Mr. Chairman, returning to a comparison of the 2023/24 original budget to the [2024/]25 budget, and we are talking the overall budget. There is a total increase of $39,000. This reflects an increase of $105,000 for Salary and Wages, $5,000 for Travel, $1,000 for Communications, $2,000 for Professional Services, and $5,000 for Other Expenses.

In order to maintain current staffing levels, variation between the 2023/24 original budget to the 2024/25 estimate also includes decreases of $5,000 for Training, $1,000 for Advertising and Promotions, $63,000 for Rentals, $2,000 for Materials and Supplies, and $8,000 for Minor Capital Equipment.

If I could move to current year achievements and plans for the upcoming year, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: You may, Minister. Go right ahead.

Current Year Achievements and Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Vance Campbell: Okay. The performance measures developed for the Office of the Information Commissioner are found on pages B-33 through B-35.

As noted, the Information Commissioner's 2023 Annual Report was tabled this morning in the House of Assembly. The Information Commissioner's 2023 Annual Report highlights the performance and achievements of the Office of the Information Commissioner and represents a summary of plans for the 2024/25 upcoming year.

As required by section 58([2])(e) of the PATI Act, the Information Commissioner's review figures are reported in her 2023 annual report for the calendar year 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. For purposes of the budget debate, however, figures are provided for the 2023/24 budget year to date, 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. To date, the Information Commissioner has received 64 new applications for an independent review, which is an increase of 83 per cent over the 34 new applications received for this period in 2022/23.

The Information Commissioner also anticipates the issuance of approximately 66 formal decisions during the current budget year, which is an increase of 128 per cent over the 29 formal decisions by the Information Commissioner between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. With appropriate staffing levels and adequate resources, the Information Commissioner has reduced the number of backlogged reviews that arose both from external and internal challenges.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner has also completed the 2023 ICO annual return process consisting of an annual review of nearly 200 public authorities' compliance with or requirements of the PATI Act. The Information Commissioner's 2023 Annual Report provides both Houses of the Legislature with information on the number of PATI requests reported by public authorities as well as the disposition of these PATI requests. In the 2023 calendar year, 26 public authorities reported receiving approximately 189 new PATI requests from Bermudians and residents, an increase of 20 per cent over the 158 PATI requests received in the prior calendar year.

In June 2023, the Bermuda ICO was also re-elected to the nine-member executive committee of the International Conference of Information Commissioners for a second term until 2026. The International Conference of Information Commissioners is the only permanent international network of Information Commissioners. Its mission is *To share knowledge and best practices, to build capacity, to help identify what is needed for global progress, and to act as a collective voice in international fora with a view to improving people's rights to public information and their ability to hold to account bodies that provide public functions.* I congratulate the Information Commissioner and her team for this achievement.

Mr. Chairman, the Honourable Members are invited to read the Information Commissioner's 2023 Annual Report to learn more about the highlights and impact of the Information Commissioner's decision notices in 2023.

For the upcoming 2024/25 budget year, the Information Commissioner has prioritised closing the remaining backlog reviews and continuing to improve the ICO review process. The Information Commissioner will also focus on upcoming briefings and programmes for public authorities and the public on building technical capacity to support the efficient administration of the PATI Act. The ICO will continue to promote awareness of the rights under the PATI Act particularly for individuals who may be less familiar with their rights through its events, publications, and outreach.

Finally, the past and future accomplishments of the ICO are only achieved through the efforts and dedication of the accomplished public officers within the office. In 2024/25, the Information Commissioner will continue to focus on the retention, training, and professional growth of its highly skilled and dedicated public officers.

With that, I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. You can carry on. You can go right ahead.

Hon. Vance Campbell: The Information Commissioner. I now move on to the Head 101, the Privacy Commissioner.

The Chairman: That is fine. Go ahead, Minister.

HEAD 101—PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget for Head 101, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Bermuda found on pages B-36 through B-40 of the Budget Book.

Mission and Mandate

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Privacy Commission is *To protect the rights of individuals in relation to their personal information.*

Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Privacy Commissioner is *To take responsibility for monitoring how the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 is administered to ensure its purposes are achieved.* The Commissioner is empowered to regulate the use of personal information by organisations so that such use is in a manner that recognises both the need to protect the rights of individuals in relation to their personal information and the need for organisations to use personal information for legitimate purposes.

Mr. Chairman, the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 (the Act) was assented on 27 July 2016. Sections relating to the appointment of the Privacy Commissioner were enacted on 2 December 2016, including the creation of the office as well as those duties and powers relevant to its operation in the period leading up the implementation of the whole Act. It is now being announced that the Act will come into

full effect on 1 January 2025. And I want to repeat that for the public.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: The date for the Act coming into full effect is 1 January 2025.

And as I have stated before, we cannot wait (like some of us do at Christmas or on a birthday) running into the store at the last minute to buy a package that will help us with being compliant the next day. So, reach out to the Privacy Commissioner and his office, and let's get ready starting now.

The Chairman: In a timely manner.

Hon. Vance Campbell: In a timely manner.

The Act will apply to every organisation that uses personal information in Bermuda where that personal information is used wholly or partly to form a part of a structural filing system whether that system is automated or manual.

The Office of the Privacy Commission began active set-up on 20 January 2020 with the hiring of Bermuda's first Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Alexander White. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner is an independent non-Ministry office, and the Act requires that in the exercise of his functions, the Commissioner shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority. We have heard that a lot, and that is the common theme in the heads that we have been reading on and bringing to light this afternoon.

The Act will require the Commissioner to submit an annual report of operations to each House of the Legislature. The accounts of the Commissioner's Office shall be audited annually independently of the Consolidated Fund and reported on by the Auditor General of Bermuda. These are some of the reports which hold the Privacy Commissioner accountable without another person or authority exercising influence on the office's operation.

Mr. Chairman, the Act empowers individuals to control what is done with their personal information and to protect themselves and their families from cyber risks and harms. The Act and the work of the Privacy Commissioner will bolster Bermuda's international reputation as a trusted regulatory environment consistent with international standards and encourage businesses to place faith in Bermuda as a safe harbour for modern digital commerce. The legal and regulatory framework of the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 is essential to enable innovation to thrive in Bermuda.

Throughout the past year, the commissioner has held workshops or events to educate the public and business community on the rights and responsibilities of the Act both virtually and in person. A focused data privacy week in January spotlighted the upcoming "Road to PIPA." The Commissioner has actively released guidance for organisations to better understand the obligations that the Act imposes as well as awareness publications for individuals to better understand their rights under the Act. More details including the guide to PIPA, releases, announcements, and reports may be found at the Commissioner's website, www.privacy.bm.

The Privacy Commissioner has engaged with international counterparts to enhance Bermuda's standing on the international stage as a regulatory leader. In addition to successfully attaining accreditation for Bermuda as a full member of the Global Privacy Assembly of data privacy regulators, Commissioner White has, since January 2022, served on the body's seven-member executive committee to guide the strategic direction of privacy regulators around the world and support enforcement cooperation across borders. The Privacy Commissioner's work will ensure that his office's guidance and actions are consistent with international standards and best practices and will increase Bermuda's voice in setting those global standards.

In October 2023, the Privacy Commissioner hosted the 2023 Global Privacy Assembly summit of data privacy regulators. This event drew hundreds of regulatory leaders and technology executives from over 130 countries.

Mr. Chairman, I will now move into the Expenditure Overview.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-36 of the Budget Book, the office has been allocated a budget for 2024/25 of $2,130,000, an overall net increase of $269,000 when compared to the original budget for 2023/24.

Rentals for 2024/25 of $113,000, which is shown as line item 8 on page B-37, is $5,000 more than the 2023/24 original budget of $108,000.

The office will use $25,000 for its information communications technology infrastructure, line item 5—an overall net increase of $8,000 compared to the original budget for 2023/24. This increase in funding reflects additional information communications technology support for human resources and technical security and functionality.

The office will use $100,000 (that's line item 6 for Advertising and Promotion) associated with the Road to PIPA campaign. This funding reflects the need to hold events, develop digital and real-world advertising campaigns and engage technical experts in order to raise awareness in the community and prepare organisations, small and large, for the requirements of the Act.

Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for full-time staff shown on page B-37 of the Budget Book is for 14 full-time equivalent positions. This number remains unchanged from 2023/24. The total salary allocated to

these positions is $1,577,000. And that is, Mr. Chairman, a decrease of $20,000 over the original estimate for 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, the senior positions established for 2024/25 in the office are the commissioner, the deputy commissioner, assistant commissioner for operations, assistant commissioner for policy and communication, assistant commissioner for investigations and assistant commissioner for innovations.

The Commissioner will continue to evaluate the most efficient use of full-time employees to fully meet the office's statutory mandate and to serve the people of Bermuda. It is expected that the office will need legal advice as the Act comes into force.

Mr. Chairman, the analysis of current account estimate is found in the Budget Book on page B-37. The allocated budget estimate for the Privacy Commissioner to complete his mandate, as previously stated, is $2,130,000 for the fiscal year 2024/25. After the expenses for rent, communications and staffing (as described previously) there remains a budget allocation of $415,000 for operations to accomplish the following purposes:

1. Support for the community as a whole, including compliance support for businesses and governmental organisations, particularly to support small and medium-sized enterprises. The Commissioner will continue to develop policy guidance, codes of practice, templates and other materials and will host educational forums and undertake other expenses as deemed necessary.
2. Provide additional support for individual Bermudians who wish to economically empower themselves through skills training to become a privacy officer. The Commissioner will work with schools and community groups to provide guidance to job seekers, boosting their employment prospects and providing the business community with a talented Bermudian workforce to meet their privacy goals.
3. Further help individuals to understand their privacy rights under the Act. The Commissioner will educate individuals on privacy as a human right and investigate complaints those individuals may have about how organisations use their data.

Mr. Chairman, these operational expenses outside of those mentioned include:

- $23,000 for staff professional fees. And this is training and associated travel, as well. And these can be found on line items 2, 3 and 4;
- $100,000 for advertising and promotion, which is shown on line 6;
- $214,000 for security professional services, and that is line item 7;
- $38,000 for repairs and maintenance, line item 9;
- $12,000 for energy needs, line item 10; and finally
- $28,000 for materials and supplies, equipment and other expenses, line items 11 and 12.

Mr. Chairman, the Privacy Commissioner is committed to responsible use of public funds. Throughout the fiscal year 2024/25, the Commissioner will assess the needs of the office and make any additional funds requested to the Ministry of Finance to ensure that the mandate of the office will be met.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Vance Campbell: If we look at capital expenditure, Mr. Chairman, the capital expenditure allocation for the office is found on page C-9 of the Budget Book and is $18,000 for the fiscal year period 2024/25. These funds have been allocated to purchase office and technological equipment for staff.

I will turn now to [performance] measures, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Performance Measures

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, the Performance Measures for the Office of the Privacy Commissioner are found in the Budget Book on pages B-38 through B-40. In 2024/25, the Privacy Commissioner will engage in new initiatives related to implementing the Act, enabling human rights and supporting innovation and safe technological practices in the business community.

The office's operations business unit will engage in initiatives to develop the operational maturity of the office, enhancing compliance functions and processes regarding various statutory requirements relating to finances, annual reports, access to information, and other business operations. This unit will implement a mediation and an alternative dispute resolution process for resolving, both formally and informally, issues related to complaints and potential violations of the Act.

Mr Chairman, the Office's Policy & Communications Unit will undertake initiatives related to community awareness and education and to creating guidance on compliance with the Act. Additionally, the Commissioner's Office will publish guidance publications and conduct workshops or events to educate the public on the Act. The public will be given specific guidance on how to implement various sections of the Act.

The Office's [Innovation] Unit will engage in initiatives related to constructive, proactive regulation. With the anticipated implementation of the Act, this unit will respond to individual complaints, generate own-initiative actions, draft compliance orders, and undertake sectoral and/or industry surveys. The Office's Innovation Unit will continue the work of the Privacy Innovation and Knowledge sharing (or Pink) Sandbox to support

businesses engaged in innovative uses of data and personal information.

Mr. Chairman, in October 2023, Bermuda welcomed the technology world to our country as digital leaders attended the Global Privacy Assembly summit of data privacy regulators. We showed the world the beauty and suitability of Bermuda as a jurisdiction for technological and business success while protecting human rights. The office engaged in various tasks to prepare for and support this event. Since funding for this event was not an item in the financial year 2023/24 budget, the office engaged sponsors from the local and international community. The Commissioner will continue to advise Government on the Act and provide recommendations as to how its provisions will become operational on January 1, 2025.

Mr. Chairman, bringing the Personal Information Protection Act into operation is of vital importance to protect Bermuda and her people from a variety of online, financial, or even physical harms. We, as a community, must each ask hard questions, such as whether the use or misuse of personal information could lead to

- stalking, harassment, or physical assault;
- identity theft or financial hardship;
- discrimination or disadvantage or loss of opportunity, liberty, or other social detriment.

In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, the Privacy Commissioner would like to encourage all companies and other organisations that use personal information to join them on the Road to PIPA.

Each week for most of 2024, the Commissioner's Office will provide templates and bite-size instructions to the community to help organisations to prepare for January 1, 2025. They should not wait but should start their preparations now. As part of their preparations, organisations should ask simple questions to map out their use of information systems such as:

- What data are we storing?
- For what purpose is the data being used?
- Do we even need the information we hold to accomplish our business purposes?

By cataloguing their data assets and eliminating unnecessary data, organisations will reduce the risk of harm to individuals and make their compliance with the Act even easier.

Mr. Chairman, the Privacy Commissioner is inspired to bring the Act into full bloom for Bermuda and her people to ensure that personal information is appropriately protected and used legitimately. We call on the community to join on the Road to PIPA.

Mr. Chairman, this brings me to the end of my brief on the Office of the Privacy Commissioner's budget. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman. It also brings to a close the briefs for the non-ministries. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

Members, we continue in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Ministers have just completed their overview of Heads 1, 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to any of these heads?

I recognise the Honourable Member, Mr. Craig Cannonier.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I know we are getting past that time now.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Everyone is looking out.

What I would like to first start out by saying amongst the non-ministry departments is thank you to all of the staff, just as the Premier had stood up to thank the staff. I mean, these are pretty much independent ministries that seek out really to be the foundation of much of what we do here in Bermuda and as legislators. So, it is not always a pretty job for them, but I believe they have been doing a successful job thus far and, quite frankly, for many of them, under financial restraints. So we are getting a good bang for our buck out of these ministries. So I just want to thank the staff for that.

Just as a housekeeping measure—

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: —I believe the Premier . . . there were some numbers that were slightly different for the Governor and Staff. There were some slightly different numbers. Hopefully, we make that change because if it is pushed over to Senate, then they may be reading some slightly different numbers as well.

The Chairman: And you are working on Head 1, correct?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Head—

The Chairman: At the moment.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: That is correct.

The Chairman: Okay, that is fine.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Head 1.

The Chairman: Under Governor and Staff.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, that is correct.

The Chairman: Go right ahead.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: That is correct.

So again, thank you. I also recognise for the non-ministries it is difficult for any Minister to answer these questions because they are independent bodies. So some of the questions I ask, essentially I am asking them just to forward them on.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: And they can get those questions back to us. So thank you very much.

What I will do is start off with Head 1, under Governor and Staff. I was just curious as the Premier had gone through and he mentioned some changes coming up considering the Governor potentially leaving. But he did say on the side that he did not know when that would be. I know she has extended her time, but he was not quite sure exactly of that time.

If I go over to . . . let me just look at my question here. On page [C-26], we see that rent is $312,000. What I was curious of is if the Governor is doing business out of the new location or is that kind of just the residence and then business is being done in the original Governor's house? Or is business being done at the new location? Additionally, understanding that where the Deputy Governor lives is slightly different, I was curious as to whether or not the Deputy Governor also was operating out of the Governor's new residence.

There was some talk before . . . and the reason I am asking that question is I know there was talk before about the statement being said that for security reasons we were not releasing the address of the residence. But if they are doing business out of there then it is pretty much public knowledge. And has there been a reconsideration as to letting people know where the Governor's new residence is so that the public has the opportunity to go there and conduct business? So I would like to know that.

On page C-4, the capital development was about $2.6 million. The Premier did answer the question—that it was roof and water issues—but also mentioned the Governor would have had to leave residence to get this work done anyhow. So my question is: With the $2.6 million, are we anticipating getting that work done within the fiscal year knowing that we are talking about a roof that has to be replaced? It was a building that was built back in 1892, so it would fall under the strict guidance of, you know, having to replace it back as it was, and sometimes trying to do that is not always an easy task. So, just curious as to whether or not that would take much of the year to get work done up there.

I will go over to the performance measures on page B-9. On the performance measures on page B-9, under business unit 11000, seven items down, it says, Number of weekly conferences with senior staff of the Bermuda Police Service. And this was a new initiative put in last year, I believe, or the year before last. What I see here is, if we look at the original forecast, it was 40, but then the revised amount is 24 and of course the target outcome again is back to 40. If we could find out what difficulty the Governor was having potentially of not being able to meet the original forecast of 40. What were the challenges there? It might have been the building. I do not know. But if we could find out from the Governor exactly what was going on. That is pretty much half of what was intended to happen. Why were they not able to have the senior staff meetings with Police Service?

Also, the next item down, Number of quarterly meetings with the Auditor General, again the original forecast is four. And if the revised amount is correct—just two—why was that . . . understanding the Auditor General's position and the job that they do being important, why is that half the amount?

Also, if you continue five items down below the one I just mentioned, Number of periodic scheduled parish visits. And I was curious about these parish visits. The original forecast is nine. You can see the revised amount is only two. And this Book probably would have been printed about a month ago, so it is pretty low there. Why was that not accomplished as would have been preferred? And exactly what are these parish visits? What are they like? Exactly what is the Governor doing with these parish visits? And with whom is the Governor actually meeting?

I will say that under this head and the further heads that I will be going through, as I mentioned, I do not have a whole lot of questions other than . . . I know that the Ministers are not able to answer too many questions. But these numbers are pretty static. As you saw the substantive Ministers going through, they are pretty static. They are pretty much the same year after year after year. And one of the general things I did see was that some of them are doing more advertising than others—quite frankly, quite more than others. And I would have thought that for some of these heads, they would have spent more time getting to the public and letting the public know exactly what it is that they are doing.

I am going to move over to Head 2, Legislature. And again, I want to thank the staff and the team members who come into this House and the Senate that comes on a regular basis—fantastic job to the point that even you keep us well-fed and the like in these sometimes long sessions. But again, I believe that the team is doing a fantastic job. Under the mission statement, *To facilitate parliamentary oversight and administrative support for a parliament that is responsive to the people of Bermuda.* It appears that we are still having challenges with streaming sometimes, and I do not know if there is a fix to that or not. At one time it is consistent then another time it drops out, with the radio as well. And I was just curious, is that something on our side? Or is it on the radio station's side? We could probably become a bit more consistent with that. Just curious if that can be done.

I did ask the question, when will it be likely . . . the general statement of the Premier on page B-10.

When are we likely to move back up the hill? I thought it was this upcoming year. But it does not . . . It does not look like it is going to be this upcoming year. So I am anticipating probably sometime in 2026, we will be getting back up on the hill so that we can enjoy the amenities that are there as opposed to here.

The other question was for this head. Just curious about the cyberattack and whether or not the House of Assembly is back up and fully functioning. It would be nice to know whether or not they are still having some challenges. It appears as if we are back up and running. But are we still having some challenges since the cyberattack? And are we fully restored?

The Chairman: Under Head 2 under Legislature. Go right ahead, Shadow Minister.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Under Head 2 under Legislature.

I am going to move over to Head 5.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: The Auditor General. The last question that I just asked, a similar question there as to the Auditor General: Were they actually affected by the cyberattack and are they at full capacity at this time?

I want to move over to page B-15 under revenue. And it was not really clear as to the explanation here under revenue source. We can see 2023/24 at $828,000 and these are audit fees. The revised amount is $447,000. But if you look at the estimate, it is $581,000. There certainly is a fall back there. If we could get clarification on exactly . . . that is a big loss in revenue quite frankly. And if we could get a little more information concerning the challenges behind that.

The Premier did explain about the employees and the full-time equivalents, so we got the answer to that.

The Chairman: The Shadow Minster continues on Head 5, under the Auditor General. Are you still on page B-15?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I am going to move to page B-16.

The Chairman: Okay. That's fine.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I am going to move to page B-16 and under business unit 15000, Audit, the second item there, Number of financial statement reviews completed. If you look at the original amount, and the target outcome, it is drastically . . . it is quite different. Now, the revised amount is at 16 and so I am not sure exactly what was going on there as to the uptick of 2023/24 or whether that 16 still needs to be revised. But the target outcome is half of that. So I would be curious as to what exactly happened there.

I will move over to Head 56, under Human Rights Commission, on page B-17 under the department objectives, To inquire into and investigate Human Rights related complaints of discrimination and harassment. I am just curious as we looked at harassment legislation here in the House. Are there any consistencies that we are seeing or trends that we are seeing in these particular human rights that the Human Rights Commission is experiencing more prevalent than others? If they could give us an idea of what is happening with the types of complaints that they are receiving. And does there seem to be a trend so we can address that?

Under salaries, it says that the increase in jobs was $135,000. We did get an answer for that. But under professional services . . . I actually missed part of the answer to that, and I believe the Premier . . . No. Who said this one? The Human Rights Commission . . . it was that web development had occurred as a new opportunity, so they were able to draw back on the professional services. I think that is what the Minister was saying, yes? Okay. Got it. Got it. Got it. I guess the question there as far as the professional service was concerned is: Was it one contractor or two contractors [for] $150,000—that is a good savings there. So it is nice to see that we are using innovation to actually help in that area.

I will move on to . . . hang on a second . . . I will move on to Head 63, the Parliamentary Registrar. If we go to page B-20 there, under business unit 73010, General and Bye Elections, we can see a relatively healthy $91,000 increase there. And the Minister was talking about election preparation and the like. I was just curious as to . . . the last time we saw a jump like this here was in the 2020 budget. We had an election in 2020.

The Chairman: We did. We did.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: So this is not the first time . . . I am not suggesting that this one . . . but there is a suggestion here that we are going back to this $251,000, which is what we saw back in 2020. It may be an indication that we might be heading toward something, not necessarily in 2025/26 but maybe in 2024/25.

I was also curious because we seem to be having some challenges at times with the Parliamentary Registrar getting things updated especially when we bring in the death certificates and the like. It still seems to be a long time before this registrar is updated. So I do not know if there is a way to streamline this process, but it would be nice to find out from how we could get this done a lot quicker, especially when elections are being called. And I see the increase there. I want to make sure that we get these numbers [for] these folks right.

The Parliamentary Registrar, as well. I would like to know whether or not they are fully operational since the cyberattack and if they are having any challenges. Certainly, with an election potentially coming up

and our preparation for it, it would be nice to know whether or not they are working at full capacity.

I must say it was pleasant to see under Advertising and Promotion on page B-21, under Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, that advertising is one of the areas of these non-ministries that have a healthy amount of $121,000 for the estimate for 2024/25. But in relation to business unit 73010, General/Bye Elections, I would have thought that when the Minister said that the increased amount for general elections has gone up because of a potential election that the advertising and promotion would have gone up as well, getting people prepared and getting people ready. So maybe the Minister can ask if they are seeking to increase that. Or do they believe that is enough for an election for this upcoming budget year?

I have already spoken about employee numbers, so I am fine there.

Under Performance Measures on page B-22, business unit 73000, Administration, Voter registrations updated per total population. We are up to 50 per cent here for our target outcome, but if you look at the original amounts, it was at 25 per cent. Maybe that is due to the upcoming election. I don't know. It is 50 per cent. It is double the amount. Why is it double the amount? Because to me, that particular one would certainly suggest an election coming up.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I will move over to Head 85, Ombudsman's Office. Head 85, Dispute resolution.

The Chairman: You notice that no one is picking up the phone.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: If you must, Shadow Minister. Carry on. No one is picking up their phone.

Carry on, Shadow Minister.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Head 85, Ombudsman's Office. Again, these guys do a fantastic job. And I must say that it is not always easy in these non-ministries sometimes, especially when it comes to dispute resolutions. The numbers there really are pretty static. I really do not have any issues there. But if we look at the performance measures under Head 85 on page B-25, there are a lot of discontinued performance measures. I was just curious if the Minister could find out at some point why we . . . I mean, literally, it almost looks as if three quarters of the performance measures are discontinued. So there seems to be a change in structure in how they are administering their responsibilities. Just curious as to why there were so many within this particular area.

I will move on to Head 92.

The Chairman: There are about 20, about 22 minutes left. But carry on.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Is it?

The Chairman: It is.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay. Like I said, I am just really looking for the office of the non-ministries to answer because I know it is difficult for the Ministers for this here. So, I am fine with that.

Under Head 92, Internal Audit. I was very curious. This is to provide a professional environment that fosters and promotes (this is under department objectives) an ethical culture for those individuals in the profession of internal auditing. And in the second bullet point, the last part says, Resources are used economically and efficiently. I was just curious if there has been a common concern across all audits being done, like consistency in some challenges, so that we know there is a direction that we need to go in to help people get educated on processes and the like, so that we do not fall in any particular area.

I took note on the very bottom of page B-27 that there was this $115,000. If you look at the general summary, business unit 102000, Administration, it was mentioned that this $115,000 had to do with the loss of a member of staff. And again, as you are listening sometimes . . . I may have gotten it wrong. I think that was what was said. So, I guess I was curious when I looked at the employee numbers. On page B-28, if you look at the employee full-time equivalent, the original was 10. The estimate now is 9. That means we have one less employee there. But if you look at the revised amount, I was not quite sure what that meant—the 6. And sometimes these still need to be updated. We know. So I will be curious [to see] the following year what the actual amounts are there. So, if we can get a little more on that.

On page B-29 . . . I am just moving quickly through here. Under Performance Measures, at the very bottom, you will see it says, Number of Surprise Compliance to Financial Instructions reports issued for Cash/Purchase Orders. I do not know what that is. What is a surprise compliance?

The Chairman: That would be Head 92, Internal Audit under page B-29.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: My apologies. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go ahead. That's okay. Go ahead.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: What is a surprise compliance? It is an odd term because it goes further on to say, reports issued for Cash/Purchase Orders. Is it sometimes that they are looking . . . is it a surprise audit? It is odd to say, *surprise compliance*.

An Hon. Member: Surprise!

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Surprise! Yes.

And when you look, the original forecast was at 5. The revised amount is 3. So we are back up to 5. If the Minister could find out where we are with that.

I am going to move over to page B-30, Head 98, Information Commissioner's Office. And I go back to the original question of the others. Are they fully up from the cyberattack? This is a pretty important area here, so it would be nice to know whether or not they are operating at full capacity.

On page B-31, there was a slight difference in the number in totals there under the general summary of $1,117,000. And I missed what that original amount was. If the Minster . . . I know he can answer that one. If the Minster could go back and tell me what that figure was, because that is another area where we may have to make an adjustment because when it goes to the Senate . . . You want to answer it?

Hon. Vance Campbell: Can I just ask for clarification? I did not quite get that question.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh. Okay. Yes. Under the total amount for the 2024/25 estimate, in the general summary. We are in Head 98, Information Commissioner's Office. I believe you mentioned a slightly different number than the total under the 2024/25 estimate of $1,117,000. I am pretty sure there was a slightly different number. And there could be a reason for it. It might have been rounding up or something like that.

Hon. Vance Campbell: I believe . . .

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. So this is a rounded-up number here.

Hon. Vance Campbell: That is a rounding.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay. Thank you. Answer the questions as we go!

The Chairman: Great. There are about 10 minutes left.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay. I am going to skip over to page C-28.

The Chairman: I'm wrong.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Everything all right?

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, allow me to make a correction. I apologise. The debate should finish at 8:09 pm.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh. Okay. I will go back then.

The Chairman: I do not know why I thought 7:49 pm. I apologise for that. Please, continue.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh, man.

The Chairman: That does not necessarily mean that one should absorb all the rest of the time. The Minister is waiting with bated breath.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: All right. I will go back to, with your indulgence, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Go right ahead. Go on. You have been given another 20 minutes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Yes. Yes. Under Head 98, Information Commissioner's Office, there was talk about PATI requests and the like under Performance Measures. I was just writing down, listening to the Minister, that there were 189, and the prior year was 150. But he also mentioned they were reducing the backlog. I was just curious as to why they experienced a backlog. Was it because they did not have enough finances to get through? Or was there was just an over . . . did they not anticipate a high number of requests? But how are they working through that reduced backlog? It would be interesting to hear the answer to that.

If I go to page C-28, under Rental. Bear with me while I get there. Under page C-28, the . . . I'm on the wrong page. Page C-28, under, of course, Head 98 and 101, Information Commissioner/Privacy Commissioner Offices, you will see that the rent was $141,025, and it is [now] a whopping $260,000. I would gather to think that this is a mistake, quite frankly, and that it is probably far less than that. Can the Minister look into that because it really does not make any sense, especially that kind of increase? There has to be an explanation for that. And I would not accept the fact that we would even entertain that kind of increase within the budget year. So if the Minister can probably find out what happened with the rent there. And then if it is changed, we need to ensure that the total amount under Estimates [for] 2024/25 is also adjusted to the correct amount.

And just as another note from another discussion, under Public Works, there were some changes that needed to be made as well. So I am hoping to see those corrections before they go to the Senate so it does not have to be highlighted there, Mr. Chairman. Hopefully that can be done by the end of this debate on Monday.

The Chairman: So noted.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you.

That's it. I will allow any other colleagues if they have any questions.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Shadow Minister.

I recognise the Honourable Member Mr. Scott Pearman. Mr. Pearman, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Good evening, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to my honourable colleague, Craig Cannonier, for allowing me a little bit of time.

I have three very quick questions. One really was for you, Mr. Chairman, and I think MP Cannonier covered it. When we were addressing the figures for Governor and Staff, the Budget Book did not gel with the Premier's statement. We did question it. Having then conferred with Mr. Cannonier, it appears it really does not gel. It was not just a rounding up. So perhaps if somebody could just look at that before [it goes to] the Senate. That is point one.

Point two. Again, just as quick. On the office of the Auditor General, the Honourable Premier indicated that he received a letter from the Auditor General. I am not going to trespass upon that letter, but the gist of it was that she did ask for more revenue than was being allocated. He spoke to certain capital allocations in relation to computers that he might—might—I think his words concede . . . But I would just generally say that this is an extremely important integrity institution in Bermuda and the numbers between the current budget amount and the amount being requested, as I understand it from the Auditor General, are not that far apart. And it would be great to really ensure that she and her office are funded in the proper way.

Third and finally, this is under Head 85, Ombudsman's Office. I know that for quite a while probably under both governments or all three governments perhaps, the Ombudsman has been making a special plea for better legislative teeth. And I was just going to raise that plea again in this format to remind everyone that this has been a constant call from the Ombudsman.

Those are the only three points I have for the Honourable Ministers (plural) who are carrying this brief on this side.

The Chairman: That would have been under Ombudsman's Office, pages B-23 and B-24.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Correct.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. That is all I have.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

I recognise the Honourable Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I will do my best to answer the questions that were raised by the Honourable Member from constituency 12, MP Cannonier, who asked a number of questions about Government House.

At the beginning of his presentation he conceded that we may not have all the answers as these are non-ministry departments and asked if they could relay them so at least they could come back. On the matter related to Government House, we will inquire about matters related to the parish meetings. Regarding performance measures, we will inquire about the matters related to the conferences with the police. And certainly, we will inquire about meetings with the Auditor General, as those particular matters were raised.

I know there were questions about rent, and that was, I think, stated and covered in the brief. In regard to the temporary residence, I made sure I made it clear that whether or not the work was taking place this year, two years ago, next year or all the rest, the place would have to be vacated in order to ensure that the roof changing can actually happen as it is significant work. And I think the roof has not been changed in about 50 years, the last time that was done.

I know there was a question about Government House and all the rest. Just to note that, of course, people do not just show up to Government House to do business. Clearly, they either have official business or they are invited to attend. It is not just open for that particular purpose.

In regard to the question about the work that is supposed to be taking place with Government House and which work could be done this year and all the rest, preparatory work can be done this year. It is being done. For instance, [it] lays with Planning, as it is a listed building. So, there are little bit more restrictions that go along with that. Preparation of drawing specs as well as Planning permission for electrical, roofing and window repairs [that] are required. So this work has started. There were a number of discussions in the UK and others regarding this.

The Government of Bermuda does retain full responsibility for the upkeep of Government House under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Bermuda and the government of the United Kingdom, even though of course it is a residence of the United Kingdom. But of course, Bermuda's advanced constitutional relationship (unlike other jurisdictions) means that we pay all expenses for the Governor and Deputy Governor as it is.

I do note, moving on to the Legislature, there are questions about continued challenges with streaming. I do not particularly have answers for that, but I am sure that the officers listening can provide the Honourable Member with the answers.

In regard to the question related to the cyberattack, I will of course remind the Honourable Member that, although it might not have been under the most ideal circumstances, the House did meet the day after the cyberattack and we did make sure that we—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: I accept that. Let me finish. My Lord, you are kind of feisty there.

The House did meet. However—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, you are hangry? That is what it is?

The Legislature is on the government network on some matters, so there were certainly computers that were impacted in addition to the fact of some matters that were impacted. Insofar as the remediation work, the Legislature was a primary department such as the head shed of Government, et cetera, just to make sure that those matters could be resolved as quickly as possible. But to my understanding, all things are back and running, but Members can certainly confirm.

Moving on to the Auditor General, I just want to make sure that I provide clarity because MP Pearman said something. I did not receive a letter from the Auditor General, just so we are clear. In the process I explained in the brief, there was a request that comes from the Committee of the [Office of the] Auditor [General]. When that request was examined and the formula that we use for funding for departments that have significant underspend in previous years, that was applied. I made sure to inform the Auditor General, as a basis for the Finance Ministry's change, in the matters of which we set out. So [I] made sure that communication was sent.

Insofar as the question that was asked in regard to whether or not additional funds may or may not be found, those things may happen. But the tradition is . . . and this is just a challenge with departments such as the Auditor General, departments such as the Registrar of Companies, departments such as the Accountant General's office, departments such as Chambers. The fact is that the assumption that we will be able to hold on to all the positions very rarely bears out because, as we explained, people do move on to the private sector, and typically all those salary funds are not used. And so from that basis, it is irresponsible or challenging to allocate funding that will most likely not be used when that funding could be used in other places and areas where we know it is needed and will be used.

So, that was the basis for that. But as I said (and I spoke with the Chairman of the Committee of [the Office of] the Auditor [General]) if there are any particular matters that do arise, I am happy to go ahead and consider that. Because one place that we will agree on, the Auditor General's office does carry out an important function, and we want to ensure that they are able to exercise that function.

I do not have a response in regard to the effect of the cyberattack. I am not entirely certain if they are on the government network or not, so I cannot particularly answer that question. But I will try to advise.

I will share the comments from the brief in regard to revenue going down. I think that is probably an issue of cash because, you know, budgets are done on a cash basis. And I know there were some matters regarding back payment, but I will happily share on the matters related to the particular brief there.

I think that is it. I think there was one [on] outcomes, which I do not have because I do not have a response from the Auditor General on those particular matters.

I do know that the Honourable Ministers will also address . . . but I do have one note just on the matter that you raised in regard to the Department of Internal Audit. There was a question regarding surprise compliance. And just for clarity, some examples of surprise compliance would be showing up at the DPT [Department of Public Transportation] terminal and conducting a cash and ticket reconciliation for a day, or a few days, unannounced. So it is just surprise compliance checks throughout government. It literally is just to make sure that everything is going okay.

I am happy to defer to the other Ministers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Premier.

I recognise the Honourable Minister, Tinee Furbert.

Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am going to answer the two questions that were posed this evening by MP Cannonier. One of the questions was about the types of complaints that were received through the Human Rights Commission that were more prevalent than others.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Human Rights Commission is in the process of preparing the annual report which does share the extent of the types of complaints that the Human Rights Commission receives. But looking back to the reported stats since 2018, this is now the sixth straight year where the protected grounds of race, place of origin, colour, ethnic or national origins, section 2(2)(a)(ii) of the Act for sex, and section 2(2)(a)(iiiA) disabilities have been featured among the three most identified protected grounds with the reporting period. So that is sex, disability and national origin.

The percentage of intakes received by ground of discrimination in 2023 for categories of race at 12 per cent; place of origin, 18 per cent; colour, 3 per cent; ethnic or national origin, 5 per cent; sex, 19 per cent; sexual orientation, 2 per cent; marital status, 2 per cent; disability, 11 per cent; family status, 10 per cent, pregnancy, 4 per cent; religion, 5 per cent; beliefs,

1 per cent; criminal record, 8 per cent; and age, 2 per cent.

As far as clarification for the professional services, it was mentioned in the brief in regard to web development that it was a one-off web development project. This was related to the enhancement of the Human Rights Commission website which is human-rights.bm to feature pages and functionality for members of the public to log a complaint via the website which integrates with their case management system which was launched in 2022. Further website enhancements were completed for the Selection and Appointment Committee and the Human Rights Tribunal. There was also a decreased reliance on professional communication services. I believe that was one contract when it came to the web development.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

Any other . . . Minister, anything further?

I recognise the Honourable Minister Vance Campbell.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Yes. Just in general, there was a common question around the provision of IT services and whether there were any major interruptions.

What I can say is the information that we receive on a regular basis from IDT does not indicate that any of these non-ministries are suffering from any major IT issues. However, you know, I can say there may be some lingering minor issues that are being worked out. As the Opposition would appreciate, we started targeting the major issues first and are working down to the less critical issues. So whilst I can confidently say there are no major issues, there may be some lingering minor issues that some of these non-ministries are suffering with from an IT perspective.

The other area that I can provide some answers . . . the Premier did steal some of my answers and answered some of them that I did have. But in the area of the Parliamentary Registrar I can report that registration updates for deaths are done on a daily basis according to the *Royal Gazette* and monthly Registry General's reports.

Again, they report from their network system. After the cyberattack, that is not fully stable, but IDT is aware of the need for stability. So there are some minor issues to do with stability, especially as, you know, we have critical information from an election perspective there—from a promotions perspective. And I think this question was around advertising and promotion.

Perhaps my counterpart is like me and is not really a big social media person. But there is a greater use and reliance on communication through social media, which is a [much] cheaper avenue. So that would minimise the increase in a budget for advertising when it comes . . . it is a lot cheaper than newspaper and radio are. And the Registrar begins preparations for an election at least one year out. And given the recent history of not going to full term, it is not unusual that they may begin now with the anticipation of an election being called earlier than the February 2026 date.

There is only person in Bermuda who really knows when the next election will be, and I am not that person.

[Laughter]

Hon. Vance Campbell: All the other questions that were asked, we will endeavour to go to the various non-ministries and get answers for those questions.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. That is fine. That is great.

Any other Member wishes to speak to any of these Heads?

There are none.

Ministers have completed . . . go ahead Minister.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 1, 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 1, 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101 be approved.

Is there any objection to the motion?

No objection.

So moved.

[Motion carried: Non-Ministries Heads 1, 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2024/25.]

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

It has been moved that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There is no objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Members.

[Gavel]

The Chairman: I now ask for the Speaker of the House to take over from here.

House resumed at 7:59 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Speaker: Good evening, Members.

Are there any objections to the House rising, reporting progress and seeking leave to sit again?

There are none. Thank you.

That brings us to a close, in particular for our listening audience, of the proceedings on today's Budget Debate.

We will now move on to the other items on the Order Paper. We have two Bills that are going to be done tonight, both Bills in the name of the Minister of Finance. The first is the second reading of the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024.

Premier, I am going to allow you to come forward and then ask for what you want to do with the two and then we will move from there.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I work with a whole lot here, so I am going to take your guidance and that of the designate Deputy Clerk. As these two Bills are related, I am going to ask for permission to move that the Bills entitled the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024 and the Bill entitled the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024 be both read the second time jointly (as they are both related) so that I may be able to give a brief on both the Bills so that we can move into Committee to dispense with the business in a more efficient manner.

The Speaker: And just to assist you, Premier, for the clarity of the House and those listening, both Bills will be done at the same time. When we go to Committee, we will go to Committee once. And whilst in Committee we will deal with both Bills separately in a sense, but all in one sitting in Committee.

We thank the House for their indulgence and, Premier, you may proceed.

BILLS

SECOND READINGS

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) ACT 2024

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) (NO. 2) ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Bills before this House are the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024, [and the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024]. These Bills introduce new regulatory fees be levied on all entities on Bermuda's corporate register in respect of which the Registrar of Companies has regulatory and supervisory compliance oversight.

And just for the knowledge of Members here (and also the listening public), we did certainly debate these matters related to the fees during last year's Budget Debate and the budget session, which I will touch on a little bit further.

Mr. Speaker, the first Bill confers power on the Registrar of Companies to introduce the regulatory fees and that were tabled under the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act [1975] to be levied on all entities on Bermuda's corporate register in respect of which it has regulatory and supervisory compliant oversight. I will refer to them as the first and second Bill as I am going through the brief, Mr. Speaker.

The second Bill before the House [Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024] amends the Companies Act 1981, the Limited Liability Company Act 2016, the Limited Partnership Act 1883, the Exempted Partnerships Act 1992, the Overseas Partnerships Act 1995 and the Government Fees Regulations 1976 in order to detail the manner in which the regulatory fees that are created in the first Bill [Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024] are payable in accordance with section 3(2) of the first Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the driving force behind the introduction of these new regulatory fees is the expansion of the role performed by the Registrar of Companies in recent years which has resulted in the need to hire significant numbers of additional skilled personnel which of course, Mr. Speaker, we touched on extensively during the Committee of Supply.

The role of the Registrar of Companies historically was primarily administrative in nature. However, with the changing landscape of the international business arena and the impact of external pressures from a variety of sources, the Registrar of Companies now has responsibility for the implementation of the economic substance regime, the enhancement of the Registrar of Companies Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing Compliance framework in the real estate and dealers in high value goods sectors, the maintenance of Bermuda's beneficial ownership register, with beneficial ownership featuring prominently both in Bermuda's AML/ATF and economic substance regimes and the maintenance and operations to the

Treaty Unit, all with increased scrutiny from global regulatory bodies such as the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFTAF) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

There is also a need for substantial investment to be made in technology on an ongoing basis to facilitate maximum efficiencies and to remain competitive and at the forefront of developments.

Mr. Speaker, now that the Registrar of Companies has regulatory and compliance obligations of every entity on Bermuda's corporate register in respect of economic substance and corporate governance, as well as supervisory oversight of the real estate and high value goods sectors, it is important to ensure that the resources are available to enable them to deliver on the disparate demands of all stakeholders and to maintain a regulatory regime that will stand up to the rigour of international scrutiny. In order to achieve this, it is necessary for additional revenue to be generated, and in 2021 KPMG was engaged to undertake an independent analysis which included an assessment of the Registrar of Companies projected revenues and operating expenditures as well as a jurisdictional comparison which culminated in a determination of the recommended fees.

Mr. Speaker, it is proposed that the regulatory fee applicable to exempted companies, exempted limited liability companies, overseas companies, exempted partnerships, exempted limited partnerships and overseas partnerships be set at $500 payable annually. It is further proposed that the regulatory fee applicable to local companies, local limited liability companies and limited partnerships which are not also registered as exempt partnerships be set at $150 payable annually. The introduction of these regulatory fees is expected to add approximately $6 million to the public purse each year.

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of regulatory fees and the rationale for it was discussed with external stakeholders, the Bermuda legal focus group, the Bermuda Bar Association and corporate service providers as well as various groups representing the international business sector in 2021. An information paper providing the details of proposed changes were circulated to all stakeholders in October 2023. Increased fees are seldom welcomed by industry and this was reflected in the discussions. However, there is a general understanding of the driving forces behind these additional fees.

Mr. Speaker, the Bills under consideration today [are] pursuant to the budget statement in support of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure that was made last year in 2023/24. The Bills confer powers on the Registrar of Companies to provide for annual corporate regulatory fees. The second Bill of course will amend the Acts I mentioned in the beginning of my brief, but to cover them again they will amend the Companies Act 1981, the Limited Liability Company Act 2016, the Limited Partnership Act 1883, the Exempted Partnerships Act 1992, the Overseas Partnerships Act 1995 and the Government Fees Regulations 1976 in order to detail the manner in which the regulatory fees are payable.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, section 2(1) of the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act 1975 provides the governor with the power to make a declaration that is expedient in the public interest [and] that [the] Bill should have statutory effect from its first reading in the House of Assembly. And as we note, the first reading of the [Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024] (the first Bill) was on 9 February [2024] and the effective date of that Bill will be 9 February [2024]. The Bills that we are debating today will assist the development of infrastructure that will enable the Registrar of Companies to perform and deliver on its obligations in a timely and efficient manner thereby continuing to enhance Bermuda's position as a leader in the international business front.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in line with the first Bill—and this is a correction to a conversation we just had. The second Bill will also come into operation on 9 February 2024. On 8 February 2024, as I said, there was a declaration for the first Bill and it is important that those two matters are in line.

With those brief introductory remarks, I will now present the Bill entitled the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) [Act 2024, the first Bill] and [the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024] and welcome comments from Honourable Members. And due to the fact that I wanted to ensure that this was smooth sailing, I have shared a copy of the brief with the Opposition (both briefs) so they can be aware of the measures that are inside of there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Opposition—Mr. Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Mr. Speaker, yes, thank you very much. Given the hour and the length of the day already, I also probably will not have any questions in Committee, so I will just speak in the general debate. I do have a few observations and remarks.

Let me start by noting that you have indicated that the two Bills will be dealt with at the same time and they will go to Committee at the same time. Let me also thank the Honourable Premier for sharing with this side his brief on both of the Bills.

Mr. Speaker, let me start with a slightly philosophical point, if I may. If I look at the brief in relation to the first of the two Bills, although both Bills are related, at page . . . in his brief he said this, and I will just repeat it for a moment if I may, with your leave. *Now that the ROC has a regulatory and compliance obligation of every entity in Bermuda's corporate register in respect*

of economic substance and corporate governance, as well as supervisory oversight of the real estate and high value goods sectors, it is important to ensure that the resources are available to enable them to deliver on the disparate demands of all stakeholders and to maintain a regulatory regime that will stand up to the rigour of international scrutiny.

Firstly, a philosophical point: we don't disagree. If you are going to have the Registrar of Companies perform a quasi-regulatory or fully regulatory function, it is quite right that it will need money to do so. However, that begs the question whether or not the Registrar of Companies should really be a regulator or a quasi-regulator in the first place.

Historically, registries of companies across the globe have been (as the Premier noted) administrative. They have been repositories of information. Yes, if it is going to regulate, then it needs the money to do so properly, in the eyes of the world. But that does beg the question whether it should be regulating in the first place.

Moving from that philosophical point to a policy point, this year's budget saw the move of the Treaty Unit over into the Registrar of Companies. We would just say that we see that makes sense. It does logically fall over there and so we recognise why that move has happened.

Thirdly, is really a point of clarification. In the Honourable Premier's brief, he referred (just for his pagination, he referred to it at page 5) where he said, again with your leave, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: *KPMG was engaged to undertake an independent analysis which included an assessment of the ROC's* (that is the Registrar of Companies) *projected revenues and operating expenditure as well as a jurisdictional comparison which culminated in a determination of the recommended fees.* One could be forgiven from reading that sentence to come to a conclusion that perhaps KPMG actually recommended the fees. But I think what that sentence is most to say is that KPMG conducted an audit of revenue and expenditure in comparison and then the Government came to the conclusion of the recommended fees.

So, that is really just a point of clarification, and the only point that I invite the Honourable Premier to come back to in response just to say whether or not this is the Government's decision rather than KPMG's.

Fourthly, is a political point and that is this. New regulatory fees . . . that is the expression that is being used to describe these things. I would say that this is probably a polite expression for taxes. And these are taxes. And they are also new taxes. I say that politically because I have a vague recollection of it being said that this budget was being balanced without raising taxes and that statement was wrong twice. Firstly, it was wrong because this is not yet a balanced budget, and possibly never will be. And secondly it is wrong because these new fees are in fact new taxes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I made it abundantly clear in the brief—which I provided to the Honourable Member in advance—and during my comments that these form . . . and we debated these exact fees during the General Economic Debate in the Budget Debate last year. This is about . . . so the figures that are in this fee, the reason why it was tabled under the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act [1975] is because this is for the current year's budget. These fees apply to the current year. Those are fees that were announced in last year's Budget Statement. These are not new fees that we are debating the legislation . . . I understand the political point the Honourable Member is trying to make, but he is misleading the House because it is factually incorrect.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I will respond to that, Mr. Speaker, that one man's fees are another man's taxes. I will also, because it is International Women's Day, say that the other way which is *one woman's fees are [another] woman's taxes*.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am getting some chirping, so obviously I have touched a nerve. But there we are.

Now, let me move to the painful point, Mr. Speaker, the painful point . . . and the painful point as the Premier has acknowledged, whether these are new fees or new taxes, or whether these are not new at all and are merely fees or merely taxes, and that is an argument that could be had . . . it is $6 million as he has recognised. Now, we say that is $6 million in new taxes and he disagrees and there we are. But when you have—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

An Hon. Member: Again!

Hon. E. David Burt: There was—again!

There was never a question of disagreement on the point in which he is trying to put upon me. The point to which I was stating was very simple. He started by saying it was a political point. He then went on to say the budget had no new taxes but this is a new tax for the upcoming year, and I wanted to correct him that it was not. But it was clearly outlined in last year's Budget Statement as part of a series of revenue raising measures.

It is important to note that this is not the first time the regulatory fee was mentioned. This fee was proposed way back in 2022, but because of all the work that the Registrar of Companies was doing, it was not able to be budgeted *and* collected in the year, except for the current fiscal year we are in.

If the Honourable Member would recollect, last year we had to revise down the estimate for the Registrar of Companies because it was included in the 2022 Budget Statement but was not able to be put into place. So I understand the political point he is trying to make but he is factually incorrect.

The Speaker: MP Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

As the Minister of Finance and Premier wishes to go to the Budget Book, we can go to the Budget Book because it is curious the point he makes. In relation to the Registrar of Companies he is effectively saying it is a two-year cost. And that is interesting because if you compare the two-year cost compared to where the actuals were two years ago, it is not a mere $6 million difference. It would appear to be in fact a $10 million difference. So he can't have his cake and eat it, as it were. If it is not new, it is not $6 million. If it is new, it is $6 million one way or the other.

The point is this—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I really thought this debate would be easy. I really tried to . . . with the briefs. I gave out defensive questions in advance. I asked if there were any questions in advance and now we are here, so I have to make the point of order.

The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The revenue from the fee is $6 million. If he is looking back on old revenue compared to this, the reason why the increase is more than $6 million is because there are more companies on the register due to the confidence that people have in the Bermuda economy. And so when he [compares] that time to now that is where the difference is. There has been a slow and steady increase (before we were under 16,000 now we are slightly above 16,000) that is the reason why those fees are there.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am going to just stick with the Premier's own words which are these, and I quote, "The introduction of these regulatory fees," (the introduction of these regulatory fees) "is expected to add approximately $6 million to the public purse each year." Those are his words. So I don't need to go further to $10 [million]. I don't need to have the argument we just had about new or old. I will stop on those words right there.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Right, "the introduction" . . . these are the Premier's words. *The introduction of these regulatory fees is expected to add approximately $6 million to the public purse each year.* So obviously these are charges on business and these are charges on all business. And these are charges on local companies. And when you have additional charges, fees, taxes (call them what you will), this impacts on jobs, because if things are more expensive to do business here, it means that the cost of doing business—the more expensive cost of doing business—may cause some to leave or to close.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: And this is local business . . . I hear some chirping from the Honourable MP for constituency 29 and no doubt he will have his time.

The Speaker: Talk to me.

Mr. Scott Pearman: He will have his time if he wants. So there we are.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: So there we are.

If the Government wants to increase the cost of doing business, don't be surprised if business reacts. That is the point.

Now, if I could just go to the Bills themselves, two very short points. First of all, the Honourable Premier has explained that the first of the Bills effectively confers the power and the second Bill amends the relevant Acts in order to detail the manner in which the regulatory fees are payable. And he has made the point that this is being made with the Governor's approval retrospectively to the date of 9 February when the first Bill was tabled. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, you are aware that the second Bill was not in fact tabled until 4 March, but we will see what that means if anything.

But I would make this final point and that is as a general rule retrospective taxation is generally regarded as an unfair thing. Standing here on the 8th of March and telling people that this Parliament is passing a law which retrospectively means that they have to pay money out of their pocket back to the 8th of February, which they did not know about, is not generally the fairest way to behave.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: So with that last point, I will take my seat. I hear more interpolation, and obviously the Premier has the right to . . .

He is saying it is not true.

It is retrospective.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Well, listen, again I am being interrupted, Mr. Speaker. It is set to be retrospective.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: No doubt, if it is not retrospective to the 9th of February, we can hear why from the Premier.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, there is a lesson in this and the lesson in this is no matter how much you try to work with the other side, sharing briefs, asking those questions beforehand, going through all that to try to ease our public officers who have been working hard all week trying to get things done, we are subjected to inuendo and madness of which we just heard, Mr. Speaker.

To be clear . . . and the Honourable Member would know as he works at Conyers, Dill and Pearman, who put out many and manage many of these companies, the companies were fully aware that this fee was coming into place. Why were they aware? Because it was announced in last year's Budget Statement!

As I said inside of my brief, the notice was sent out to all persons in October of 2023. So the fact that he is saying . . . after it was stated in the brief, a brief that was provided to him in advance that the notice was sent out he would still get on his feet and then state that people are getting this after the fact, that it is not being done fairly, is completely and totally disingenuous, Mr. Speaker. And it is unfortunate because we tried to avoid this today. But the Honourable Member cannot help himself.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading and Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Premier is firstly misleading the House and secondly imputing an improper motive. We are standing here today, in this House, passing two pieces of legislation. Today is the 8th of March. Because of certain things that have been signed off on, this will have retrospective effect back to the 9th of February. That is retrospective taxation. That is not misleading anyone, nor am I saying this out of any wish to embarrass the Premier. I am just stating the facts as they are. If he disagrees with the facts, he may say so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hello—

Hon. E. David Burt: There's—no—

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: The Premier was on his feet already. He took a point of order from the other Member. So the Premier can continue.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Should I point of order my Premier?

The Speaker: No, your Premier . . . the Premier is quite capable of handling himself.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: He is quite capable.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Go ahead, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Whenever you are ready, Zane. Whenever you are ready.

The Speaker: Just don't impute improper motives to the Member—

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am not imputing improper motive, it is my opinion that the Honourable Member is being disingenuous when he gets up and says that we are passing something that people are finding out about and we are passing retrospective effect when he has a brief that says a notification was sent out by the Registrar of Companies in October 2023 off of fees that were announced in February 2023 which we all debated in this House at that point in time.

So, to say that it is a surprise is completely incorrect and it is disingenuous, especially when he has a brief in front of him of which he quoted from which says that the Registrar of Companies sent out this notification in October of 2023. The reason why it was tabled under the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act [1975] was because the Registrar of Companies sends out bills in February and wanted to make sure they sent out bills so they could have the revenue, the regulatory fee, included inside of the bill rather than us spending money to send out two bills. It is that simple, Mr. Speaker.

So there was no need to make all of this . . . trying to raise a political point to gain more ink in the *Royal Gazette* as part of the combined opposition to say that we are doing something untoward. As was said, there was consultation in advance. There were discussions. There was a comparison to other jurisdictions, understanding the significant regulatory aspects that the Registrar of Companies has to take over. We have to monitor economic substance. We need to deal with high value dealers. You know the reason why we have to do all of these things? Because it is required by international standards.

And as I have reminded this House on many occasions, we have some of the highest standards in the world which is why we passed our FATF review with flying colours. And remember what happened, Mr. Speaker. When we came into office the former Government had done nothing! And we had to spend the first 18 months of the legislative programme . . . the Attorney General remembers. We all remember how we were bringing up multiple Bills to make sure that we passed that global examination. So that is the reason why the Registrar of Companies is there because we have to make sure that we appropriately do these things and that does not belong to a prudential regulator such as the Bermuda Monetary Authority.

Therefore, we have to find the right place and fit within the Government of Bermuda to make sure that we hold up to these international standards. That is where we are. And it is not unusual for government departments to carry out regulatory functions as there are many regulatory functions which are carried out by numerous government departments in government. So, I understand the point that he might be trying to make. But, again, he is factually incorrect.

I do believe that I have dealt with all the questions. I will just state again this fee will raise $6 million and any argument to the contrary is just false, especially when it is clearly stated inside of the briefs that were provided to the Honourable Member and the Honourable Opposition Leader in advance.

With that, Mr. Speaker, and no further comments, I would ask that the Bill[s] be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy.

House in Committee 8:31 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILLS

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) ACT 2024

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) (NO. 2) ACT 2024

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of the whole [House] for further consideration of the Bills entitled the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024 and the second Bill the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024.

Premier/Finance Minister Burt, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask your permission to move all the clauses on Bill number one.

The Chairman: Continue.

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much.

There are four clauses.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 provides the meaning of terms used in the Bill.

Clause 3 provides that an entity under the Act shall pay an annual corporate regulatory fee as provided in the Schedule to the Act and that the manner in which the annual corporate regulatory fee is payable shall be prescribed by the Minister responsible for the Registrar of Companies in the Act that relates to a particular entity. It also provides that the Minister may, by order subject to the affirmative resolution procedure, replace, add or vary the Schedule of the Act.

Clause 4 provides for the Bill to have statutory effect from the date of its first reading (9 February 2024), in accordance with the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act 1975.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier.

Are there any speakers?

There appear to be none. Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move that clauses 1 through 4 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 to 4 be approved. Are there any objections?

There appear to be none. Approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 4 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I also move that the Schedule be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Schedule be approved. Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none. Approved.

[Motion carried: The Schedule passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, if I may I would like to move all the clauses for Bill two which is the Registrar of Companies—

The Chairman: The preamble.

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry?

The Chairman: Do the preamble.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh sorry. I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved. Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none. Approved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that. I was going a little bit fast.

The Chairman: Uh-huh.

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) (NO. 2) ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: I ask your permission at this point in time to move all of the clauses for the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, clause 1 provides for a citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends the Companies Act 1981 to provide for payment of the annual corporate regulatory fee of $150 by a local company under section 121, of $500 by an exempted company under section 131 and $500 by a permit company under section 135. The clause further amends section 132C(3A) to provide for a foreign corporation registered as an exempted company to pay within one month after the date of its registration of the memorandum of continuance a corporate regulatory fee of $500.

Clause 3 amends the Limited Liability Company Act 2016 to provide for the payment of an annual corporate regulatory fee of $500 by an exempted LLC under section 96 and of $150 by a local LLC under section 253.

Clause 4 amends the Government Fees Regulations 1976 to provide for the payment of an annual corporate regulatory fee payable under the Limited Liability Company Act 2016 of $500 by exempted LLCs and $150 by local LLCs.

Clause 5 amends the Limited Partnership Act 1883 in section 22 to provide for the payment of an annual corporate regulatory fee of $150 by a limited partnership, and where such partnership fails to comply to be liable to a default fine.

Clause 6 amends the Exempted Partnerships Act 1992 to provide for an annual corporate regulatory fee of $500 payable by an exempted partnership and by an exempted partnership registered as a limited partnership under section 11(3A)(a).

Clause 7 amends the Overseas Partnerships Act 1995 to provide for an annual corporate regulatory fee of $500 payable by an overseas partnership under section 23.

Clause 8 provides for the Act to be deemed to have come into operation on 9 February 2024.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier.

Are there any further speakers? No? There appear to be none.

Minister, want to move . . .

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that clauses 1 through 8 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 8 be approved. Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none. Approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 8 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved. Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none. Approved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that both Bills be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that both Bills be reported to the House as printed. Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none. The Bills will be reported to the House as printed.

Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried: The Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024 and the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024 were considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 8:34 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) ACT 2024

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) (NO. 2) ACT 2024

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bils being reported to the House as printed? No objection? They have been reported as printed.

Premier—your third readings? Okay.

Premier, would you like to do your third readings of the two Bills?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will do the first Bill.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024 be now read for the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections? No objections.

Continue, Premier.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read for a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by title only and is now passed.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried: The Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024 was read a third time and passed.]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024 be now read for the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections? There are none.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES (ANNUAL CORPORATE REGULATORY FEES) (NO. 2) ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read for a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: Members, the Bill has been read a third time by title only and is now passed.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried: The Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Before I move the motion to adjourn, I would just like to inform you that I do know that some of my Members wish to speak.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Monday, the 11th of March at 10:00 am.

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to speak to that?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: MP De Silva.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight because I am tired. And I am tired, Mr. Speaker—

[Crosstalk]

PUTTING OUR LIVES ON THE LINE

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to my feet, I am a little disappointed that we have no Opposition Members in the House tonight. And I don't like to speak with regard to their behaviour without them being in the House.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: And they do that regularly.

Another Hon. Member: It is unacceptable.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It is unacceptable.

The Speaker: Just speak to the Chair. Just speak to the Chair.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay. I will speak to the Chair.

But, Mr. Speaker, for the record, I am tired. I am tired of the accusations and unrelentless attacks on our Attorney General's husband, Mr. Speaker, to be frank. And in particular by the Honourable Member who just left this Chamber . . . the Honourable Member Scott Pearman.

Mr. Speaker, this must stop. We have Members in this House, all of us, that put our lives on the line to represent the people of this country. And when I say put our live on the line, Mr. Speaker, I think we all know in this House what we mean. You certainly know, Mr. Speaker, as the longest-serving Member here, what that means.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me just refresh the people of this country. On March 1, in the *Royal Gazette* . . . the Honourable Member Pearman didn't waste any time running to the *Royal Gazette* yet again. Why do I say again? Now, let us think about it. March 1 was only last week. And why do I say run to the press (the *Royal Gazette)* yet again? I say that, Mr. Speaker, because on February 3, in the *Royal Gazette* this year . . . and I am happy to table it. You know I keep all my papers.

Mr. Speaker, on the 3rd of February, the day before on February 2, this particular MP went to the *Royal Gazette*. This after the OBA asked parliamentary questions in May of 2023. So we had parliamentary questions in May 2023. We have an article on February 3. We have another article on [March] 1 and we have more questions yet again today in this House. The Honourable Member Scott Pearman pressed the Premier at least three times . . . and this has got to stop.

The Honourable Member knows, Mr. Speaker, Scott Pearman knows . . . has to know—a Learned Member, supposedly—that the Attorney General, Minister Jason Hayward, any Minister you may choose does not have any part of decision-making of who is hired and who is not. The Honourable Member knows that. But he will not let this thing rest. And it is not fair. Mr. Speaker, I know the Attorney General will prefer me to not talk about this subject. But I am sorry. Because this is our family and I am sorry . . . but it is her today. It was me yesterday. It was the Premier last month.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It was Jason Hayward a couple of months ago. It is relentless! And we have families, Mr. Speaker, and I am tired of it. I am absolutely tired of it.

They run to the press. They smear and insinuate that anyone who is related to any one of us in this House, Progressive Labour Party, is not shooting with a straight arrow. If any Progressive Labour Party family member receives any contract from this Government, it is crooked. If any of our relatives receive a contract, there has got to be something wrong. What is wrong with our family members, our cousins, our distant relatives, receiving contracts because they might be qualified?

An Hon. Member: Hmmm.

Another Hon. Member: Oh!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Because they might be legitimate? They might have expertise? Is it because they are Black? Because I can run off a litany . . . and I will run off some tonight, of when they were in power for a very short time.

We had a former OBA Minister, his wife, who received millions of dollars! And not a dickey bird about that! Not one. We had former Minister Grant Gibbons who stood up in this House and said . . . and I have it . . . I have it, Mr. Speaker, [1]Hansard 16 March 2015, to be exact. He stood up in this House and said for the

[1] *Official Hansard Report*, 16 March 2015, p. 1813

America's Cup he is going to give that contract to Burland, Conyers and Marirea. But guess what? Because they had *a trusted relationship*!

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm!

Another Hon. Member: BC and M.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hang on now! Wait a minute!

An Hon. Member: Say it again!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Grant Gibbons, the former Minister when they were in Government, gave hundreds of thousands—*hundreds of thousands*—of dollars' worth of contracts to Burland, Conyers and Marirea for the America's Cup—

An Hon. Member: Millions!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: For the America's Cup. I said hundreds and hundreds of thousands . . . and millions, okay? Because . . . and I will read it for you if you want, Mr. Speaker, I can table it. Because he had a *trusted relationship* with that company.

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: He's got an OBE for it too.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But wait a minute. But wait a minute.

An Hon. Member: That's not friends and family?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But we must . . .yes, that's not friends and family? But we must be subject to a constant barrage of accusations against our Member's family member? Who happens to be an expert in his field? And that Honourable Member had absolutely nothing to do with the hiring. But we must sit here and not say a word while the Honourable Member Scott Pearman goes to the *Royal Gazette* and then there's no less than four articles on this subject.

I am sorry.

And if I know the Honourable Attorney General like I do, she is not going to be happy with me because that is not her style. But I am sorry. She is my colleague, just like everyone else on this side. And I will continue to highlight what has happened to our people compared to them.

Now you will remember former Minister Pat [Gordon]-Pamplin between 2012 and 2017 . . . 2012 when they got in, within three months she hired the former and late Louise Jackson. Gave her a six-month contract for $30,000 and she knew nothing about for which she was hired. Trevor Moniz, the former Member, former Attorney General. When he left the office in 2017 there was not one shred of paper left on his desk. He shredded everything. I hear he burnt out a shredder, shredding up so much papers!

An Hon. Member: He shredded the shredder?

[Laughter]

Another Hon. Member: But he hired a lawyer. Remember that lawyer he hired?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But that's okay. That's okay. There was a former OBA Minister of Education that was sitting in Cabinet . . . was part and parcel of conversations about the forming of the Gaming Commission. Resigned from Minister of Education, stayed an MP. The very next week he was announced as the Chairman of the Gaming Commission. But that is okay.

An Hon. Member: The same Gaming Commission they are complaining about!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Wait a minute! The same Gaming Commission that the Opposition are complaining about that has to be funded today. But you see this is what they do!

Another example, there was a hurricane that blew down half of . . . down by John Smith's Bay, the road and the wall. Remember the wall down at Dr. Brown's . . . Brown-Darrell Clinic? The wall collapsed because the road collapsed which caused the wall to collapse. We fixed it. They made noise. Dr. Brown said, *Hey, hey stop! I will pay for it*. A couple of years later, the former Minister Pat [Gordon-]Pamplin becomes Works and Engineering Minister—

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hurricane comes, takes off half her roof. What happens? She takes Works and Engineering up there to fix it!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But that's okay!

An Hon. Member: Unbelievable!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You see . . . you see the double standard?

You see? These are the types of things that I refuse, as long as I got my time in this House, I will not let the people in this country forget what they do.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, we have witnessed months of attacks on our colleagues. Months of attacks! Which . . . I have been biting my tongue and

biting my tongue and biting my tongue the last six, seven, eight months. I will bite it no more. Okay?

But the Honourable Member Scott Pearman who is leading this attack on my colleague's family . . . I started thinking. Wait a minute. Where does he work? He works for one of the biggest law firms in this country, Conyers, Dill and Pearman. Where did his father make his money?

An Hon. Member: Hmmm.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I am just asking a question.

An Hon. Member: Or his grandfather.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Or maybe his grandfather. Where did they make their money? For all I know, could have been a slave owner. And I am not saying he was. I said *could have been*. That is all I am saying. And let me say . . . it does fit the description.

An Hon. Member: Fits the description.

Another Hon. Member: Don't worry about it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And let me state for the record, again, there is no Opposition Member in this House. And I don't like to talk without people being here but I think I have to state that for the record.

An Hon. Member: But they have a responsibility—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But when I got up on my feet, I think they had a responsibility to stay in this House until it is over.

But let me say this, some say we have come a long way from slavery. But should it be a crime for someone on this side of the House to be paid for the work that they do, for the expertise that they provide?

I will remind Members of another situation. And cousin Derrick, the Honourable Member who sits next to me, will remember clearly because I think it was under him. I would like to remind Members of a contract that was given to a former Learned Member of this House. That Honourable Member was the late great Julian Hall. You might recall—

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Yes, I do.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: There was a contract given to Julian Hall by the Honourable Member Derrick Burgess when he was Minister.

An Hon. Member: Fancy that.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And at the time I believe it was about $100,000 a year. And I said on this floor in this House that $100,000 for the expertise and knowledge of Julian Hall was a steal!

An Hon. Member: And he was flogged to death.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, he was.

An Hon. Member: Flogged to death.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: We were flogged to death in this House because of that contract. And I said it then and I will say it now that that was the best deal of this country to have Julian Hall as a representative working for us—

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Yes, it was.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —in his capacity as a lawyer.

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: You better believe it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, as I finish, I am going to say this. This has to stop, Mr. Speaker. It has to stop. Everyone in this House has a family. In Bermuda we will continue to have conflicts. We will have conflicts. Someone once said that if there is not a conflict with any one of us, what is the . . . they said if there's not a conflict something is out of order.

An Hon. Member: If there's no conflict you're not interested.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, if there's no conflict you are not interested.

But I am pleading to the Opposition and in particular . . . because the Honourable Member Pearman isn't the only one. You would remember, Mr. Speaker, a couple of months ago the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) decided not to press charges against myself. The very next day, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member Opposition Leader Jarion Richardson and the former Premier Michael Dunkley went to see the Governor and said listen . . . and I will quote them too if I have to, Mr. Speaker. I have that here. I will give you the date, [2]19 September 2023. Went to the Governor and said listen . . . the Honourable Member Dunkley said, *I am aghast at this decision*.

Well, wait a minute! Why would he be aghast? Did he know something that we didn't know? And I have got that right here. Here you go, Mr. Speaker, I will table it. Picture and everything. But that is what they do to us. People of Bermuda, that is what they do to us and our families.

And I am not up here to say *oh woe is me*. Trust me. I am a big boy. I can handle it. But my family went through hell over the Blu [restaurant] situation and over

[2] *Royal Gazette*, 19 September 2023

the Savvy [Entertainment] situation. Went through hell! Still have challenges today.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have Members who say, *Wait a minute. We want an investigation further!* Now I can tell you some things about Members on that side of the House that have happened, you know. Now if we want to talk about that, let's go. Because the Honourable Member Dunkley is not here tonight and I don't like to do that. I like to look people in the whites of their eyes because I ain't afraid of nobody. And if that Honourable Member comes back to this House we can have that conversation on the floor. But this is what they do to us, Mr. Speaker, and I . . . implore for the Opposition to stop. And I am not talking about me. I am talking about my colleagues. Because I have seen many of them in the last couple of years take arrows and bullets like you wouldn't believe for doing their job. Putting their lives on the line. Spending time away from their families, their children.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Their children—sacrificing! And you can talk about MPs' wages if you like. Now if you want to go there, that is another story. Because I think all MPs are underpaid. If you give me the decision, I will make sure every MP in this House gets at least $100,000 a year. Because you know what? The time that we spend away from our family, our children, our grandchildren, our grandmothers and our grandfathers. . . they read papers too!

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And I will say it again, we put our lives on the line! We don't have to do this! We care about our country. We care about our people. Look what we have done over the last six years. All you have to do is read and listen . . . what we have done, starting from our Premier to our Ministers to our Backbenchers to our Senators. We have worked hard to try and give this country a better life for all of our people and we do not need attacks like we have had.

Hon. E. David Burt: Personal attacks.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Personal attacks.

And, Mr. Speaker, I don't go personal, but I am tired of watching the families of colleagues on this be attacked. And it has to stop! It has gone way too far. My plea to the Opposition is to stop. You have people who are sacrificing their lives. Stop. We all work very, very hard in this country. Stop. You have families. We have families. Stop it.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Simmons.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: HONOURING BERMUDA'S POLITICAL WOMEN LEADERS

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank my colleague, the Honourable Member who just took his seat, for tackling the challenge that all of us on the Progressive Labour Party have dealt with from our inception. But when you understand the history of what our people have gone through, and I would direct everyone's attention to a text, while not historically accurate that has proven to be very accurate in reality.

The Willie Lynch letter speaks about exploiting fear, distrust and envy. And when you understand the methodology and the ideology of the One Bermuda Alliance and the roots from which it sprung—cultivating fear, cultivating distrust, cultivating envy—you understand the obsessive nature they have around travel. You understand the obsessive nature around contracts. And in some regards, Mr. Speaker, let's be honest, based on their history they are judging us by their own yardstick.

But, Mr. Speaker, I did not get on my feet today to talk about them. This week and today are very special. Earlier this week we celebrated our Founder's Day for the Progressive Labour Party and today we are celebrating . . . it is International Women's Day. And the two tie and unite quite well because our political party was at the forefront of elevating, promoting and following women.

So if we go back to Dame Lois [Browne-Evans], if we go back to Dame Jennifer [Smith], if we go back to Paula Cox and go back even further to Dorothy Thompson and Dr. Barbara Ball, two members of the White community who not only stood against their gender, their oligarchy and their race for our people. So we have a history. And so the abuse, the name calling, the dis-reputational attacks . . . we are built for this because of those who came before us showed us how to do it.

I want to take a moment right now on International Women's Day. Now I can wax lyrical about my mother all day, every day. I am not going to do so today. But I am going to speak on my political godmother. The Honourable former Member of this Chamber and Leader of this House Dame Jennifer Smith. And when I think about how she ran in 1972, Mr. Speaker, 19 years old. The then youngest person to ever run for elected office in our country. She ran in 1972. She ran in 1976 and lost; 1980 and lost; 1983 and lost; 1985 and lost until winning in 1989.

Now just imagine what it takes to live with the abuse. To live with the name calling, to live with the disrespect, and to go into elections knowing you were

going to lose but keeping yourself committed to the task. Keeping yourself driven to drive this country forward.

We look at someone who was appointed in [1989] as the then youngest Senator. Outstanding. She joined and became our Deputy Leader and then became the Leader after the passing of the great L. Frederick Wade. But for me, I called her my political godmother because at a time when I came back into the Progressive Labour Party, she spent a lot of time unprompted, unasked, to mentor and develop me. And that is the kind of person she is.

She is someone who sees somebody, sees value in them and invests in them. And I will always be thankful for the time that she spent with me and everything that I learned—from canvassing to political strategy. One of the greatest political minds Bermuda has ever produced and I don't think we give her enough credit. I am very glad that we will see her honoured later this month by the Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast group because I do think that she deserves recognition.

The Speaker: This weekend.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: This weekend. Sunday.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, we were up in the coffee room, and we were having conversations, as politicians do. And we got on the things that occurred under her leadership and it is amazing how in just four short years she transformed this country. We each sit in a seat (one man, one vote) of equal value because of her leadership. I know that when I look to my colleague (my MP) the Honourable Renee Ming, who is another person who was mentored for many years by Dame Jennifer. The legacy continues. But being able to take the abuse, to run when you know you may not win, not for personal gain, not for wealth, not for accolades . . . to serve your people. That is something that I will always honour and respect.

I am grateful to all she contributed for us. I am grateful for what she contributed to me personally and I thank her and all the women who serve in our Chamber know who are carrying the baton of those who came before them with honour and integrity despite the odds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, sir.

MP Caines, would you like your time on the clock?

Mr. Wayne Caines: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You have your time, sir.

ELDER ABUSE STARTING TO BE A PROLIFIC PROBLEM IN BERMUDA

Mr. Wayne Caines: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, recently I had to purchase a new black suit. Mr. Speaker, the question I am sure that is burning you as you sit there is, *Why, MP Caines, did you have to purchase a new suit?* Mr. Speaker, did I purchase a suit because I am a purveyor of men's fine haberdashery? In these circumstances, that is not the reason, Mr. Speaker. Did I have holes in my black suit? Was my black suit stained? Was it out of fashion? Were the trousers flared or did they have bell-bottoms? None of [the answers to] those questions are in the affirmative.

The reason I had to purchase a new suit, Mr. Speaker, is because I have been attending so many funerals. I have been attending so many funerals, Mr. Speaker, that my black suit is worn out—the funerals of classmates parents, of church members who are seniors, of neighbours who are seniors, of constituents who are seniors, of friends' parents who are seniors, of family members who are seniors. Two weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, I buried my beloved Aunt Twiggy, my mother's best friend.

All of the things that I have mentioned, Mr. Speaker, are emotional occurrences. Not only does my black suit—or did my black suit—get worn out, the emotions of our community are worn out. Why? Because we love together, we cry together, we mourn together. We are aware that the circle of life includes death. But when our senior citizens die, it takes a piece of all of us. A piece of all of us dies, Mr. Speaker.

So, when my Aunt Twiggy passed, I saw my mom mourn in a way that crippled and broke my spirit. I watched my mother pine for a time that she and my Aunt Twiggy spent together, the experiences shared, how she and my Aunt Twiggy shared their dreams, their aspirations for their kids for the future. Ah, Mr. Speaker, my heart was buoyed, though, when I saw Shawn and Trevor take care of my aunt. My spirit was buoyed when I saw Shawn and Trevor come over here and work on her finances and fix her house and make sure that she was protected and covered by those who were prone to take advantage of her.

Most recently I returned from overseas with my mother as she had medical treatment. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that my mother is as fit as the butcher's dog. But she has been advised to take it slow for a few weeks and to rest at home. Mr. Speaker, my mother . . . Yes, Mr. Speaker, [she] has been advised to rest at home. So, you can imagine my amazement when I looked at yesterday's *Royal Gazette*, and I saw my mother prancing up and down Front Street with the International Women's Day march. Mr. Speaker, the woman who had a medical procedure in New York two weeks ago was then prancing up and down for the International Women's march. When I saw the picture in yesterday's *Royal Gazette*, I could not stop laughing. For you see, my mother, at 77 years old, does not take orders from any human being on planet earth. My father tries at times, and at other times my pastor tries. But she has her own guiding principles.

But the fact that I was on a trip with my mother—though we disagree often, though we lock horns often . . . I realised that my brothers, my sister, and I have a responsibility to take care of my parents. My brothers and sister and I work on a rotating schedule to make sure that all of our parents' needs are met mentally, physically, and spiritually. After all, they did that for us for so many years, Mr. Speaker. Exodus 20:12 says—and I read the Bible—to "honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

The bedrock of any good society lies in how they treat those most vulnerable amongst them. In the context of this conversation, the most vulnerable amongst us are our senior citizens.

The success of Bermudian international business, tourism, [and] our educational system in the last 70 or 80 years can be attributed to the leaders—many of our elders that live amongst us. Our government, our unions, our churches, our educational system, our cricket clubs, our football clubs, our lodges, they are all built on the shoulders of the men and women who worked, who marched, [and] who toiled tirelessly in the 50s and 60s for a better way of life for all of us in Bermuda. I call them pioneers.

We see pioneers in education and construction, people that set the global standards in international business from seamstresses to caregivers. All of our elders in our country worked to build a better Bermuda for all of us. There was a time when houses were built in our community, Mr. Speaker, not by bank loans but by sheer cooperation and the sweat of the brow with the concerted effort of men—brothers—living in our community.

My mind goes back to the Cobbs Hill Methodist Church that was built by slaves in the moonlight. When men and women in our community had very little to hold on to, they held fast steadfast to faith, establishing and keeping denominations going like the Salvation Army, the African Methodist Episcopal Churches, the Seventh-day Adventist community. Faith has been an integral part of our success. When we were not able to be taught business and leadership in the JCs and in the Rotary, we learned leadership in our member's clubs, in our workmen's clubs, and in our churches.

Ah, it is after all, International Women's Day, so we want to celebrate women that are here and some who have gone on like Dr. Barbara Ball. I thought Dr. Barbara Ball was a veterinarian only because she always had dogs walking in our neighbourhood. I did not know she was a medical doctor. What is more, she became a trade unionist *par excellence* who sat at the table with some of the greats negotiating for better lives for the people in Bermuda.

We just heard about the exploits in politics with reference to our Dame Jennifer. Her exploits in politics are that of legend. But also, she was equally as prolific in the arts.

Educators like Judith James who taught for 40 years at the Elliot Primary School and Martha Francis who taught for a number of years at the Prospect Primary School, these were people, seniors that are committed to an education.

So many of us now stand as the beneficiaries, the effigies, the luminaries of these forefathers. So many of us have jobs in international business, sit in offices as lawyers, get around the board tables as bankers, stand at the chalkboard as teachers, behind the podium as preachers, and we have all of that thanks to our elders, to the people in our community that spoke truth to power when it was unpopular to do so. Leaders that inspired our generation like Dr. Ewart Brown, like Mr. Freddie Wade, and like E. F. Gordon, men who stood up and stood out and took risks and set examples for us.

But the stark reality that we have in Bermuda now [is] that many of our seniors that set the path for us, that paved a way for us, that gave us the start in our lives, that gave us our mortgages, that sacrificed for us to go to school, that maybe gave us our first loans for our cars, that had club hands, and put everything on the line for us, they, are finding themselves in difficulty.

Most recently I have been talking to senior citizens in Bermuda who share with me that their children—their flesh and blood, people that shared their same DNA—are bullying them out of their own homes, using their parents' savings for lavish trips and buying expensive gifts for themselves. I recently talked to a senior citizen who is in the King Edward VII Memorial Hospital. He is in the extended care unit languishing not because of his illness, per se, but because when they tried to discharge him, there was no home for him to go to. It seems as if our society let him down, but on closer inspection his children are living in the home. His daughter's boyfriend is living in the home, and they—with his sacrifice, with his toil, with him building the house by the sweat of his brow—have told him that he cannot return to his own home. No toiletries.

Nobody comes to sing a hymn with him. Nobody comes to move him in the bed to avoid him getting bedsores, to make sure that dementia does not set in. Nobody reminds him of what he has done, to say *thank you* for his sacrifice.

I heard a story last night that prompted this soliloquy, Mr. Speaker. It was a senior who had bad eyesight. She needed some help with her banking. She asked her grandchildren to come over and to read a document to her. She thought that she was being helped by her beloved grandchild, and she, without any foreboding, without any second thought, she gave her [grandchild] her PIN, access to all of her accounts.

A week ago, she went to go to the doctor and to use her bankcard. Her card was declined. She thought it was an oversight, and she asked to be taken to the bank. When she went into the bank, she was only told that her grandchild, her daughter's child— somebody that shared her own DNA, somebody that

understood the struggle that she had gone to, how much and how long she worked in the hotel watching her come home from Hamilton Princess for 30 years, sacrificing for her mother, watching this sacrifice—went into her bank account and drained it. Not a stranger. Not an adversary. Not an enemy. Her granddaughter!

This is not a one-off. This week we heard from the Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert. She shared with us that in 2023, Mr. Speaker, 89 complaints were made of elder abuse in Bermuda. This is starting to be a prolific problem in our country. There are seniors who have built and given us our best, who have made it possible for us to go university. We sit in these lofty places because of them. Because of our indiscipline, because of our inability to save, because of our inability to see and only take what you need, and our desire to live in excess, we find ourselves taking advantage of our seniors at a time where they should be respected, should be covered, should be protected. We find our seniors in our country being taken advantage of.

We stand on the shoulders of the seniors of this country. They worked by the sweat of their brow in the hotels as chamber maids, as masons, as cooks, as chefs, as stewards, seamstresses, all to make their lives better—our political system, our union system, our education systems. Our seniors are going into their sunset years, and they must be protected. They must be protected by all of us, by our churches, by our Government, not only in their homes, in business. It is time for us to hold those accountable, our family members, our friends. We must protect our seniors at all costs. It is our responsibility.

It is difficult to learn that many of our seniors find themselves in situations with the very same people that they gave everything to make their life better. These are the very same people who are now taking advantage of them. If you see such a situation that needs intervention, intervene! If there are young people who need guidance and support and/or to be held accountable, hold them accountable. If you know someone that is being taken advantage of, take it to the appropriate authority. We have a responsibility in this beloved country to take care of our elders, our seniors.

What we described, the harrowing ordeals by our seniors, is a nightmare for these families. We must acknowledge that we can do better, and we must do better.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to end with a quote that I penned today. *Seniors are the foundation and the strength of our community. Their wisdom and sacrifices laid the groundwork for our collective future. It is our duty to protect and honour them as they navigate their sunset years of their remarkable journeys.*

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Honourable Member, MP Swan?

OBA OPPOSITION NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, tonight I am reminded of a gentleman who was carried up the stairs of the House of Parliament. You probably were in the House at that time—

The Speaker: I was.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —when he was carried up the steps by his colleagues to serve Bermuda.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I had to take my shoes off and stand on my left foot right now to give this speech, and I pray indulgence to be barefoot like I had to be teaching golf when I did not have any health insurance and the Honourable Member Mr. Derrick Burgess—in 2013 when I was an Independent—paid for insurance, when I did not have any health insurance, Mr. Speaker, when I taught barefoot up at Port Royal because I did not have health insurance.

I am reminded that Dr. Stubbs was carried up these steps. I remember, Mr. Speaker, 1983 as a 25-year-old-and-four-months running in Sandys South against my cousin Walter Robertson, Walter Lister, and getting collectively with John Harvey during doubles seats, 1,000 votes. But they got about 1,400. And I heard Lister and Roberts come out of that ballot box so often I moved to St. George's, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Speaker, when some 25 years later I got the opportunity to serve in another place—which I did in 1998 for some nine years, seven of them as Opposition Leader in the Senate—I went to the library that existed in another place, and I read the speeches of L. Fredrick Wade. I read the speeches of C. Eugene Cox. I read the speeches of Dame Lois Browne-Evans, which were contained in the Budget and the Throne Speech Replies, typewritten documents.

I remember Phil Perinchief telling me that he and others participated in the preparation of those things, and I learned a lot at that time.

I remember when the top three in the Senate were David Allen, Alex Scott, and Dame Jennifer Smith in the Senate, those three, holding the Government accountable.

I was taught by Herman Santucci Bascome to learn from my opponents. I have always been a good study. I remember, Mr. Speaker, learning from the most glorious seven to ever sit collectively in this House. And I remember who they are, Mr. Speaker. In Sommerset, you would know. Their names were Lister like yours—not yours, but they were Lister like yours. And they were Roberts, a cousin of mine. You would not know

they were Lowe down in Southampton East—and Burrows a cousin of mine. You would not know also they were in Devonshire and their names were Wade and Dame Lois Browne-Evans. And you would also know that the other person that was in Pembroke when others deserted and went elsewhere was Ottiwell Simmons. And just like when I was in Opposition and I came to this House as an Opposition Member, I had the courage to study the only Opposition that Bermuda ever had for 30 years. I learned a lot.

I am going to tell you right now, the Opposition today is not fit for purpose. Where are they? They are not in this House. Mr. Speaker, today I had to crawl. I even thought about whether I would call an ambulance to take me home because I cannot put my foot down to walk down. I struggled to get here. And you are telling me . . . And I have seen it week after week. When it comes to the motion to adjourn, they leave. And tonight, I was reminded of Dr. Stubbs being carried up these steps by Harry Viera.

I saw a picture of Harry presenting me a trophy in 1974 at Port Royal—the Southampton West and Member of Parliament who I used to canvass for. He did not like to canvass. I would go there and knock on the door and tell . . . Marshall and Viera . . . They came to the door. [A] nice pretty lady came and looked and saw me instead of Harry. She was very disappointed, very disappointed because you know Harry was somewhat of a lady's man.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And a little 16-year-old, 17-year-old, could not . . . I mean it is true. I am not telling you any lies.

So, I am just here to say that when an Opposition week after week cannot participate in this debate . . . step aside and let somebody else that may want to get here take your place. Let me tell you why. Because people ask me why my leader would ask me, *Why are you coming up here the way you are in pain?* Because I waited 25 years to come here! And I used to come up here, and I used to listen to Austin Thomas. I used to listen to Dame Lois [Browne-Evans]. I go down the Memory Lane because I learned it from the great Dame. She would take you down, and she had more time, too. You cut me short, you know. I cannot go in those motions down there like I would like to, so I have to learn how to be more brief.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: So, I am here to tell you that this country is not being served well by an Opposition that fails to participate, that will be like Donald Trump and go on Twitter and social media and rely on the *Royal Gazette* and those lot to come here and get their message out and be nasty and tell lies on people.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Speaker, this evening I asked the indulgence of the Whip to go to the airport. In 2022 . . . because in 1980 and 1970s I was a trailblazer in this country, representing this country wearing a blazer like this (probably this one, too, because it has moth holes in it). I am the country boy from White Hill that cannot afford suits, but I care about this country dearly. And I am telling you. I went to the airport, and I saw a situation where a lady got off the plane, and she was talking to Mr. Bailey, the CEO of Bailey Transport, who went up to her and saw that the lady was in distress.

She had paid for some transportation that was not there. And I listened. And it could have been an honest mistake, but I could not allow that person to be in my presence and not act. So, I went there. I told her that . . . and she actually saw me greet the three people that came. I have 25 people coming to Bermuda from the United Kingdom through relationships, right? So, I was there waiting for the first three who came in advance. And I watched it. And then with my cane . . . she saw those persons who knew me, and I think it may have put her at ease. And she walked with me to my car. And my wife came.

And she was staying at Edgehill. And I said I know where it is. And I even got it on Google Maps so that she can hear the map tell me turn right, turn left on Langton Hill, and the like because that is what you have to do to put people at ease. Tourism is about relationships. That is what the Honourable Derrick Burgess and I learned at Castle Harbour and Coral Island and places like that back in the 1970s and in the 1960s and the 1950s, you know. And people that taught us were learning it back then. We are younger fellows than that. And so, Mr. Speaker, we had that experience.

And I say that to say this, that when I got the opportunity to play in the PGA Tour in 2022, it was not because anybody liked me or anything. It was because I had built a reputation and a tour came to my country. And I had the ability to walk in a space and take my last walk with my peers—no different than Doug Ford in his country or other older persons who played in tournaments when they were in their last 60s for that final walk.

But I was chastised in the social media and spent a lot of time combatting things that people were saying from the Bermuda Broadcasting Company as well. But you know what? I care about our country. And because I went to the UK for the first time in 2002, in 39 years I realised that my reputation had currency. And this is why three people came today.

You know what? The good Lord has a wicked sense of humour and an awesome sense of timing because when I met young Fergus Montgomery—yes, a very Scottish name, similar name as Europe's number one for about 10–15 years . . . and related, right? I want you to [know] that the bed cover that he had come from

St. George's Golf Club in 1990, a blue one, a light blue, royal blue [one]—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —because his mama worked for an insurance company here 40 years ago before going back. Relationships. People love Bermuda overseas.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, when I was over in the UK being strong and training and the like, I always thought it was because of golf. And I am finding out now it is because of the relationships that are going to help our country. But there is another reason why as well.

I became conversant and familiar with people because a year ago my daughter was looking at death's door. And I was not here. I was not here on the 40th anniversary of running for the House in 1983, February 3, 1983. I was not here. I was in the UK. And UK golf pros called me. One Jeff Hall, who I swear is my cousin because Isaac McKinley Hall was my great-grandfather from Ireland. Right? [He] offered me an address because he knew that I was entitled to live and work there and I did not know what the future would hold. That is the type of friendship that exists internationally for not only me, you know, for many people in this country, leveraging relationships that we have to bring people in this country between November and March to get more people.

And I often tell people the amount of people it takes to move the needle in tourism in Bermuda is not a lot of people. One hundred people a week more for about 20 weeks—you do the math—staying maybe a week or 10 days with an average spend of what they would spend. You do the math. It would make a dent. And we can achieve that. If I can do it as a country boy from White Hill, imagine what all those people around there that will spend a lot of time calling me names could do if we collectively worked for the common good.

Mr. Speaker, I remember in 1983 because when you run for an election . . . I did not know. I was very green, 25 years four months. The leader of the Senate at that particular time, the Government leader, he used to come around. He was a lawyer from Conyers, Dill, and Pearman. His name was Charles Collis. He was the bully behind the scenes. Okay? He was the bully behind the scenes. And he came around with the register of interest, and he went to different Members and came around. He came to me, and he said, *I do not have to worry. You do not have any interest.*

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. But you know what I said to myself? And I have used this before in a speech. I had the biggest conflict of interest in this country. I care so much about this country that I gave up my career to run at 25-years-old. And I never stopped wanting to be like my cousins on both sides of the aisle up and down this country.

Thank you, [Craig] Cannonier. Come in. Thank you. Cannonier has come in. And that is what needs to happen.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: They all need to be here. They need to take a page. They need to take a page out of the book of L. Frederick Wade, Lois Browne-Evans, Ottiwell Simmons. They need to take a book out of the page of Reggie Burrows and Stanley Lowe. They need to take a page out of the book of Walter Roberts and Walter Lister. And they need to be here, be accountable, and hold us accountable at the same time. But you cannot do it if you are not in your seats. And we are seeing it week after week, and then you read about it on blogs. They are not fit for purpose acting like that in this Honourable House.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say thank you to those visitors that have felt it not robbery to visit our shores from March 14 to 18, and those who have taken the opportunity to come early, persons from Yorkshire, from Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, from Hampshire, from Nottinghamshire, from the Southwest region, which is on the cusp below Hampshire, and the Somerset area. Yes, we have folks coming from Somerset too. They are out there in the western part. Bournemouth. Ladies and men, young and old. It is important that we start leveraging our relationships that we have.

And I have said it once, and I will say it again today. Everybody that serves in this House, I feel, cares about this House, cares about this country. But if I feel that you are deliberately being absent, that is going to help this country. I am here to tell you that you are wrong, wrong, and more wrong. And I am telling you that if you want to see how to be a responsible Opposition, do what I did when I came in this House when I was UBP. I studied the PLP. And I learned from speeches by people like L. Frederick Wade who was here at seven and held that Government of that time accountable. And you can look at the mounds of legislation that was passed that were Opposition solutions. But you are not seeing that today because all they are doing is finding a way to criticise.

And I will end on this, Mr. Speaker. This budget balanced the budget of this country for the first time since 2001 or 2002 (there about) . . . there were plans to do it. There were plans to do it I think in 2019, but what happened? Morgan's Point happened.

An Hon. Member: Uh-oh!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Having to deal with the guarantee and the money that was committed by the Government on the eve of a General Election happened. And a pandemic. And, given the opportunity to

spend money on the people, the PLP did that in 2009, 2010, and 2011 to make sure that our people had a lifeline. And the PLP did it in 2020, 2021, 2022. And now, because of fiscal prudence, we are now finding a way to remediate the debt, to be able to find ways to lower the amount of interest paid so that we can do more things for our people.

So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say this. I want to say thank you for the good example taken. And if persons will spend a little bit more time respecting the contribution of the PLP whilst it was in Opposition in Government—not perfect—respecting persons that have come before, realise that everyone who has sat in this House since the Constitution Order of 1966 did so with a good interest at heart, I think this country could move forward. I see the future brighter than what I read and hear from our detractors because I have seen 25 people show love for Bermuda and love for relationship. And I know there are thousands more out there.

And Mr. Speaker, my blood is starting to circulate a little bit. The foot feels a little bit better. Maybe I should have got up on my feet a little bit earlier. But thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this time.

I want Bermuda to know that we care. This Progressive Labour Party Government cares. But I cannot sit here, stand here, as one who has been involved in politics for all of my life—all of my life. [I] respected people even when I went to Berkeley. I saw that it was Berkeley sports week. I remember, Mr. Speaker, in 1970 when we sat in a huddle down at the school field, and when my old man, my late father, saw that front page, and he saw me there . . . He was special branch at the time. You know I was doggone doing the . . . We did not have Gombeys up Granaway Heights and Somerset Bridge. Gombeys came from town, but I was dancing. Oh yes, I was dancing.

An Hon. Member: You were a Gombey.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Well, he whaled me. And I am just here to say that, Mr. Speaker, we care in this House. And I think it is high time that persons know that the people whose shoulders we stand on also cared about this country, and did yeoman service in doing so. But we need more from the Opposition. We really need more. And they need to be present and accounted for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Audio ended abruptly]

[This page intentionally left blank.]

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
11 MARCH 2024
10:03 AM

Sitting Number 15 of the 2023/2024 Session

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

The Acting Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Acting Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes from the 8th of March have been deferred.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: We have had two notifications this morning, first that Minister Roban will be absent today and that MP Pearman will also be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: There is one paper this morning, in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

BERMUDA FAMILY OFFICE SOLUTIONS—A FRAMEWORK FOR EMPOWERING YOUR LEGACY

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Family Office Solutions—A Framework for Empowering Your Legacy.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: There are four Statements this morning. The first is in the name of the Minister of Works.

Minister.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

UPDATE ON THE MERGING OF THE BERMUDA LAND DEVELOPMENT COMPANY AND THE WEST END DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give an update on the ongoing merger between the Bermuda Land Development Company (BLDC) and the West End Development Corporation (WEDCO).

Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying nothing in government moves fast. Almost two years ago in July 2022, I announced the intention to amalgamate the BLDC and WEDCO. From a business perspective, this makes complete sense since these two quangos share similar objectives, mandates, skills, accounting procedures and staffing levels. From the time of that announcement, the following operational activities have taken place to prepare for this transition:

- creation and implementation of new identical union collective bargaining agreements for both WEDCO and BLDC;
- job description reviews and internal policy assessments have been completed;

- merged WEDCO and BLDC servers and software, essentially running all finance and IT systems for both entities from a single location;
- the Chief Financial Officer at WEDCO is now acting in a dual role for both entities;
- compiled the asset and liability schedule for both entities;
- established a marketing and PR joint strategy for the new entity;
- relocated key staff to assist with the transition initiative; and
- liquidators have been appointed.

Not only has all this taken place, Mr. Speaker, but you may also recall that in March 2023 this Honourable House approved the dissolution of the BLDC to ensure the seamless amalgamation of the entities.

As I have said before, Mr. Speaker, a lot of work has been done already and both entities are ready to merge. Kudos must be given to the team of technical officers who worked diligently, ably led by Mr. Andrew Dias in his dual role as General Manager of WEDCO and CEO of BLDC, as well as the respective boards of each entity. At the BLDC AGM [annual general meeting] last year, steps were taken to align the boards. The remaining administrative staff at BLDC are moving their offices to converted space in the maintenance building, and Triton House, their headquarters, will be rented out to the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, before I move on, let me remind colleagues why the Government is undertaking this initiative. Originating on the 16th of July 2002, the then Cabinet decided that the Central Policy Unit should complete a review of 17 quangos, which focused on a wide range of topics covering the establishment and governance of each body; its existing relevance, feasibility, effectiveness and levels of accountability to Government; expenditure; income; whether the work could be more effectively (or more efficiently) carried out within government proper or by some other means; determine governance and best practice in other jurisdictions; and develop mechanisms for ongoing review. This review culminated in a report entitled "UNTANGLING BERMUDA'S QUANGOS—A Review of Quangos in the Bermuda Government" presented in October 2003, as well as subsequently mentioned in the SAGE Commission Report presented a decade later in 2013.

Mr. Speaker, this Government took the decision early in our administration, shortly after returning to Government in July 2017, to have another look at the reports and their recommendations with a view to actioning some of those items, one of which is this amalgamation. Simply put, the Ministry views the merger as an opportunity to immediately effect cost savings by reducing duplication of roles, combining responsibilities and bringing a sharper focus to deliver on the Government's mandate to control costs and operate more efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, this now brings me to the key update as of today. It was the full intention for this initiative to be completed by January 2024—and I must clarify that operationally this target has been met. The company is fully ready to complete this transition. However, there has been a delay regarding the legislative amendments needed to complete the project. [Due to] resource challenges within the Attorney General's Chambers, Mr. Speaker—namely, staffing—the Bill to complete the merger has not been finalised. As such, the transition teams are currently in a holding pattern until this portion is completed.

I repeat what I said in July 2022: "We have got to find a better and quicker way to make progress, going forward." The merger team stands ready to complete the consolidation once the necessary legislative requirements are concluded. The final process after legislative approval is estimated to take an additional six months based on specific steps laid out for closing a company in accordance with the Companies Act 1981.

Mr. Speaker, I must again commend the management and staff of both organisations, many of whom did not believe we would proceed and [believed] that their jobs would be in jeopardy if we did. I am particularly pleased to commend both the Bermuda Industrial Union and the Bermuda Public Services Union for collaborating with us to revise the collective bargaining agreements so that they are identical, and the amalgamated entity can flourish.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a long and arduous journey that both you and I, and perhaps a few others in this House, have lived through. I am certain, though, that if other government entities wish to pursue a similar course of action, the process employed in this exercise would be an excellent template to follow.

Mr. Speaker, you and the honourable colleagues will be aware that we have reached the end of this journey when the Bill is tabled in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I am going to call on the Premier to do his Statement as well, and I will come back to you and the other Statements after that.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. How are you today?

The Speaker: I am good, thanks.

Hon. E. David Burt: Great!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

APPROVED RESIDENTIAL SCHEME "KICKSTART" PROGRAMME

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House of an agreement with local

banks to support additional housing development in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, on numerous occasions both inside and outside of this Honourable House I have articulated that a top priority of this Government is to increase the stock of affordable housing. That is the reason that this Government has increased its investment in affordable housing by $15 million with an additional $10 million investment announced in this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, the Government cannot build all of the housing needed by itself, and to provide incentives for the private sector to play its part the Government, through the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, established the Approved Residential Scheme programme in June 2022. This scheme provides incentives for the private sector to increase the stock of available housing units and stimulate growth within the Island's three economic empowerment zones.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately despite the hard work being done by the BEDC and other stakeholder groups, the cost of borrowing was identified as a barrier to prospective investors and developers in moving their plans to the construction phase, which consequently impacted the progress of approved residential schemes being constructed. But, Mr. Speaker, this Government understands that simply identifying the issues is not enough, and therefore, after significant stakeholder engagement and extended negotiations, I am pleased to announce that last week the Government signed a memorandum of understanding [MOU] with three local banks to launch what we refer to as the Approved Residential Scheme "Kickstart" Programme.

Under this initiative the Government has committed to provide a maximum aggregate $50 million government guarantee to support Approved Residential Scheme opportunities within the economic empowerment zones. In return for the reduced risk, participating banks, which include HSBC Bermuda, Clarien Bank and Bermuda Commercial Bank, have committed to offer a preferred interest rate to eligible applicants.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that as the size and scope of the potential projects may vary, so does the associated risk, and as a result there is no agreed set interest rate. However, each of the participating banks have committed to offer successful applicants a discounted rate which will meaningfully reduce the cost of development which is necessary for the private sector to complement the Government's efforts in building more housing in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, other key terms of this MOU stipulate that the total guarantee limit will not exceed $50 million; the Government guarantee shall remain in place for six years after completion of the construction project and therefore will not be in place for the entire length of the mortgage; and as with the Mortgage Guarantee Programme, the Government will not have any involvement and/or influence on the banks' credit underwriting or enforcement decisions.

Mr. Speaker, to be clear, investors and developers interested in large-scale residential and mixed-use building projects within our EEZs can apply to be a part of the Approved Residential Scheme through the Uptown Development Authority. If approved, applicants will not only be eligible for tax, customs duty and other incentives, but will also be eligible for a reduced interest rate for their project as well. For more information on the Approved Residential Scheme guidelines, opportunities, incentives and how to apply, I encourage interested persons to visit the Uptown Development Authority's website at www.uda.bm.

Mr. Speaker, all local banks were invited to participate in this important initiative, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the three participating banks, HSBC Bermuda, Clarien Bank and Bermuda Commercial Bank, for their efforts in working with the Government with this programme which we believe will support our economic growth as the Government remains committed to successfully executing Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy. I would also like to thank the Honourable Member, MP Jache Adams, teams within the Ministry of Finance and the staff at the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation for working with the Government to bring this initiative to reality.

Mr. Speaker, the Government will continue to use every tool at its disposal to ensure that more housing units are brought online. The private sector has a critical role to play, and we will continue to work with the private sector so that together we can ensure that there is adequate quality and affordable housing to support Bermuda's economic growth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

Minister Burch, would you like to do your second Statement?

ASSET RETIREMENT OBLIGATIONS

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to provide an explanation of Bermuda's approach to asset retirement obligations. On April 1, 2022, the Government of Bermuda adopted Public Sector Accounting Standard PS 3280. This standard addresses the reporting of legal obligations associated with the retirement of certain tangible capital assets such as asbestos removal in retired buildings by public sector entities. Events giving rise to the obligation arose prior to April 1, 2022, and the obligations had not previously been recognised. The new accounting standard has resulted in withdrawal of the existing section PS 3270, Solid Waste Landfill Closure and Post Closure Liability. The standard was adopted on the prospective basis at the date

of adoption. Under this prospective method, the discount rate and assumptions used on initial recognition are those as of the date of adoption of the standard.

Mr. Speaker, that is the overview of the new policy, and its effective date is April 1, 2022, with reporting due on the 31st of March 2024. If that sounds confusing to you, Mr. Speaker, I am too.

[Laughter]

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, it can be anticipated that all buildings built before 1970 will have asbestos in the flooring. In most cases the asbestos has been encapsulated over the years by the layering of additional flooring. Although this insulates the occupants from exposure to the toxins while the building is in use (no liability to recognise), there is a cost for abatement of the asbestos if the building is demolished or renovated. From past experience, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Public Lands and Buildings has determined that this cost is approximately $16 per square foot. This represents approximately 6.4 per cent of the insured value of the buildings on record.

Mr. Speaker, the total insured amount for the buildings in government's portfolio is $1,584,215,277. This does not include buildings owned by Berkely Institute, Bermuda College, BHC [Bermuda Housing Corporation], BLDC, CedarBridge Academy, Port Royal Golf Course, Ocean View Golf Course and WEDCO. It also excludes the insured value of the Dame Lois Browne-Evans building. Using the average rate previously listed, the estimated liability of identifying and abating any asbestos in all government buildings is estimated to be $101,389,778.

Asbestos in Containers

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 370 containers at the Quarry that contain asbestos and are packaged to be shipped overseas. At the current rate of processing, it will take up to 10 years to remove all of the containers at a cost of $8,000 per container. The liability will be completely extinguished once the containers are shipped, as the receiver has no rights to return the items to Bermuda. This estimated cost is $2,960,000.

Landfills

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, there are two landfills that are owned by the government. The first is Marsh Folly. Its use was changed from commercial solid waste to compost only about 30 years ago. The long-term plan for the site is to convert it to a parkland or a nature reserve once the composting is complete. It is not expected that this will occur within the next 5 to 10 years. No liability is being recognised at this time.

The second landfill is the airport dump where white metal is disposed of for land reclamation. This site is still in use for this purpose, and no liability is being recorded there either.

Mr. Speaker, the context and estimated costs to address the identified issues suggest that in most cases it is fiscally cost prohibitive to tackle them without some precise planning over several fiscal years. This, Mr. Speaker, is a risk management exercise, and in assessing that risk, the change in the audit standards requires more time to fully implement the requirements into our budgetary process.

Mr. Speaker, I would also add that I bring this to the attention of Honourable Members and the public to note that we are very much attuned to the issues but must perform a genuine balancing act in devoting funding to infrastructure improvement versus meeting an accounting standard that is just shy of two years old.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister Hayward.

FAMILY OFFICE FRAMEWORK

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members, I stand before this Honourable House to introduce Bermuda's framework of solutions for family offices. Mr. Speaker, today marks a significant moment for Bermuda where our storied heritage converges with new opportunities for partnerships and investment. As we forge ahead with implementation of our National Economic Development Strategy, we are also delving into the rich tapestry of Bermuda's history and how it intertwines with the present framework for family offices.

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the listening audience, I want to point out that in its simplest form a family office is a private business established for the benefit of a family of significant wealth. With a heavy focus on private wealth management, family offices manage key areas of family assets such as securities and investment funds, real estate holdings, tax matters and estate management. Family offices also serve as the central hub for a family's legacy, governance and succession, and often support the education and development of family members, coordinate communications and resolve issues within the family enterprise.

Family offices also facilitate charitable and philanthropic activities that help sustain a family's legacy. Many influential figures use family offices as a way to manage their wealth while also driving their philanthropy. Examples of influential people whose family offices have helped shape their enduring legacies and act as a catalyst for changes in society and economy are Michael Jordan, Oprah Winfrey, and Bill Gates.

Mr. Speaker, the framework for family offices in Bermuda showcases the intricate blend of finance, legislation, innovation, and community that defines our beloved Island. Throughout history, Bermuda's location in the heart of the Atlantic Ocean has necessitated a commitment to finding ways to connect with and engage in market activities with people and businesses far beyond our shores. Bermuda has done this by becoming a cradle of financial innovation, a fortress for legacy preservation, and a beacon of philanthropy and sustainability. Over a century ago, Bermuda thrived as a hub of maritime trade. As economic tides shifted we adapted, transitioning into a stronghold for insurance and reinsurance—a pivotal moment that laid the groundwork for our future endeavours as an international financial centre.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda boasts an attractive framework for family offices that stands out against other jurisdictions. Our strong asset protection, tax efficiency, political stability and well-defined regulatory regimes are just some of the ways in which Bermuda has set itself apart from its competitors. Our framework includes a [unique] mixture of a best-in-class financial services regulatory regime that facilitates access to investment opportunities in cutting-edge digital assets, emerging technologies, and innovative insurance solutions.

Government support further enhances the family office framework. Concierge services, incentives to support economic investment and residency, streamlined processes and expedited approvals will help ensure a smooth transition for family offices establishing or expanding their presence on the Island. The Government also remains committed to working with private sector experts to update and introduce new legislation and products to attract and support Bermuda [business]. Mr. Speaker, all of this combined with our natural beauty and rich culture presents a complete ecosystem for family offices.

So, Mr. Speaker, why has this Government focused on attracting and supporting family offices? Well, the answer is simple. Economic growth. Family offices invest both globally and locally in areas where the administrative office and primary family members reside. In recent years, investment trends of family offices have included increased venture capital investments in startups and small businesses, ESG [environmental, social and governance] and impact investing, as well as increased investments in real estate, property redevelopment and infrastructure improvements.

Mr. Speaker, as owners and clients, the families served by family offices are ultimately job creators and job supporters. So expanding business activities and the number of family offices doing business and investing in and from Bermuda can create new jobs and support demands for highly skilled professional services provided by Bermudians.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, endorsing our family office framework is not just about marketing; it is about shaping and securing Bermuda's financial landscape; it is about seizing the opportunity for combined growth and innovation. And most importantly, it is about addressing today's economic challenges and uncertainty with a strategic approach that can collectively advance our economy, our community, and the legacy we leave for future generations. Together we can shape a future of shared prosperity and success for Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister for Cabinet Office.

Minister Campbell.

MEETINGS IN LONDON FOR FURTHER PREPARATIONS RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PIPA

Hon. Vance Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share that between February 26 and 29 I participated in a visit to London to make further preparations related to the implementation of PIPA, otherwise known as the Personal Information Protection Act 2016.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, PIPA will come fully into force on the 1st of January 2025. It is therefore essential that we begin to strategise how PIPA will be recognised in other jurisdictions. Additionally, we must also ensure that we understand and prepare for innovative developments such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the role that PIPA will play in the ethical and responsible deployment of innovative technologies.

Mr. Speaker, I began the visit by meeting with the Commonwealth Secretariat to discuss policy and enforcement in relation to data protection and Bermuda's preparedness for PIPA coming into force. Additionally, we discussed digitisation of government services and the blue economy. During this period, I was accompanied by the Permanent Secretary, the Privacy Commissioner, the Deputy Privacy Commissioner, Dr. Marisa Stone and also Dr. Nicola O'Leary and Ms. Kennette Naylor from the PATI/PIPA Unit. Details related to the Privacy Commissioner's Road to PIPA and the Government of Bermuda's Privacy Programme were provided.

We also discussed initiatives that the Commonwealth Secretariat is facilitating around the world. Ideas and opportunities that may benefit Bermuda were discussed. The work of the Commonwealth Artificial Intelligence Consortium [CAIC] and their focus on "AI for Good" may provide useful insights for Bermuda's development in this area. Additionally, the inaugural Commonwealth Ocean Ministers meeting, which will take place in April in Cyprus, is intended to set a shared voice for Commonwealth countries on ocean issues.

Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, February 27, I met with representatives from the UK Government Department for Science, Innovation and Technology [DSIT]. The discussion included the process for assessment to

gain data adequacy with the UK, their *data bridge* concept and its benefits. The UK's data adequacy assessment is an outcomes-based approach that considers the overall effect of a third country's data protection laws, implementation, enforcement and supervision. The UK Information Commissioner's Office has a role in the assessment process as the independent regulator. The meeting was useful to understand how the UK data adequacy process differs from other adequacy processes such as [that of] the EU. This will be beneficial as Bermuda will be required to pursue a UK adequacy decision once PIPA is in operation.

Mr. Speaker, other meetings held on this day focused on the EU adequacy process as well as on the UK's and EU's approach to artificial intelligence regulation. The Bermuda team previously mentioned participated in discussions and planning facilitated by Eduardo Ustaran, Partner of the Privacy and Cybersecurity Practice of Hogan Lovells.

Further, Mr. Speaker, to highlight the activities of the day, let me frame the importance of international transfers of personal information. A key feature of any privacy legislation is that transfers of personal information to a third-party jurisdiction must ensure that the third party has similar legislation in place or ensure that contractual relationships between the relevant parties are implemented that ensure similar protections apply. It is simpler for businesses if the jurisdictions have similar legislation in place and are recognised to have done so. This is called the *privacy network of trust*. Once you become a member of a network of trust, then business is freed from the need for contractual mechanisms and some audit functions. It is an economic driver in the development of the Information Society.

Mr. Speaker, the process is two-way, as the network of trust must recognise your country's privacy regime and you must recognise the network of trust of the countries that constitute the network. This process is not a one-off and must be reviewed and maintained. The EU recognises this by use of their adequacy process, and the UK have developed their own process due to. An adequacy decision ensures that data transfers can take place without reliance on any further data transfer mechanism. Once PIPA is in force, Bermuda must develop its applications for the EU and the UK and determine how it will deal with other jurisdictions with which it does business regularly. In the meantime, contractual mechanisms will be the predominate method for the international transfer of personal information.

Mr. Speaker, this may result in Bermuda's becoming a part of other initiatives such as the Global Cross-Border Privacy Rules Forum. The Cross-Border Privacy Rules [CBPR] are a comprehensive privacy certification that provides organisations with a mechanism for cross-border data transfers (like Binding Corporate Rules [BCR] in the EU, but with a broader scope). CBPR can be used for intra-company transfers, for transfers between unaffiliated companies as well as for transfers to non CBPR-certified companies anywhere in the world. The Global Cross-Border Privacy Rules Forum, established in 2022, is an initiative that builds on the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation CBPR system as a framework that supports the effective protection and flow of data internationally.

At its core, the Global CBPR system and the global Privacy Recognition for Processors [PRP] system are voluntary accountability-based systems that allow participating organisations to demonstrate compliance to internationally recognised data protection standards. The Global CBPR Forum has gained momentum as a scalable data protection and data flow framework. The Global CBPR Forum is currently made up of the following member countries: Australia, Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, Singapore, Chinese Taipei and the United States of America.

On April 13, 2023, the Global CBPR Forum officially opened its doors to participation by interested jurisdictions by publishing its Global CBPR Framework and Terms of Reference. The UK joined as an associate member in 2023. As an associate, the UK will be able to participate in the Global CBPR Forum discussions, but they will not have any voting rights to help shape the CBPR and PRP systems. I also note that Bermuda has been participating in the discussion [meetings since 2021].

Mr. Speaker, the UK and EU approaches to the regulation of artificial intelligence [AI] were an important part of the day's discussions due to the increased focus on ethical and responsible use of AI technologies. The Bermuda team received an overview on the ways in which AI regulation is being approached. In an area such as AI that uses such a great deal of data, it is important that those who use these tools have trust both in the integrity of the data and that harm cannot come to individuals.

Mr. Speaker, the EU approach, a comprehensive regulatory framework, is known as the AI Act [(Regulation on Artificial Intelligence)]. Its aim is to regulate the development and use of AI by providing a framework of obligations for parties involved across the entire AI supply chain. As with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the EU is seeking to set the new global standard for AI regulation. At its heart is a cross-sectoral risk-based classification system with an outright prohibition on certain AI practices deemed to impose unacceptable risk, and new obligations largely targeting AI systems deemed high risk. Additionally, there will be obligations on providers of general-purpose AI systems including generative AI systems like ChatGPT. Like GDPR it will carry significant fines and have extra-territorial reach.

Mr. Speaker, the UK approach differs in that currently they do not plan to introduce primary legislation to regulate AI. They have recently released their consultation response to their March 2023 white paper

which was titled "AI Regulation: A Pro-Innovation Approach." The UK Government's approach to AI regulation will be context-based and underpinned by cross-sectoral principles. Their aim is to retain an agile regulatory approach that does not inhibit innovation and can adapt to evolving AI risks. This means that the cross-sectoral principles will be interpreted by existing regulators. The five core principles established are as follows:

1. safety, security and robustness;
2. appropriate transparency and explainability;
3. fairness;
4. accountability and governance; and
5. contestability and redress.

There is the potential for binding requirements applicable to only the most capable AI systems in the future. With that in mind, the intent appears to be that any binding requirements would be designed to fill the gap in existing regulation.

Mr. Speaker, the International Association of Privacy Professionals [IAPP] Data Protection Intensive: UK which followed on February 28 and 29 featured keynote speakers, breakout sessions and workshops diving into data protection laws, regulations, technology and operational practices. It covered topics including

- the EU–US Transatlantic Data Privacy Framework;
- building a safe space for children online;
- avoiding deceptive design practices;
- how to navigate privacy and the cloud;
- AI governance;
- the safe use of generative AI;
- the intersections of UK;
- EU and global legislative updates;
- privacy enhancing technologies; and
- a range of operational topics impacting data protection concerns.

Governance, Trust, Assurance and Accountability were themes across many topics. It was an event that provided access to topics of critical importance, as well as networking with those who are setting standards and working in these areas daily.

During the IAPP Data Protection Intensive, I was able to meet with the UK Information Commissioner, John Edwards, after he delivered the opening keynote address. We talked about the role of the Information Commissioner's Office [ICO] in regulating both data protection and freedom of information, among other regulatory responsibilities held by the office. We also received the Information Commissioner's view of his office's role in the UK's data adequacy assessment process. He shared that there is a memorandum of understanding in place to allow for *cooperation and consultation*, which provides for a no-surprises environment relating to future positions and decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, the UK Information Commissioner also indicated that the UK ICO provides comments and advice during the gatekeeping and assessment phases of the UK's data adequacy assessment. They also provide a response on the draft conclusions of a UK Government DSIT [Department for Science, Innovation and Technology] assessment during the recommendation phase so that the commissioner's view can be formally included in the recommendation to the Secretary of State and factored into their decision-making. Finally, they are asked to give advice and/or an opinion to Parliament during the procedural phase, including on the process followed and the factors taken into consideration by the DSIT adequacy assessment team and the Secretary of State. This helped us to understand the process that will be required to pursue a UK adequacy decision once PIPA is in operation.

Mr. Speaker, PIPA's coming into force on the 1st of January 2025 is another step in Bermuda's protection of personal information and privacy journey. As of March 2023, approximately 162 countries had enacted privacy laws, while a further 20 had privacy Bills in process. The international network of trust continues to expand to support both the effective protection and the flow of personal information internationally. We must prepare to become a part of and navigate through this developing privacy journey.

I assure you that even while we are implementing and strengthening our privacy regimes, we are also preparing for this next phase. Thus, we are actively considering PIPA's role in ethical and responsible AI. AI, we know, has the potential to provide many opportunities to improve efficiencies. However, we must ensure that we manage the risks to realise the benefits. We look forward to sharing more on this as we progress.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the Statements this morning. We will now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are no questions this morning, written or otherwise regarding today's Statements.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to make a contribution?

Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, sir.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: And good morning to the listening public and colleagues.

I rise this morning to congratulate the Casa Dos Açores charity located at Pembroke Community Club (or out by that area) for their ninth anniversary. For a very small charity that started in a garage with only a handful of people, what they have done to expand and memorialise on Portuguese culture in Bermuda is actually quite incredible. And they have done it, as they say, *one malassadas at a time* because they have sold so many bakery items at all of the events in Bermuda, including Harbour Nights and things like that. You see them working back there, sweating. And they have done an incredible job. Their work includes giving monies to other charities such as the Women's Resource Centre and Age Concern. I would also like to associate MP Jache Adams and the Senator from another place.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other.

Oh, Minister Weeks.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning on a sad note. I want this House to acknowledge the passing of one of my fraternal brothers, Brother Charles Daniels.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: He passed this weekend.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. So, it looks like I will associate the whole House.

An Hon. Member: Hamilton Parish.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Hamilton Parish, yes. Mr. Speaker, Charles Daniels was one of my fraternal brothers. He was a fraternal member of Kappa Alpha Psi. He actually started the Bermuda chapter with a former Member of this House, the Honourable Nelson Bascome. It is not much more I could say, Mr. Speaker, other than he was an architect. He was very much involved in the community here locally and abroad. He was like a big brother to the rest of us who joined the fraternity here. So, my heartfelt condolences go out to his family, his two daughters and son, and to his extended family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other Member?

MP De Silva.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to be associated with the condolences to the family of Charles. I spent a lot of time with Charles over the years and quite surprised to hear of his passing.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like the House to send congratulations to Ms. Judy Scott. You may know Judy, Mr. Speaker. She has worked at Port Royal for some 41 years. This year will be her 41st year. And MP Kim Swan would like to be associated as well as MP Neville Tyrrell. Judy is a stalwart, Mr. Speaker. She certainly is a shining beacon for all of those who may wish to follow in her footsteps working for an organisation, let alone the Government of Bermuda. So, to Judy, congratulations to her commitment and her hard work over the last 41 years.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other Member?

Minister Rabain.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to lend my condolences to [the family of] brother Charles Daniels. It was a shock to hear this morning of his passing. I have known Charles for quite a long time as the architectural fraternity does know. There was never a moment when I saw Charles that he was not with his son, Chris. He is a special-needs child. And the amount of time and energy and dedication he put into raising that young man, you know, that is the enduring memory that I think all of us will have, of seeing Charles with his son. Almost every time you saw him, he had his son with him. And I know his family, and especially the son, will miss him greatly. And as I said, it is a complete shock. And as Minister Weeks said, this is something that just rendered me speechless just to hear that this has happened. And I just wish . . . his family peace during this time. And let them know that if there is anything that they need, they can reach out to myself or any of our Members here. And we will be sure to help them out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to associate with the remarks on Charles Daniels, who was a constituent of mine. I saw Charles approximately about six weeks ago down at Piggly Wiggly. And I asked him, *How you doing, Charles?* And he said, *Not too good.* He told me of the challenges he had, and things did not look great for

him. And as the Minister just said, a lot of Charles's energy was taken just taking care of his son. He was dedicated. He was well known in the community of Hamilton Parish. A very nice guy, likable, all those good things that came with Charles. He certainly will be a miss to his family and certainly to the community of Hamilton Parish. Supporter of the party, worked hard for the party when necessary. But he will be sorely missed. Even though I expected it based on what he told me, it is still a shock.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have been associated with the remarks to Judy Scott on her long service at Port Royal. I would like for this House to recognise the service of Ms. Patricia Tuzo at Ocean View, who is retiring. MP Tyrrell and MP De Silva associate with that, and MP Weeks as well. Mr. Speaker, I hired Ms. Patricia Tuzo when I was called upon by the Minister in the late 1980s to bring Ocean View Golf Course into the government fold as a quango.

And [Ms. Tuzo] was working for the then Ocean View Golf Club which was no longer going to be in a position to lease that golf course any longer from the Bermuda Government. And under the express wishes of then Minister Quinton Edness, under whom I was the head of the quango, we put in place mechanisms that allowed that club to continue to be associated with the name with which they had operated. And we took on a young Patricia Tuzo at that particular time and found a place for her to continue on working.

She continued to work there, providing great yeoman's service and a continuity between what was and what is. And we are very appreciative of her and her wonderful service. And maybe she will have some time to play some more golf, as she did a lot at that particular time along with many other stalwarts of that club. But she served Bermuda Government through its quango admirably. And we wish her well in her years of retirement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Government Whip.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, it was with some sad notes that I learned this weekend that a constituent of mine passed, Ms. Althea Pearl Simmons. Ms. Simmons, as I said, is from Scott's Lane South in Warwick. She is certainly going to be missed because even though she reached the ripe old age of 93, she was still very active within her family, having parties and things like that. She was one of those persons who was always well-dressed. In fact, she worked very late into her life, I think up to about 10 years ago. She was a messenger for one of the companies in town. And you would see her walking through town, you know, strutting with her stride that she had and always well, well dressed.

She also was a neighbour of mine in my younger years on Angle Street. So, I did know her quite well. And as I said, she was a supporter of me. Whenever I came through the constituency in her neighbourhood, she would always be shouting out to me. She has a very large family, so she is going to really be missed. But I would like to mention her niece, Helene Burchall, and her great-niece, Chanel Burchall. She has three great-great-nephews. And of course, Shannon, her great-nephew as well will sorely miss her. So, I ask that condolences be sent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None other.

Before we move on, I would just like to add my words of condolences to the family of the late Charles Daniels. Many years ago when I entered into the public life, political arena, Charles, like Nelson who was mentioned earlier . . . we were some of the younger faces around this time working extremely hard within the party. And I know the dedication that Charles had to the party, to his family and also his church. He was a member just down the street here at Emmanual Baptist. And he committed himself 100 per cent to everything that he took on. I will always remember Charles for that.

I feel fortunate that I actually went to visit him last week and saw him at the hospital. I had [a chance] to spend some time with him and was uplifted in that he knew where he was with his condition. He accepted where he was at. He praised his Lord and Saviour. And we ended up with a very good prayer together.

And I will always remember Charles for his sense of commitment and the dedicated person he was. My condolences go out to his family—his daughters, Margaret and Catherine, and son Christopher. And much has been said already about the dedication that he had to his son. And we always remember the type of father he was. He stood with his son even in those challenges. And I think he was an example to other parents who have the fortune to have similar challenges with their children. My heartfelt condolences are with him and his family at this time.

Thank you. We will move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: That now moves us to the Orders of the Day, which is actually the final sitting of the annual Budget Debate. For the listening audience, for today we have, as always, eight hours set aside. The first four hours this morning are for the Ministry of Economy and Labour. And the latter four hours will be for Transportation.

Once the Premier moves us into Committee, the House will be in the hands of the Panel of Chairs, led by the Deputy Speaker. And the Speaker will be out of the House for the next eight hours during the budget period.

Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

MP Famous, you will be in the Chair this morning. The House is in your hands.

Members, have a good day.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

House in Committee at 10:55 am

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024/25

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good morning to the listening audience.

Honourable Members in the House, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Minister of Economy and Labour will be presenting his briefs.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND LABOUR

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move that the following Heads: Head 44, Ministry of Economy and Labour Headquarters; Head 14, Department of Statistics; Head 27, Immigration; Head 60, Workforce Development; Head 94, Economic Development; and Head 99, Department of Labour be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Any objections?

Minister, please proceed.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, before I proceed into the substance of my briefs, we often come here and we debate these heads within the Budget Book. And sometimes you have Ministers who read out their time and the Opposition accuses us of not leaving enough time for them to [ask] questions; or Ministers read for lengthy periods of time and then the technical officers are racing around at the end of the time period trying to provide comprehensive answers to the Opposition Members' questions.

I do not think that that is an effective or efficient use of time. As a result, Mr. Chairman, I will humbly ask if the Opposition Member can raise all of his questions in advance. That way my team can provide comprehensive responses to every question that the Opposition may have according to the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience and Members in the House, the Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour, Jason P. Hayward, has magnanimously allowed the—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Excuse me, sir. This is the Chair. Understand that. All right.

[The Honourable Minister] has allowed the Opposition to ask their questions.

Opposition Member.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. I thank the Honourable Minister for his invitation and this change to

parliamentary tradition and precedent. However, I will need a moment to confer with honourable colleagues. This is a new expression. And we would want to make sure that we are fully consulted before you proceed forward. I would be happy to stand up after consultation to put specific questions to [the Honourable Minister] if we agree to go down that road. But first I require time for consultation. Thank you.

The Chairman: So, for clarify, you are asking for consultation from whom?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Well, we will proceed with the Standing Orders precedent and Hansard of course.

The Chairman: Hmm.

For the benefit of the listening audience and the Honourable Members in the House, the Minister of Economy and Labour, Jason P. Hayward, has allowed the Opposition quite some time to ask questions. And they are consulting amongst themselves whether or not they are going to ask these questions beforehand.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Also, for the benefit of the listening audience, today is the last day of the Budget Debate. The Budget Debates are traditionally the Opposition's debate in which they come prepared with questions. Today's ministries to be debated will be Economy and Labour [which includes] Immigration, and Transport. The first four hours are dedicated to Economy and Labour [which includes] Immigration; the second half of the day of the debate is dedicated toward Transportation.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Member, you are on your feet. Do you have something to address the Chair [about]?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you. We are still reviewing the Standing Orders and precedent. Thank you.

But I would like to note, Mr. Chairman, that this is a very kind offer. Had it been made earlier ahead of time, I would have been prepared for it. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

[Pause]

The Chairman: Would you like to give a point of clarity, Honourable Member?

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, I sure would, Mr. Chairman. I am just wondering. I mean, the last time I looked, I think the Opposition chooses how many hours to debate ahead. I find it shocking that the Honourable Opposition Leader is not prepared! I would have thought that preparations would have been made weeks ago, especially since the Opposition decides how many hours to talk about each Ministry. I am just . . . I am taken aback!

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, the previous speaker was the Honourable Zane De Silva of constituency 29.

The Chair recognises the Honourable Kim Swan of constituency 2.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Good day, Mr. Chairman.

The Opposition Leader said he is searching for precedent. I can provide precedent in another place. On this very debate (not particularly this particular head) a Member, Mr. Cal Smith, with a very lengthy brief spoke for a very abbreviated period of time and the Opposition Leader in the Senate sent me up to vet and told me, *Continue on.* And I did. And there are Members in this House who can attest to that. The precedent has been set. There is no particular time that the Government has to speak. It is the Opposition who have to come prepared to carry the debate.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, we are going to rise for a minute while I recess with the Speaker.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 11:02 am

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 11:10 am

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024/25

MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND LABOUR

[Continuation thereof]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And again, we thank the Honourable Minister for his offer, again mindful that if we would have gotten it earlier it would have been much more appreciated. To that end, Mr. Chairman, the ministerial brief provides the justification for these spends as outlined in the Budget Book, or the estimates, as well as how the money is spent and why the money is spent.

To that end, I will decline the offer so that I can hear the brief and put questions to the Minister in the customary fashion.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Opposition Leader.

Honourable Minister, you may proceed with your brief.

For the benefit of the listening audience, the House has resumed. We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

The Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour and [Department of] Immigration, Jason P. Hayward, shall give his brief now.

Minister, please proceed.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I have moved the following heads: 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99.

Mr. Chairman, the revenue and expenditure for those particular heads has been set out in the Budget Book. The Budget Book has been out for weeks. And I am appalled that the Opposition has no questions as it pertains to the Budget Book that has been out. I am even more concerned that the—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order. That is a misleading statement. The Honourable Minister is misleading the House.

The Chairman: Opposition Leader, I did not recognise you. Respect the Chair, please.

Minister, please resume.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Will my point of order be taken, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Go ahead with your point of order.

Do you recognise the point of order, Minister?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes.

POINT OF ORDER
[*Misleading]*

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A point of order, misleading.

The Honourable Minister, especially in the House indicating that there has been no preparation, no questions based on the Budget Book. Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister, please resume.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, unfortunately there is a reluctance to ask questions as it pertains to the numbers which are set out in the Budget Book. And the Opposition wants to focus on rebutting—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: What is your point of order, Opposition Leader?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Again misleading.

There is no reluctance to ask the questions. We are simply asking for the traditional brief to be provided before we commence the question period.

The Chairman: Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, when we provide lengthy briefs and there is little opportunity for questions, we are criticised. When we give full opportunity for questions to be asked and to engage in a fulsome debate, we are criticised.

Mr. Chairman, I will proceed with reading [the brief for] Head 44, which is the Ministry Headquarters.

HEAD 44—ECONOMY AND LABOUR
MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Jason Hayward: The revenue and expenditure are set out, so I will discuss the plans for the upcoming year.

Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year 2024/25 the Ministry is set up to deliver on further strategy and Throne Speech initiatives that advance this Government's agenda to improve the lives of the people of Bermuda with our vision at heart. Of all that the Ministry does, our priority is to drive economic growth and job creation. The Economic Development Strategy will be a major driving force behind our initiatives. The strategy aims to move beyond just increasing GDP to maintaining high employment rates and improving the range of well-remunerated jobs. Its five strategic priorities are as follows:

1. local and international retention and expansion;
2. business attraction and investment promotion;
3. entrepreneurship and small-business development;
4. continued execution of the Economic Recovery Plan; and
5. investing in people.

Mr. Chairman, accordingly, during this year the Ministry will bring amendments to the Immigration and Protection Act 1956 to drive in the Economic Development Strategy. I expect to shortly bring to this Honourable House a position paper on Retaining Bermuda's Workforce, which will outline proposals to retain our local workforce by

- continuing to strengthen labour protections;
- ensuring Bermudians studying abroad return home to reside and work upon completion of their professional development;
- investigate the extent and causes of Bermuda emigration from the Island;
- review residency eligibility requirements; and
- encourage the retention of older Bermudians in the workforce.

In addition, the Ministry will continue to advance its family office framework to encourage family

offices to establish and maintain operations in Bermuda, create and support the demands for jobs and professional services, and invest in companies and property on the Island.

Family offices manage family assets such as securities and investment funds, real estate holdings, tax matters and estate management. They also serve as the central hub for a family's legacy, governance and succession, and support the education and development of family members. The family office framework with developing consultation with stakeholders, and I was pleased to table that framework in the House this morning.

Further, Mr. Chairman, the Ministry is committed to driving continued improvements in all of its departments—in particular, immigration digitisation as a priority with an active enhancement on the way. This will be essential to eliminate backlogs and improve customer service. The work permit policy is being updated and will be finalised shortly. Likewise, compliance monitoring on immigration matters is a priority where we anticipate measures to improve in the upcoming year. I will speak on these matters specifically under that head.

Mr. Chairman, I want to end my presentation by thanking the staff of the Ministry Headquarters including the previous Permanent Secretary, Ms. Pandora Glasford, who were all instrumental in the delivery and the extensive reform and legislative agenda of my Ministry. The Ministry of Economy and Labour has a small but excellent team of professionals, and our achievements this past year are a testament of their hard work.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 44, Ministry Headquarters. Mr. Chairman, I will welcome any questions as it pertains to Head 44, Ministry Headquarters.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, the Minister, the Honourable Jason P. Hayward, has finished his brief on Head 44, Ministry Headquarters.

The Chair now recognises the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you.

The Honourable Minister moved more than Head 44, so I will wait until he finishes his briefs on the other heads he moved. Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister.

HEAD 14—STATISTICS

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I will move on to Head 14, Department of Statistics, and that can be found on pages B-179 through B-182, and page C-13 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the revenue and expenditure are clearly set out in the Budget Book, so I will discuss the plans for the upcoming year. The department will conduct the necessary surveys and collect administrative data to produce the following core publications in the upcoming fiscal year 2024/25:

- monthly, the Retail Sales Index and Consumer Price Index;
- quarterly, the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position and Gross Domestic Product by Expenditure;
- semi-annually, Labour Force Survey;
- annually,
    - The Bermuda Digest of Statistics
    - Bermuda Job Market
    - Employment briefs
    - Employment survey tabulations
    - Annual Gross Domestic Product
    - Information, Communication and Technology Profile
    - Environmental Statistics Compendium; and
    - Tourism Satellite Account Report.

Additionally, we will engage in the ad hoc Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

Mr. Chairman, the department is committed to leveraging technology to automate processes to improve the quality and timeliness of reporting. We expect to bring our publications up to date by the second quarter of fiscal year 2024/25. Mr. Chairman, the department conducts ad hoc surveys, provides survey samples and undertakes in-depth research and analysis of data. In addition, the department provides fiscal advice and professional consultancy in the collection, processing and analysis of data for government departments.

Mr. Chairman, the department will engage in activities such as processing and providing trade statistics, fulfilling statistical data requests from local and international organisations, and making presentations to internal and external stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the hard-working staff of the Department of Statistics, led by the Director, Melinda Williams, and her support staff for their continued commitment.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation for Head 14, Department of Statistics, and I welcome any questions from the Opposition Leader.

The Chairman: The Chair recognises the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would thank the Minister to continue with the heads as he has moved them.

The Chairman: Minister, please proceed with your heads.

HEAD 27—DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, my next head is Head 27, Immigration.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Jason Hayward: During fiscal year 2024/25, the department will

- enhance the payment gateway for fees;
- improve all immigration processes to be more effective and efficient so as to eliminate the backlog of applications. Should it occur again, it will immediately be managed;
- enhance the Compliance section so that they can carry out duties in accordance with the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956;
- implement a digitisation system that automates the application process for all applications which are submitted to the department. A request for information will be published shortly with the expectation that the new system will be brought online in phases within the 2024/25 budget year, beginning with work permit applications.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I would like to thank the dedicated members of staff at the department of Immigration. I would like to thank the Immigration team under the leadership of Dr. Danette Ming, Chief Immigration Officer; and Ms. Marita Grimes, Assistant Immigration Officer; together with Ms. Lauren Sadler-Best of the Attorney General's Chambers; the Information and Digital Technology Department, led by Mr. Daron Raynor; and the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, headed by Mr. Charles Richardson. Finally, I would also like to thank Ms. Tionea Effs, Ms. Kelly Perinchief-Burgess, Ms. Nekia Richardson, Ms. Ashleigh Lambert and their respective teams, as well as the Collector of Customs, Ms. Lucinda Pearman and her airport team for administering the airport border control on behalf of Immigration.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation for Head 27, the Department of Immigration. And I welcome the Opposition Leader to ask any questions on that head.

The Chairman: The Chair recognises the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Honourable Minister to continue with the heads as he has moved them.

The Chairman: Minister, you may proceed.

HEAD 60—DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, the next head is Head 60, which is the Department of Workforce Development found on pages B-188 through B-193, and page C-19 of the Budget Book.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, as we look forward to the upcoming fiscal year and beyond, the Workforce Development Department's objectives for the fiscal period 2024/25 can be found on page B-188 and read as follows:

- Provide Support for the newly formed National Certification and Apprenticeship Board.
- Expand Apprenticeship Training Programmes to include high demand occupations.
- Create Occupational profiles and career pathways for current and future tech careers.
- Increase engagement and communication with Bermuda's Youth.
- Execution of Personal Employment Plans.

In the upcoming 2024/25 fiscal period, the Department of Workforce Development is poised to implement a strategy to bolster its impact on Workforce Development. The plans include an enhancement of summer employment programmes [which are] providing valuable work experience for aspiring individuals entering the job market. Additionally, a proactive stakeholder engagement initiative will be launched specifically targeting clients with personal employment plans to refine and elevate their workplace skills. The department is committed to expanding apprentice opportunities fostering skills development in designated trades and streamlining processes for national certification.

A renewed partnership with the ILO [International Labour Organization] is on the horizon, focusing on expanding opportunities with the blue and green economies. Furthermore, the department is exploring innovative micro-courses designed to offer efficient and targeted career certification pathways in various trades, ensuring a nimble response to the evolving needs of the workforce in Bermuda. These initiatives will collectively reflect our commitment to nurturing a skilled, adaptable and future-ready workforce.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 60, Department of Workforce Development. And I welcome the Opposition Leader to ask any questions on that head.

The Chairman: The Chair recognises the Honourable Opposition Leader, Jarion Richardson.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Honourable Minister for his presentation and invite him to continue with the heads as he previously moved.

The Chairman: Minister, you may continue.

HEAD 94—ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, Head 94 is found on pages B-194 through B-197, and C-19 of the Budget Book.

[Pause]

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience and Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Honourable Minister Jason P. Hayward is giving his presentation on the heads under his Ministry. Today is the last day of the Budget Debate. The first half of the Budget Debate is dedicated to the Ministry of Economy and Labour. The second half of the Budget Debate is dedicated toward Transport.

Minister, you may proceed.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, first I want to start off by thanking the team within the Economic Development Department [EDD] for all of their hard work. The Economic Development Department has a number of business units which are outlined in the Budget Book, and they are responsible for driving the economic development initiatives of the Ministry of Economy and Labour and the Government.

The mandate of EDD is *To advance the sustainable growth, development and diversification of Bermuda's economy.* It does so by

- facilitating, creating and implementing policies to support the Bermuda Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027;
- in collaboration with stakeholders, positioning Bermuda as an ideal test market for innovative product and industry development;
- analysing innovative developments and trends through research and stakeholder engagement;
- identifying the jurisdiction's market fit, clearly communicating its message and driving opportunities that lead to economic activity;
- processing various land licences and Incentives for Job Makers applications in a timely, efficient and professional manner;
- facilitating opportunities for technology education, mentoring and training, and supporting e-entrepreneurship; and
- helping create a more attractive regulatory environment for business and enhanced communications between the Government of Bermuda and the private sector.

Under programme 9404, Research and Legislative Support; under programme, 9403, Analysis and Policy Support; under programme 9405, Concierge and Engagement Services.

Mr. Chairman, the department is also responsible for two significant grants, those being grants provided through the Economic Development Corporation, which can be found on page C-19 of the Budget Book; and grants provided through the Bermuda Business Development Agency.

Mr. Chairman, the BEDC's [Bermuda Economic Development Corporation's] plans for the upcoming year: The BEDC plans to focus on critical projects and initiatives in 2024/25 in support of the Economic Development Strategy to provide further benefit and positive impact economically in Bermuda. The BEDC has undergone significant changes in the last few years, providing business development services to Bermuda's entrepreneurs and economic development services to specific geographic locations. As such, it requires a robust and innovative strategic plan to guide its activities and the next phase of evolution over the coming years.

The BEDC has come to the end of its current strategic plan and will be engaging an appropriately qualified consultancy to assist in developing its new strategic plan. Entrepreneurship is among the most important drivers of job creation and economic growth. It is critical for developing a vibrant formal small- and medium-sized business sector. A proactive role for any Government is supporting entrepreneurship in a systematic approach.

In 2023, the Government of Bermuda released the Economic Development Strategy to build a diverse and sustainable economy that will enhance the quality of life for Bermuda's residents. One of the five strategic priorities in this effort is entrepreneurship and small-business development. The BEDC will engage a consultant to assist in developing Bermuda's first National Entrepreneurship Strategy.

Work has concluded on the research of the legislative framework to underpin the development of a co-operative legislative policy document which is now being revised and updated after being vetted twice by key industry stakeholders and the International Labour Organization. The next phase is now to move policy to legislation. The BEDC has partnered with Ignite Bermuda to develop programmes and products to address the additional support, skills-based training and mindset development needed around financial literacy. This joint effort aims to develop the necessary support without duplicating existing solutions. The outcomes will provide an outline of a step-by-step guidance to grow the percentage of financially literate entrepreneurial leaders so that they can take full advantage of the products available to them through the BEDC and Ignite Bermuda.

The overarching goal of the Commercial Kitchens Programme [CKP] is to provide interested entrepreneurs with an affordable, quality work environment to support their business start-up or expansion and at the same time provide commercial kitchen owners with facility income that they would otherwise not receive.

Since the programme's launch in 2022, BEDC has been successful in matching foodpreneurs with available commercial kitchens, and in renting and subleasing commercial kitchens it has invested in. Despite this, demand greatly outstrips supply of available and suitable kitchens. As such, BEDC has partnered with the Bermuda College to expand available kitchens by investing in and building two commercial kitchens to support up to eight foodpreneurs. It is anticipated that these kitchens will come online in 2024/25.

This concludes my presentation of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation.

Bermuda Business Development Agency

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, the other organisation that receives a grant from the Bermuda Government is the Business Development Agency. The Business Development Agency is critical to the economic growth and development of Bermuda. Mr. Chairman, in 2023/24 the Bermuda pursued targeted business development opportunities around the world across five key industries strategically aligned with the Economic Recovery Plan to create economic growth, increase inward investment and create jobs.

The five key industries are (1) risk and insurance; (2) services of high net worth including the economic investment residential certificate; (3) client resolutions and asset management; (4) technology; and (5) infrastructure. In various ways these industries directly related to economic growth locally. They support economic diversification by creating jobs; they support expanding Bermuda's population by boosting the working population; and they often support sustainable green recovery policies and/or regulatory frameworks for technology innovation as outlined in the Economic Recovery Plan.

Mr. Chairman, to ensure the BDA delivers on its core mission, it continues to enhance and review its operational systems and frameworks. As a result of this, which was championed by the BDA Board of eight volunteer directors and endorsed by the Ministry of Economy and Labour, the Speech from the Throne announced that the BDA has begun a strategy to begin becoming a best-in-class investment promotion agency.

Mr. Chairman, the BDA has also been busy organising signature on Island events. And they are highlighting Bermuda's competitive strengths, and in doing so held three signature events: the second Annual Bermuda Risk Summit, the second Annual Bermuda Climate Summit and the fifth Annual Bermuda Tax Summit. The immediate economic impact of these events, including lodging, transportation, food and beverage, retail and recreation, was estimated at $3.2 million and supported 686 local jobs. Far more significant are the long-term economic benefits of the business deals written at and around the events.

In addition to BDA's own signature events, it supported numerous in-person on Island conferences relevant to five key industries. [The conferences were as follows:] Legal Week; Global Elite Private Client Exchange Bermuda; Transcontinental Trusts International Forum Bermuda; the World Federation of Exchanges Annual Meeting; Bermuda International Long-Term Insurance and Reinsurance conference; Bermuda Captives Conference; ILS Convergence and Insurance Risk Capital Bermuda conference; and STEP Bermuda Conference.

Mr. Chairman, in the current period, the BDA will be transitioning to an investment promotion agency. There has never been as much global competition for the estimated $727 billion in foreign direct investment flowing worldwide. Thousands of investment promotion agencies represent every country, region and city in the world, all fighting for the same slice of the global economic pie. As a result of this fierce competition, the BDA looks forward to refocusing its priorities and growing from strength to strength as a best-in-practice IPA [investment promotion agency] in 2024 to deliver even more for our valued stakeholders in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 11-strong BDA team who have worked tirelessly to assist with breathing life back into our economy evidenced by an estimated 2.3 per cent growth in GDP year over year after adjustment for inflation. Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank the team at the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation for the work that they have undertaken.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation for Head 94, Economic Development Department. And if the Opposition Leader has any questions ready to go, he can present them at this time.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair recognises the Opposition Leader, Jarion Richardson.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I definitely thank the Minister for his brief and acknowledge that I can put questions to him according to his invitation. I would thank the Minister to continue with his heads as he previously moved.

The Chairman: Minister, I believe you have one more head.

HEAD 99—DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman.

I am pleased to present the budget for Head 99, Headquarters of the Ministry of Economy and Labour *[sic]* found on pages B-198 through B-200, and page C-13. And that should be the Department of Labour, Mr. Chairman.

The mandate of the Department of Labour is *To provide services to support and foster positive employment relations and harmonious industrial relations within Bermuda in alignment with international best practices.* Mr. Chairman, the department has a current establishment of 10 full-time equivalents [FTEs], which consist of the Director of Labour, a Labour Relations Manager, Office Manager, three Labour Relations Officers, three Labour Inspectors and a Tribunal Administrative Assistant.

The department continues to offer seminars, workshops and presentations to employers, workers groups and individuals in an effort to broaden the understanding of good employment practices and harmonious industrial relations. Additionally, with the enhancement of the minimum hourly wage rate and the amendments to the Employment Act 2000 regarding the protection of employee tips and other gratuities which [took] effect on the 1st of March 2024, the department will expand its campaign to educate the public on any new and revised legislation with the specific aim of reducing employment- and labour-related complaints, ensuring that parties feel supported and enhancing workers' rights.

The department will continue to liaise with and provide support to the Wage Commission in its pursuit to recommend a living wage for the people of Bermuda. Additionally, the department will continue to evaluate the effects that the recent legislative amendments are having on the working population and keep abreast of international best practices to ensure that the relevant national legislation is up to date and keeps the advancement and protection of employee rights at the focus. The department will continue its close relationship with stakeholders, employer groups, the unions and relevant government departments to ensure continued collaboration for the enhancement of amicable industrial relations among employees, employers and their respective representatives.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Acting Director, the staff, the Department of Labour and the members of the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal. I thank them for providing excellent service to the people of Bermuda for continuing to deliver in accordance with their mandate on the less-than-ideal circumstances at times, and for their commitment to ensuring that the employment and labour legislation that is a fundamental component of our society is maintained. Their professionalism and dedication have been unwavering and very much appreciated.

Mr. Chairman, this now concludes my budget presentation for Head 99, the Department of Labour.

Mr. Chairman, in summary closing, the Ministry of Economy and Labour, on an annual basis without any statutory responsibility, puts out an annual report which highlights all of the work that each and every department underneath the Ministry of Economy and Labour actually executes within the fiscal period. I would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Economy and Labour, the staff of all of the departments under the Department of Economy and Labour and the staff within the quangos, who do an excellent job in executing on the Ministry's mandate, but [also] the mandate of the Minister, which is to ensure that there is economic growth, economic development and the expansion of jobs.

When we start to talk about performance measures, if this Ministry is responsible for economic growth, economic development and the expansion of jobs, we can certainly tick those boxes. We have seen economic growth, we have seen economic development and we continue to see the expansion of jobs. Those are the outcomes that matter to the country. Those are the outcomes that ensure that we have a sustainable economy for the future. Those are the outcomes that mean our money is actually well spent, Mr. Chairman. And as a result of that, I want to thank each and every one who has contributed to the success of the economic growth, economic development and the expansion of jobs in Bermuda.

Thank you. And I will now hand it over to the Opposition Leader to ask his questions.

The Chairman: One minute, Opposition Leader.

For the benefit of the listening audience, Minister Jason P. Hayward of Economy and Labour (and [the Department of] Immigration) has concluded his heads. And he has given thanks to those civil servants who have worked so hard to do the best for Bermuda.

The debate will now be turned over to questions from the Opposition Leader.

Please proceed, Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Honourable Minister for his briefings on Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99.

Mr. Chairman, how much time do we have, for the record? How much time do I have left in the debate?

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, this debate began at 10:55 am. We had a five-minute break. So your maths, Berkeley maths, tells me that that is almost three hours.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I again thank the Honourable Minister.

I will start on Head 44, specifically on page B-178 relating to the Performance Measures. Mr. Chairman, we note that the Labour Relations section has indeed fallen away, leaving two performance measures, one for business unit 54060, Administration, and one for business unit 54210, Immigration Appeals Tribunal. My question relates to the activities that we are anticipating under the heads this year and specifically for business unit 54060, Administration. We are discontinuing the performance measurement of accomplishing the Throne Speech initiatives. So before, we had an

original forecast of accomplishing five Throne Speech initiatives. And it was revised in 2023/24 to, again, five. Our target outcome for this administrative department to accomplish Throne Speech initiatives has been discontinued, so it is no longer there. It is a zero.

My question therefore to the Honourable Minister is, we are seeing a 40 per cent increase in funding to business unit 54060 despite their losing one of three performance measures and activities. That 40 per cent increase of course can be outlined on page B-176 under the General Summary wherein we are seeing an increase, an original estimate in 2023/24 of $847,000, which was revised. That is, one was spending $886,000. There is an additional $329,000, which is 39 per cent (rounded up to 40). So we have an estimated spend for this fiscal period coming up in 2024/25 of $1,176,000. So, again, an increase of 40 per cent in funding, but, in fact, a decrease of a third of our performance activities.

I would like the Honourable Minister to speak on what this specific business unit will be undertaking this fiscal year. What will the additional spending be allocated toward? Thank you.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Minister. Would you like to entertain the question now?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I will welcome the Opposition to ask all of the questions so that I can ensure that they have comprehensive answers to each and every question that is asked.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

For the benefit of the listening audience, once again I want to give some time clarity. This debate officially started at 10:55 am. We had a five-minute break to get some clarity and direction from the Speaker. That means we are going to go until 12:30 and break for lunch. We will come back at two o'clock, and this debate would have two and a half more hours after that. So for clarity, this debate officially ends at 4:30 pm.

Opposition Leader, you may proceed.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My next question relates to . . . let us see. Okay. Again, going back to business unit 54060, Administration, what we have is an interesting increase under Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates on page B-177, specifically the line item Advertising and Promotion. Now, this is interesting because it is an increase of—and listen to this percentage; I found this percentage quite interesting. The percentage is 1,614. That is, 1,614 per cent increase in funding for Advertising and Promotion relating to Head 44, Ministry of Economy and Labour HQ. And again this is under the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Expenditure.

So, Advertising and Promotion under this head in 2022/23 actual was actually zero funds were spent. When we go into 2023/24 it was requested and approved by this Honourable House that $7,000 be spent in that Ministry under that department for advertising and promotion. Now, $5,000 of that was actually spent, that being under the revised for 2023/24 again under page B-177. And then we go into this year's request, or this year's estimate, for 2024/25 of $120,000 being spent on advertising and promotion. This is an increase of $113,000, or again an increase of 1,614 per cent.

Now, what makes this specific number so interesting, Mr. Chairman, is that we are seeing across the board a decrease in Advertising and Promotion. So mindful, for example, under Head 14, Department of Statistics, going into the Household Expenditure Survey and census year, under page B-180, we are seeing Advertising and Promotion under Head 14, Department of Statistics, who arguably will need quite a lot of funding for this work this year, going from 2023/24 they had $12,000 and they only spent $7,000 of that. But this year under 2024/25, again on page B-180, the Department of Statistics, again conducting Household Expenditure Survey and a number of other projects, is down to zero for Advertising and Promotion. So in fact they have been totally defunded for Advertising and Promotion.

So, when you see this massive increase in the HQ, but you see the defunding across the Ministry, the question comes, Why are we doing it this way, given that year on year it has always been possible for the individual heads and/or departments to undertake the line items under the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates?

Another great example of this line item in the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates includes things like salaries, wages, training, communications, advertising and promotion, professional services, rentals, repair maintenance, energy, these sorts of things. So it was interesting to see one of those line items defunded to the point of zero, but again an increase of 1,614 per cent going into the head. So one of the key questions here will be, Is this in fact a transfer? So earlier I asked, Why would the increase take place? And it may appear to be a transfer that is moving funds around departments. So it will be interesting to hear what the Minister has to say to that question. It would be certainly great.

Also, staying with Head 44 under Performance Measures, again, Mr. Chairman, on page B-178, I note under business unit 54210, Immigration Appeals Tribunal. We spoke a little earlier about the continuity or a number of performance measures and activities being discontinued in this year's Budget Book, Mr. Chairman. And under this business unit we see two of four performance measures in fact being discontinued. So my question would be, Why would we discontinue two of these four whilst maintaining the exact same amount of funding?

And you will note, Mr. Chairman, that under this head and business unit 54210, Immigration Appeals Tribunal, $25,000 had been allocated last year, and that had been spent. And this year, 2024/25, the estimate is $25,000. So we are maintaining the exact amount of funding, but we have what appears to be a reduction in the amount of performance expectations for this unit, which is Immigration Appeals Tribunal.

So I would [ask] the Minister to explain why we are reducing the amount of work, apparently, they will be doing in the Budget Book, but maintaining the same level of funding. (That is that one.)

Mr. Chairman, my next question relates to the Labour Relations section, which has been transferred from Head 44 and has become . . . so it has been transferred from being a business unit under Head 44. So the business unit is 54200 titled Labour Relations section. And it has been transferred to Head 99, Department of Labour, retaining its business unit designation of 54200. Now, I looked over some of the previous debates. And it had come up in another place that the Immigration Appeals Tribunal had in fact not been meeting for a few years. And that was raised during the Budget Debate in the other place. And it had actually come to light that—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mm-hmm.

The Chairman: Do you have a point of order, Minister?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes. I think the Honourable [Member] is inadvertently misleading the House as it pertains to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. The Immigration Appeals Tribunal meets on an *ad hoc* basis as it pertains to appeals that have been submitted. If there are no appeals for the Immigration Appeals Tribunal to adjudicate, then that board does not regularly meet. So it is not fair to say that the board has not been meeting. The board has not had appeals to consider to adjudicate. And that is a result of the lack of meetings.

In order to provide clarity as to why that unit is still being funded as well, I should share, Mr. Chairman, that they only get paid as they meet. So if there is no meeting, then they do not get paid. And we cannot anticipate how many matters will go in front of the Immigration Appeals Tribunal on an annual basis as a result, notwithstanding we have taken out the Performance Measures. That is why we have maintained the funding. But I do not want the general public or anybody else to believe that that board sits dormant.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Opposition Leader, you may proceed.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you.

I think I have to push back or at least get some clarity from the Minister because we do have a Hansard [report for] 19 March 2021, that is Hansard [page] 1051, and Hansard [page] 733 of 11 March 2022, that said multiple appeals were in the backlog. And at that time, again under business unit 54210—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

The Chairman: Minister, proceed with your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: We are now in fiscal period . . . moving into fiscal period 2024/25. And the Member is referring to Hansards from 2022. I would think the better question would be for him to ascertain what levels of appeals are outstanding so that he can be provided with clarity. There is no huge backlog of appeals. And it would be incorrect to put that notion out there in the public that that is the case.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Opposition Leader, you may proceed.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you.

Moving on with that question, and this relates to the 2023/24 and 2024/25 years, again $25,000 is being anticipated. It would be great to get some clarification, because it was raised in the debate in the other place in the 2023/24 year that appeals may be published (and this was reflected in the Hansards as well), understanding from our records which indicate that decisions of the tribunal have not been published since 2015, though the 2016 and 2017 records of those appeals in tribunals are now ready to be published, or certainly they were in 2023/24. So one of my questions to the Honourable Minister would be, When do we anticipate publishing on the proper website the appeals from 2016 and 2017, as well as any appeals from that time—that is, 2017 up until 2023 (I believe would be available)?

And again, because we did have that incredible backlog, which has, according to the Minister, been cleared and—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: You have a point of order, Minister?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I question the relevance of that to the funding of the tribunal. If the Member can tie that in to how that is applicable to the fiscal allocation that

they have received in this upcoming period that would be greatly appreciated.

The Chairman: Well, Minister, let me just take some liberty and say that this is the Opposition's debate. So they have the liberty for a little bit of preamble. I am assuming that this is what the Opposition Leader was doing.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. I thank the Minister.

I would note under Head 44, Ministry of Economy and Labour HQ under page B-178 that Performance Measures are outlined. So what I am speaking to is a performance measure that is in fact an expectation as outlined and, by the way, discussed in previous Hansards. But we are not seeing it here again under Performance Measures on page B-178. So given that there is an expenditure of some $25,000 and there is a performance that we are missing, then my question to the Minister would be, When do we anticipate that performance being fulfilled?

Moving on, Mr. Chairman. My question would also relate to the $25,000 obviously being allocated to this. If the Honourable Minister would be able to speak to how long . . . Obviously the Budget Book reflects the 2022 to 2025 (sort of) fiscal periods. And during that time in 2022/23, on page B-176 it shows under General Summary that the Immigration Appeals Tribunal did not spend any money. This would seem to indicate that they had in fact therefore not met. So during that time period, it has been said in another place that the Minister has been taking the decisions of the Immigration Appeals Tribunal.

My question would therefore be—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister, do you have a point of order?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Member is misleading the House. The Immigration Appeals Tribunal has statutory responsibility under the Immigration and Protection Act. The Minister cannot adjudicate on matters that have been assigned to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. That is incorrect.

The Chairman: Thank you for your point of order.

Opposition Leader, you now have the floor again.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

I do appreciate that because it was said in another place in response to questions from one of the Members to a Government Member that Minister Hayward *handles all appeals at this time.* So it is good that he clarified that that person was incorrect when they said that.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

The Chairman: Proceed, Minister.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I think the individual is inadvertently misleading the House now.

Underneath the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act there are a number of appeals—some appeals which the Minister has authority to adjudicate, and there are others which go to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal that the Minister does not have authority to adjudicate. Those which I have the authority to adjudicate, I provide the decisions on those particular appeals. Those which I do not have the authority to adjudicate go to the respective body.

The Chairman: Thank you for the excellent clarification, Minister.

Opposition Leader, you now have the floor again.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you. And I thank the Honourable Minister for that clarification.

So, moving on with the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, the tribunal now being active, we have seen that comment in the other place that the Honourable Minister has recently appointed a new board. It will then assist the Minister with special projects, et cetera. And I checked the website, and there is a list of names. And the PATI request has been updated as of December 2023.

So given the tribunal is now active, my question to the Minister is, Why go from $122,000 for that tribunal to $25,000 for this now new active tribunal? And my further question is, When will this new tribunal start meeting?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mm-hmm.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I think that the Member is inadvertently misleading the House. The Member is referring to the Immigration Board, which is different from the Immigration Appeals Tribunal.

Those are two separate entities. The funding which he has spoken about is not the funding allocation for the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, but actually the funding allocation for the Immigration Board, which is found underneath the head for the Department of Immigration. There are two separate boards. One is an advisory board which is the Immigration Board, and the other is the Immigration Appeals Tribunal which has statutory responsibility for adjudicating matters which is outlined under the Immigration and Protection Act for that particular board.

The Chairman: Thank you.

I might give a slight bit of advice, Opposition Leader, just for the listening audience so they are following, give the line items so there is no conflation.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Thank you.

But I do push back on the Honourable Minister's point because this source material was taken from a debate that was dealing with the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. So with that being said, I am happy to move on. But what I would like to say is when . . . Well, I will skip that one.

I tell you what. I move on to one that is actually quite interesting for me, Mr. Chairman. Again on business unit 54200, moving back to Labour Relations . . . this is where I encourage everyone to read the Government's Budget because it actually can be quite difficult to wrap your head around some of this. Now, this business unit has shifted to Head 99, which removes $1,176,000 from Head 44. This is clearly seen on page B-176, again under Labour Relations business unit 54200. This gives the Ministry in its summation a difference or a drop of 41 per cent in expenditure.

But, Mr. Chairman, if you go to page B-199 under the new Head 99, we actually see that this unit that has been moved over and transitioned into a whole department has now become . . . the funding is now $1,272,000. So it is actually a net increase of $96,000. So it is just an interesting point that you can see how these numbers work. So I have a question relating to this.

So to the Honourable Minister, on page B-175 of the Budget Book, and if you are looking it is the summations relating or the aggregates relating to total expenditure and revenue for the Ministry. And you will see under Head 44, Ministry of Economy and Labour Headquarters, that it is a decrease. It shows a decrease of 41 per cent, or a drop in expenditure of 41 per cent for that head. But there is not a matching book entry that is an increase to Head 99, Department of Labour, $1,272,000.

In other words, we should be seeing, at least if I remember Mrs. Parsons's Bermuda College lesson, right? There should be a reflection of not zero per cent. If you lose 41 per cent here and you move that money over to another head, then there should be a commensurate increase in that head. So instead it says zero per cent instead of 100 per cent increase.

So to that end, my question to the Minister—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Proceed, Minister.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: With no offence to the great Mrs. Parsons of Bermuda College, 100 per cent increase of zero is what?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am always interested in how we have this sort of interesting banter around here.

The Chairman: It is called interlopers.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Interlopers.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. I am glad that we do not run businesses this way.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: No thank you, Mr. De Silva.

In 2023/24, obviously the Department of Labour did not exist. And then in 2024/25, we are seeing again this $1,272,000. Just to point out that when you see a transfer, it is actually quite deceptive and you really, really have to look at this Budget Book.

So with that being said, Mr. Chairman, I will by your leave move on to questions for Head 14.

The Chairman: Please proceed, Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Now, during the Honourable Minister's invitation to accept questions prior to his briefing, I had declined them based on the briefing providing certain justifications on how and why the funds are being spent. I would be interested to hear . . . the Honourable Minister in last year's budget briefing for Head 14 outlined . . . so for example under General Summary, which is on pages B-179 and B-180. This deals with, by the way, fluctuations in expenditure. So there are a lot of numbers on these pages obviously, and there are various

business units that say how much money has been requested or allocated and fluctuations in that compared to the previous year.

I was looking for how and why those fluctuations had taken place. So my first question to the Minister is could he outline the how and why of the fluctuation including the how and why of the actual estimate request? (And I will just mark that. I will mark those.)

Also last year the Minister put forth a number of explanations relating to the spends that we see in the 2023/24 revised, that is, again, in the Budget Book under Head 14, Department of Statistics on page B-179. And again the ministerial brief provided what those spends were for, specifically under headings Major Achievements, Capital Expenditure, Manpower and Performance. So before I leap into the questions relating to Head 14 specific to the Budget Book, I was wondering if the Minister could speak to, again, the how and why under the General Summary, that being allocations of funding including fluctuations, and then the major achievements, capital expenditure, manpower and performance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I invite the Opposition Leader to continue with his questions.

The Chairman: Opposition Leader, you have been given the floor to continue your questions.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you very much.

So with that being said, I will continue on Head 14, mindful of those questions that I asked (thank you very much). So we have under . . . by the way, this question picks up from a debate that the Minister and I engaged in in [during the] 2023/24 Budget Debate under Department Objectives, specifically on page B-179. It reads that one of the Department Objectives is "Ensure the collection, compilation and production of statistical outputs are based on the most current international statistical methodologies, standards and best practices, by using data quality frameworks by March 2025."

Now, the date is what drew my attention because in [1]Hansard on page 756, I had asked the Minister about the specifications for that international standard. That is, Which standard is it? How far do we have to achieve compliance?, those sorts of things. And the Minister helpfully pointed out that "international organisations continuously revise the methodology on how statistics should be calculated. And so, for example, the System of National Accounts—if you were to google it, you would see that if you looked at the manuals, they revise the manuals every so often."

So it was a point of curiosity as to why this year the department added March [20]25 as a deadline to achieve compliance with a standard that the Minister said fluctuates so much that you do not put a deadline to it. So that is one question.

I am just marking these off, by the way, so I know to follow up with them again, Mr. Chairman. Sorry for the delay.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience and Honourable Members, we are in debate. This debate is four hours long, and it started at 10:55 with a break at 11:00. We are going to be going to lunch at 12:30, which is in another 15 minutes.

Please proceed, Honourable Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Moving on into the General Summary again for Head 14, Department of Statistics, we are on page B-179 under General Summary. My question relates to business unit 24055, Census and Survey Res. [Residential] unit. This question relates to originally estimated to spend $555,000. So looking at the column headed 2023/24 original, the Minister had asked for (and obviously the House approved) an expenditure of $555,000. But only $341,000 had in fact been spent. So my question to the Minister is, Would he please explain why only that much was spent, especially given that we are going to allocate another $555,000 in this fiscal year, Mr. Chairman? And we obviously did not spend it last time. I definitely want to know if this has anything to do with the delay in the conduct of the census.

Obviously, Mr. Chairman, it goes without question that the census is crucial—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

The Chairman: You may proceed, Minister.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The census is a survey that is carried out every 10 years at this point in time. There is no delay in the execution of the census. It is incorrect and misleading to make that statement.

The Chairman: Proceed, Honourable Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you.

So this is a great question because it relates specifically to the performances that we are anticipating here. The census, when are we anticipating the completion of the census? That is a great one.

[1] *Official Hansard Report* 11 March 2022

The Chairman: Opposition Leader, I invite you to continue your questions. We have 10 minutes until lunch.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sure. Okay. Perfect.

I also note under business unit 24065, Household Expenditure Survey, again still on page B-179, Mr. Chairman, requesting clarification here, I see in 2023 (the column headed 2023) that being the last fiscal period, that zero dollars were requested or allocated for Household Expenditure Survey for that business unit, although eventually some $185,000 were spent. So my question to the Minister is, What was that spent on?

And then secondly, I note that this year the request is for $148,000. And again given that there was no original request in the last fiscal period, but there was in fact money spent (again $185,000), then there is a request this year of $148,000. If the Minister could explain that fluctuation in funding and what that allocation was already spent on and what he is anticipating the spend to be made for the $148,000 for this fiscal period.

Mr. Chairman, under Subject Analysis, moving on to page B-180 under Head 14, Department of Statistics, we see that Professional Services has increased 33 per cent—that is, last fiscal period it was $184,000 and this year it is requested to be $245,000, an increase of $61,000, or 33 per cent increase. Professional Services obviously includes quite a lot of different things, so I would [ask] the Minister to explain that increase.

Moving on, Mr. Chairman. Again under Head 14, Department of Statistics under page B-180 under Employee Numbers, full-time equivalents, business unit 24025, Core Annual Surveys drop from seven full-time equivalents [FTEs] in 2022/23, and then it remains seven in the last fiscal year. That was revised to five. So obviously a few people have left. And then it shows that we are anticipating in this fiscal period that number to drop again to four staff members. So in the space of two years we are going from seven to four full-time equivalents.

Given the crucial role that this function provides, which the Minister has spoken to before in previous budgets more fully, I am wondering why this department seems to be bleeding staff. And will the department be able to keep up with its very numerous activities that we see in last year's Hansard reflecting the Budget Debate? It must be, I would say, 10 surveys that they were doing annually. So I would be interested to hear if this department is capable of keeping up, given that they are (my words) bleeding staff.

The Chairman: Your words or your inferring? You are inferring?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Probably both.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: But I definitely . . . losing staff . . . I will . . . I will not . . . I will—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, not inflammatory language. Thank you.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, the Member is deliberately misleading the House. Because the Budget Book points out that the estimated FTEs in 2024/25 will be 22. That exceeds the FTEs in 2023/24 and 2022/23. So these FTEs are actually increasing rather than decreasing. I do not how we can consider that to be bleeding staff. That is an inflammatory and misleading statement and should be withdrawn.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I could not agree more with the Minister. It would be inflammatory and misleading if I was in fact referring to the aggregate. But I was only referring to the Core Annual Surveys' FTEs under business unit 24025.

(Okay. Let us see.)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Honourable Minister for the clarification.

Performance measures, oh yes. Moving on in Head 14, Department of Statistics, specifically on page B-181 under Performance Measures. I am looking at business unit 24015, Administration. And "100% of staff will engage in targeted external and internal training and development . . ." Oh, here we go. The very last performance measurement. (Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am sorry. My notes . . .)

I have a performance measure here. There is a target outcome in this fiscal period of 100 per cent. And the performance measure is, "100% of staff will engage in targeted external and internal training and development by December 2024." My question is, Is that a typo? Or if the Honourable Minister could just explain. Because obviously this target outcome is related to the upcoming fiscal period, and December 2024 has already left. So, I am thinking they already accomplished this.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: It says, "100% of staff will engage in targeted external and internal training and development by December 2024." If I am correct, we are now in March of 2024, which means that December of 2024 is actually in the future and not a past date.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. I thank the Honourable Minister for my misreading.

The Chairman: Misreading?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Business unit 24020, Core Statistics and Publications under Performance Measures. Two of three performance measures are discontinued again. (Let me find myself in the [Budget] Book.) And the remaining sounds like something that should happen anyway. I will read it out here. It says, "100%" (so the target outcome of this target outcome for this upcoming fiscal period is that) "100% of all outputs will undergo a formal review to ensure that the collection, compilation and production are based on the most current international statistical methodologies." Mr. Chairman, that sounds like something that should happen anyway. So I was kind of surprised to see that outlined in the Budget Book, which in part justifies its certain expenditure.

With that being said, my question to the Honourable Minister is, Given that we are losing two out of three of the performance expectations and measurements, and then the other one says we are going to review things professionally and very well, I thought the Honourable Minister could just expand upon the workflow and the activities we can anticipate in this upcoming fiscal period for the business unit that is called Core Statistics and Publications.

I also have a similar question relating to business unit 24025, Core Annual Surveys. Again, we are seeing a discontinuation across four of the performance measures, these being the things the department will do in the upcoming fiscal period, which in part justifies the expenditure. I am very mindful, Mr. Chairman, that our expenditure that we are looking at for this year is $2.5 million for the Department of Statistics. For this business unit, under Core Annual Surveys, which we spoke about before a little bit there, we spoke about their losing staff, Mr. Chairman.

This is in the business unit 24025, Core Annual Surveys, and they have an allocation of some $1.8 million . . . oh, sorry. Excuse me, $366,000. (I apologise. I was looking at a summation number.) So $366,000 and they are losing four out of their five performance measures. And the last one remaining is Target response rates for major statistical surveys, that being 80 per cent under Labour Force Surveys, Economic Activity Survey, Balance of Payments, Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

So an interesting one for the Minister to speak to because again losing a large number of staff, still we have that $366,000 being allocated. But under the Performance Measures, I am not quite sure—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister, you have the floor.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I must stress this. The Department of Statistics is not losing any staff. It is the same employees who have been reallocated to different budget centres. That is simply what is happening. And the Honourable Member can clearly see that outlined in the [Budget] Book because I explained that the staff were the full-time equivalents for Statistics. Statistics is increasing. He is continuously hammering home this point in terms of the department losing staff or staff being bleeded *[sic]*. When the [Budget] Book actually reflects—

Some Hon. Members: Bled.

The Chairman: Bled, bled, bled. Not bleeded—bled. That is the word. You used *bleeded*.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, so I just want to make it abundantly clear that it is a continuous misleading of the House. And we refer to our reduction of staff in Statistics.

Just looking at the time, I believe we are on the eve of lunch.

The Chairman: So thank you for that clarity, Minister.

In that line item, can you point out that line item so the Opposition Leader no longer goes down that incorrect road?

Hon. Jason Hayward: So under Head 14, Department of Statistics, page B-180 in the Budget Book that was presented to every Member of Parliament, the one that the Honourable Michael Dunkley is—

The Chairman: Chirping?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Looking at.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Underneath business unit—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Point of order, [Honourable Opposition Leader].

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

The Minister is referring to my statements as referring to the Department of Statistics. I was referring to a very specific business unit *under* the Department of Statistics.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The statement stands correct that the Department of Statistics is not bleeding staff or there is no reduction of staff. Staff are being categorised in a different business unit. That is simply it.

The Chairman: Thank you for that clarity.

Minister, with that being said, I would like to invite you to lead us into lunch.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move that the [Committee of Supply] adjourn for the lunch hour and recommence at 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: At 2:00 pm. The [Committee of Supply] is adjourned until 2:00 pm when we will commence and continue.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:29 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:01 pm

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND LABOUR

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members. Good afternoon, Members.

For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now resuming the Budget Debate. We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99 out of the Ministry of Economy and Labour [and Immigration] are being debated. For crystal clarity, this debate commenced at 10:55.

The Honourable Minister Jason P. Hayward was very magnanimous and allowed the Opposition quite some time to preamble and ask their questions. They were not quite ready at the time. We had—

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order. We have ruled on this, Mr. Chairman. We were prepared. We simply requested . . . Mr. Chairman, that is a misleading statement.

The Chairman: Inferring.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: At 11:00 am we commenced in earnest. That means that this debate will conclude at 4:30 pm.

Minister, I now ask you to resume answering the questions.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Chairman, just a point of clarity. In the Health debate when we had a couple of minutes that elapsed, they were not taken into consideration. So I am just making that point.

The Chairman: Okay. The Honourable Member needs a reminder. We commenced at 10:55. There was a break. We started the clock back over at eleven o'clock. We broke for lunch at 12:30. That means two and ahalf hours after that is 4:30.

Did you have a point, Member? Okay.

Minister, may you return to answering the questions of the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon to the members of the public.

There were quite a few questions asked before the lunch hour. The first one pertains to the increase in activities on the business unit 54060, which were Performance Measures underneath the Economy and Labour Ministry's head. This pertains to business unit 54060, which is Administration. It was highlighted that the budgeted amount for that number increased by $329,000 compared to the previous fiscal year. That is absolutely correct. The funds utilised in that increase will be for the marketing and promotion, travel to key conferences and events for the promotion of Bermuda as a jurisdiction, and for other fees related to the Economic Development Strategy.

Mr. Chairman, in the last fiscal period Bermuda did not have an Economic Development Strategy. That Economic Development Strategy was produced. It sets out the key initiatives and action items that the Ministry of Economy and Labour and the other economic development organisations will undertake over the next four years. In order for us to have effective execution of the items underneath the Economic Development Strategy, it is important that we prioritise and fund those particular initiatives. All in the public have agreed that that strategy is critical to the sustainability of economic growth and economic development moving forward. As a result, it was important for us to ensure that we have the adequate budget allocations for that.

The budget allocation in particular for advertising and promotion seems a little bit high for the Ministry for the reasons that the Ministry is spearheading all initiatives whether they come under BDA, BEDC or EDD. And as a result, we typically are working together on projects for the execution of a number of items. Centralising the funds makes it a lot easier to disburse those particular funds on projects when needed. So there are a number of initiatives underneath the five strategic priorities of the Economic Development Strategy that we need to execute on. And those funds provide us with the resources to effectively deliver on the items that we set out in that particular strategy.

That strategy is important for a number of reasons. I put out a paper as it pertains to Bermuda's ageing population and our need to increase our working population. In order for us to increase our working population, we first need greater levels of economic activity, which would then expand business development and job growth. Once we have that job growth, then we can actually fill those [positions] with able-bodied Bermudians who find themselves locked out of the job market, and then by bringing in guest workers. And that is how we are going to increase our lot of workers within the population. So that money has been allocated for those particular activities.

When we talk about the performance of the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, as a matter of intervention this morning, Mr. Chairman, I did highlight the difference between the Immigration Appeals Tribunal and the authority which is vested in the Minister to adjudicate matters. I also highlight that there is a substantial difference between the Immigration Board and the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. The Immigration Board will be found under the Head 27, which is [the Department of] Immigration, while the Immigration Appeals Tribunal is underneath the Ministry.

I also clarified in terms of there not being a backlog. And the Opposition Leader indicated that it was this perceived backlog based off of some dialogue that took place in another place. But I am the substantive Minister, and I am indicating that there is no backlog that pertains to appeals going to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. So I hope the other place uses my comments today as the official record as to what stands.

And just to be abundantly clear, there were three matters that were placed in front of the Immigration Appeals Tribunal. One matter was closed out, and two matters remain open because of the applicants' being nonresponsive, not the board. So this is the persons who would have filed a complaint, but the applicants not being able to progress through the adjudication procedures.

It is also important to understand in terms of the funds allocated, we do not know how many appeals we will get in any fiscal period. So we continue to budget $25,000 to account for any occurrences or any number of appeals that may take place. What we do not want is justice denied or natural justice being impeded because we do not have the resources to have an efficient and effective board. And as a result of that, you will see that, yes, it is correct that only $1,400 *[sic]* was spent in 2023/24, and zero funds were spent in 2022/23. And that is just because the volume of appeals actually declined, or in that one particular year there were no appeals to be considered. Or there were no matters that had progressed to adjudication.

[There] was another set of questions pertaining to the transfer of the Labour Relations section into a department. And I think what the Opposition Leader was trying to get to is that there should be a like-for-like entry. So if that section just simply moved to a department, then we should see just over $800,000 reflected. What the Member is not fully appreciating is that when one section moves into a department, then there is differentiation in hierarchy which means there are additional positions. Underneath the Ministry, there will be no Director of Labour. When it goes to a department, then you must have a director responsible for that department. That is increased funding that has to go into that particular line item.

Additionally, in order for us to appropriately accommodate the increase in staff, it means that we need to find alternative locations. Right now the Labour Relations section sits underneath the Department of Workforce Development. That does not bode well for their expansion plans. And as a result, they need to look for alternative office space arrangements which obviously costs funding to do so. So there is no lavish spending or increased funds to transfer our Labour Relations Department to the Department of Labour. What you actually find is that this would allow the department to effectively execute on the items which it sets out to do as a matter of priority.

And I want to remind Members and the listening public that this department is responsible for ensuring that our labour code is adhered to and that our minimum wage legislation be passed in terms of gratuities, tips and service charges. It is responsible for ensuring that we have harmonious labour relations and that this is processed in an efficient and effective way. The department is also responsible for being proactive in terms of looking at our labour policies and ensuring that we keep up with international standards and then also providing both employees and employers with advice.

So when you look at the 10 full-time equivalents, which consist of the Director of Labour, a Labour Relations Manager, Office Manager, (I said) three Labour Relations Officers, three Inspectors and a Tribunal Administrative Assistant, I believe that when you look at the allocation of funds, you will see that the majority of funds are for salaries. And then you have those items which are administrative that I discussed. But the department has been extremely active as it pertains to its Labour Relations Officers doing investigations. We have had 18 or so investigations regarding wrongful

termination; 12 regarding outstanding wages; 17 regarding constructive dismissal, layoffs, vacation pay redundancy, union certification and collective bargaining.

And the tribunal is also active in this matter in terms of adjudicating and trying to bring resolution in our labour relations landscape. So they have had a number of rulings. Eleven rulings have been in favour of the complainant, or the unions; four rulings in favour of the respondents; three are awaiting decisions; and six were resolved by consensus of the parties without the need for substantive hearings.

And that is the beauty of our Labour Relations or the Department of Labour. The beauty of our Department of Labour is that it allows for us to bring parties together and bring resolution to disputes without their going through a lengthy tribunal process. Part and parcel of the role and function of the officers within the Department of Labour is mediation and conciliation. And that is what those officers attempt to do prior to any matter going to a tribunal. And you can see the success of that when you see that issues are being resolved with consent. And that is when I am talking about having a more harmonious labour relations environment than the work that is actually being done by that particular staff.

So that is why those particular funding allocations are listed as an increase, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to that, there were questions in terms of performance measures. And I just want to highlight that Statistics on page B-181, Performance Measure, 100 per cent of staff will engage in targeted external and internal training and development by [December] 2024. That is actually correct. Each employee within the department . . . each employee within the department has forward job plans. During their performance appraisal and during their forward job plans, each officer sets out training and development objectives. And it is for those employees to complete those training and development objectives in a fiscal period. This is the way in which we allow staff to sharpen their sword on an annual basis so that they remain effective in their duties.

[The Department of] Statistics Professional Services increased by 33 per cent. And I was asked to explain the increase. This is partly due to increased funding for consultants and transferring money from overtime in order to account for resource requirements at the conclusion of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey. And it is important to note . . . the Member asked about additional funds allocated to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey. And this is actually correct when the Member sees that funds were allocated last year as it pertains to the actuals being spent, but not in the budget.

So, being the Minister of Economy and Labour, I would have taken on that responsibility midstream as it pertains to after the budget process was done. We would have recognised that the Household Income and Expenditure Survey was fundamentally important. And I ensured that I went and took a paper to Cabinet to get a supplementary so that we can get funding for the Household Income and Expenditure Survey. And that is why the actuals were actually greater than the budgeted amount. Because you need funds for preparation. You also need funds for the execution of the survey. And that is why additional funding has been allocated underneath that particular line item, for the execution of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey. That survey will run up until December 2024, which is in our future.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The data will be collated and hopefully finalised by the end of the fiscal period 2025/26.

The Member also asked, When will the next census be? The next census day will be the 20th of May 2026. So, while it is a line item which speaks to census research and surveys, Mr. Chairman, core census activities would not take place until at least 18 months from now. And then in next year's budget you will see funds associated with the preparation of census for the effective execution of a census. But like I articulated earlier, the census is done every decade rather than annually or biannually. So you will see bumps as it pertains to the funding that will be associated with that particular line item.

There was a question in terms of when we look at statistics and we start to talk about 80 per cent targets for survey completion. It is important to note that in any survey you have a number of respondents who simply do not respond. That is the high level of survey work that is actually done, because you have to find methodologies to impute values. And that is what a statistic is, the ability to launch a survey, but then ensure that you have numbers in place that represent our entire population.

For example, we have a retail sales index, but the retail sales index does not cover every retail establishment in Bermuda. The same thing goes with our annual GDP, and this is worldwide where you have a survey which is conducted. You may get 80 per cent of the market by making sure that you capture the big players. But then you have to impute the performance of those smaller firms. And that is according to methodology and well defined in the meta-data for each survey that is actually set out.

I know there was a question pertaining to data quality assessment framework for national accounts completed. And so we just simply put a timeframe in there. This remains ongoing in terms of what I articulated in the past, Jarion. But we did (I am sorry, Honourable Member) actually put a date there. Because there are still targets that we should be meeting on an annual basis. And what I did not want is just that this remain as an ongoing item, but then there are not targets that you are reaching on an annual basis. So this

ensures that we are moving the goalposts as it pertains to the development on an annual basis to ensure that we stay in line with international best practices.

There was a question between removal and changes of performance measures. By no means are the performance measures that are set out in the Budget Book simply the performance of each and every department. They are also indicators, as I stressed in the past. So the performance measures for the Ministry of Economy and Labour are whether or not we have economic growth, economic development and the expansion of jobs. And I highlighted earlier, Mr. Chairman, that we have achieved economic growth. We are achieving economic development. And we are achieving job growth and expansion. So those are the main performance matters while we stay on target with meeting measures within the Budget Book.

It is important that we had to do a reassessment of some of the measures to see if it made particular sense. For example, to say that we are going to execute on five Throne Speech initiatives in a calendar year when five Throne Speech initiatives may not be set in that particular period. It means that you have a misalignment between your targets and the initiatives that are actually set for the Ministry. We have found that we have executed on Throne Speech initiatives for multiple years in one year. But it would not be reflective that we executed on seven, but we only had five targeted.

So it is important that these serve as indicators and not hard measures. But I do think that there should be areas of accountability, and I believe that this Ministry in particular has been extremely forthright with information. The number of papers that I have actually tabled in this House of Assembly, the annual reports that are actually put out in this House of Assembly . . . I think we do a yeoman's job as it pertains to keeping everybody in this House informed as it pertains to the work of the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

I think that covers the substantial questions that were asked in this morning's session, Mr. Chairman. And I will turn the floor back over to yourself.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Opposition Leader, are you ready?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I am. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I thank the Honourable Minister for over the lunch break going and getting those answers. I do have a couple of supplementals to those answers for the avoidance of doubt.

And I will start with the last one the Honourable Minister went with, given the performance measures relating to the Ministry of Economy and Labour. He mentioned how GDP and job growth were performance measures. And I just wanted to put on the record that this year I did the Finance Ministry's debate, and those measures are on that one as well. So I would definitely recommend that the two groups working toward the same outcome, yes, at a very high level, but devolving those two groups or sets of measurables to differing objectives to ensure that duplication does not take place. That is just a point on that one.

On advertising and promotion, the Honourable Minister pointed out . . . this is under Head 44, Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, Advertising and Promotions. The Honourable Minister explained how this is being centralised to make it easier to disburse funds when needed. My question to the Honourable Minister is, Is this permissible within the Financial Instructions and the Constitution as it relates to the use of the Consolidated Fund? The only reason is because I could see how that centralisation would work under Head 44—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister, you have a point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading and Imputing improper motives]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes, certainly. I think the Member is misleading the House or inadvertently misleading the House or imputing improper motives; all three are applicable on this particular one.

Everything that is done is done according to financial instructions. There should be no inference that what we are doing is anything different. For example, today I tabled a Family Office paper. We need to promote family offices, Bermuda as a jurisdiction for family offices. You would note that both EDD and the BDA have working groups that have worked on the family office framework. The Ministry is also leading the initiative publicly to get the document produced, correspondence. And you can see this document is printed "Ministry of Economy and Labour."

So that is an initiative that we are all working on. But when it comes to the promotion of the family offices, the Ministry of Economy and Labour will retain funds to do its own promotion of family offices. And then also you know that the BDA typically put out pamphlets and things of that nature, and small cards for conference with QR codes. And they do their own level of advertising and webinars. This is not duplication of effort. But this is where [with] one initiative, each department having its own marketing and promotion funds, we can all utilise our resources collectively to push out those particular initiatives. This is not us just paying for items that other people are executing on.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Opposition Leader, would you like to resume?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. I thank the Minister for the clarification. I certainly was not intentionally implying any nefarious activity. It was only that there were differing constitutional arrangements for the entities

that he mentioned. And I went, *Is it the same?* That is all. I had no intention of imputing improper motive.

So with that being said, it is entered on record. Thank you, Honourable Minister. I appreciate that.

And the last supplemental or follow-up question was on mediation and conciliation efforts under the Labour section transferred into Head 99. [The Honourable Minister] mentioned that it allows for us to bring parties together to get resolution without a tribunal process. Definitely a great thing. We definitely want to make sure that we do not use legal resources when we do not have to. And having done mediation training when I was in the Bermuda Police Service, I was wondering if the Labour team had either had the training or would be getting the training in the next fiscal year. Thank you. That is all it was.

The Chairman: Is that your supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: That was just a supplemental for his, and then I will hop right back to where I was.

The Chairman: You may proceed, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Most certainly. The team goes on ongoing training. And whenever training is available in a competency area that is in alignment with the area of core responsibilities of a particular department, we typically take on that training. The ILO [International Labour Organization] does a good job as it pertains to providing localised and free training through virtual mediums, and also through its ITC (International Training Centre). And the Department of Workforce Development and the Labour Relations section continues to carry out that training. Where there are additional skills sets which are identified, I believe that right now . . . where there are additional skills sets that are identified, I believe that we always have forward discussions whether or not we can increase the competencies of the staff in those particular areas.

So training is an ongoing thing. And as I said, they are built into the performance measures of the staff as it pertains to their forward job plans. And then when we discuss the performance appraisals, we discuss how they have executed on those training and development items which have been set out in their respective documents.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Moving on to Head 27, Immigration, starting on page B-183. My line of questioning starts with . . . if the Honourable Minister could . . . in last year's ministerial brief he outlined some information that would be helpful. And I would like him to bring that information up again. First of all, there are fluctuations in department funding, both across General Summary, Subjective Analysis of Current Account Expenditures, and Revenue Summary. I would like some explanation for why we are seeing fluctuations in those areas. And also, major achievements were in last year's brief. Oh, sorry, Key Accomplishment in Previous Spending is the area. So fluctuations in department funding and Key Accomplishments in Previous Spending are the two areas that I would like covered.

Moving on to the Budget Book itself, under General Summary, business unit 37030, Compliance. There are some $41,000 added to that which is under General Summary, moving from $2.3 million to $2.3 million in the estimate for 2024/25. But there are some $41,000 added there into Compliance. I raise that because there are further questions relating to revenue summary, specifically revenue source 8881, Penalties, on page B-184.

It is quite clear that the original for 2023 was $18,000. It was revised, or the actual was $17,000. This is money being received, Mr. Chairman. And then we are estimating $19,000. I do intend to speak to financial penalties as a mechanism of supervision going forward, as that is an area that I do work in. And I wanted to question the Minister relating to the severity and volume of penalties and offences being detected and how these penalties have been applied. How many people, for example, have been penalised?

Under the Regulatory Acts for Financial Services Regulation, we actually wind up using financial penalties as a key way of ensuring that people . . . that although one person may commit an offence, that it is made quite clear to the general public that you cannot keep doing that. So to that end, I always recommend the Regulatory Acts when I see areas of penalties like this. Also increasing in area of revenue. So to that end, I just wanted to explain the $41,000, especially since we are not seeing an increase in penalties.

Okay. Thank you for that.

The Chairman: Honourable Member.

Minister, are you giving a point of order?

Hon. Jason Hayward: No. I want to give a point of information as it pertains to . . . before he moves on to his next item, he did indicate about major achievements. I am prepared to speak to those major achievements if he will permit me.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, please. Thank you.

The Chairman: Proceed, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, this is . . .

[Pause]

The Chairman: Minister, may you hold for a minute as we are going to have a slight change in chairs.

For the benefit of the listening audience and Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25. The Honourable Minister Jason P. Hayward of Economy and Labour has given his briefs on Heads, 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99.

And just as a closing remark, I would like to say that in this debate it has been very invigorating. And the Opposition has given preamble, post-ambles and good questions. And it is good for the people of Bermuda.

I will now turn [the Chair] over to the Honourable Member from constituency 3, St. David's, Honourable [Member] Lovitta Foggo.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon to the House and Members, people of the public.

And Minister, when you are ready to continue, as my honourable colleague just recited all of the heads that you are speaking to, you may.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I am just going to address back and regress a bit as it pertains to the training for the Labour Relations Department. I also want to state that they have received international alternative dispute resolution training, which covers areas of mediation and conciliation in their daily functions. And I am pleased that the staff has undertaken that particular training.

When it pertains to some of the major items within Immigration that have changed, Madam Chairman, you would note that we have put in place the Prohibition of Entry Order. Honourable Member, that is a very important order that we have put in place to protect our borders. You would know that in 2014 when there was a policy change as it pertains to Bermuda's moving away from having a Bermuda visa and relying on the embassies and agencies and consulates of other countries to vet the visitors and residents who actually come to Bermuda, we needed to ensure that moving forward everybody is abundantly clear on which countries are on that list and which are off of that list. It protects us from many types of legal challenge. But it provides clarity to the population. And I think that, for persons travelling to Bermuda and persons who wish to work in Bermuda and employers, that clarity is greatly appreciated.

We have a number of scenarios. For example, before we put the order in place, Russian nationals were actually allowed to transit through the UK and to Bermuda. And we allowed that just as with nationals from other countries. But on the onset of the war, rules changed. And that transit provision was taken off of the record not at the onset of the war, but after the war had commenced and sanctions had actually been put in place.

It ultimately means now that you would have had a policy in place that allows somebody to come in. But now when you are trying to get that person back home, it is very difficult. We see the same with persons who allowed their visas to expire. You have persons who land in Bermuda, allowed their passports and their visas to expire. And then you have difficulty with redomiciling those individuals. It is easier to control that at our borders on the way in. That is why this order is fundamentally important. When I talk about protecting our borders, you have people who land on Bermuda soil to simply claim asylum. Bermuda cannot handle the volume of individuals who may land on our shores to claim asylum. We do not have the civil framework in place to support that or accommodate that.

So it is important that we have those measures in place. And we will continue to update our policy as often as we possibly can. We made changes within the last two weeks to reflect the UK's list because the UK had actually made some additional changes. I mean, that is fundamentally important, but that is the work that we do. While it seems easy to come here and put an order in front of the House, it is a complicated item because you are dealing with human beings and their lives. And you are dealing with people who may have entered the territory under one auspices, or are currently working under one auspices or a work permit that was issued under one auspices, and that then has changed.

So we have to be mindful. And we also have to be mindful that travel is no longer just with gateway countries. Private plane travel and charters create another nuance to our particular border compliance. So I just want to be abundantly clear that this is a policy that we put in place, and that is something which is important for our country.

We have been doing extremely hard work to restore our BMU codes. And restorations of our BMU codes are important. It is important because when persons are travelling on the Bermuda passport and they are trying to transit through the US to come back home, oftentimes if that particular border agency or that officer is not familiar with the exceptions for Bermuda and that passport is flagged as a British passport incorrectly and not a Bermuda passport, then that person is requested additional documentation. And myself as the Minister, I have to keep my phone on every night because somebody may be stuck in some region of the world and they are trying to get home or they may not have enough funds. And they are looking for immediate intervention. And my number is the number that is floated into the universe to provide that immediate assistance.

And I do not mind doing it! I do not mind helping our citizens. So I have put out in advance the guidance. But this has provided a catalyst to us ensuring that we sort out this problem. And I am pleased to state that full implementation of the new BMU code is slated—and I

want to say *slated* because there are moving pieces toward this, some which we control and some that we do not. So the conversations that we are having in our working group right now, it is slated that that change will be completed by the 31st of March 2024. Once I get confirmation of the dates, I will put it out in the public domain and issue a full press statement, press release. If the House is in [session], I will make sure I table that information in the House. If the House is not in, I will make sure that we use all media so that the House currently knows.

What I do not want is to create a passport frenzy where people put in their passports and then . . . We want to articulate the process so that people who have submitted passports now who may return with the GBR code and they say, *I want a BMU code.* We have to address how that is done, and we want to do it in an organised way. So that will be part of the communications moving forward. And hopefully that can be communications that are shared by both sides of the House as it pertains to their constituents and individuals whom we represent as it pertains to providing those persons with surety.

But that has been a long journey. We had allocated funding for the restoration. We have engaged in working groups, and we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel. I know that if March 31 comes and goes and there is still no BMU code, somebody will hold me accountable for my words. And that is why I am cautious in terms of saying that this is the aim based off of the dialogue that we are currently having. But certain things are in our control, and certain things are outside of our control.

The restrictive period of residence or allowed length of stay was a major change that we had. And that was the 180 days per calendar year. What we have found is that we had persons working illegally in Bermuda and utilising a provision where they come for 180 days, leave for a day, return and they continue to work underneath the radar. This opens us up for greater levels of abuse by the misinterpretation of that particular clause in our Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act. I do not think when that clause was originally debated that it was intended that somebody can come for 180 days, leave for 24 hours and return for another 180 days. Because that would negate somebody just going and applying for residency.

And we vet the people who can actually apply for residency, but we do not vet people who can utilise the provision of coming for 180 days, leaving for a day and [returning]. We also unfortunately, Madam Chairman, and I do not really like to speak about this one. It is that children are caught in this particular process. So persons who typically do not make enough funds to qualify for a dependent child are having dependent children coming under those auspices of coming for 180 days, leaving for a day and returning. And those individuals are also entering our school systems as well, as a non-resident. But based off of the way in which the Education Act is actually drafted, they have to take consideration of all children notwithstanding that child's particular status.

But it is a protection. What we do not want is persons coming and living in Bermuda or children in precarious situations. So if a family demonstrates that they have the financial means to support a child, then we will welcome the child onto our shores. But certainly where there is no demonstration of means, especially when you have a parent who works all sorts of shifts as a cleaner, then you must ask yourself, *Well, who is watching the child when that parent is gone?* And if the answer is, *Well, maybe another co-worker,* because the person typically will not have family here, I do not think that is good enough. And I think that is a position that we would not want our young children to be in.

So, Madam Chairman, this highlights the complexities around why we put laws in place. Oftentimes we come and debate the laws, but then there is a human side to these changes that we actually make. It is real things that we actually are trying to prevent from taking place as it pertains to that. And I am pleased that we put that in place. We have caught a number of actors who have tried to re-enter Bermuda and use the 180 days, go away and come back. And they have been told, *No, your time is up* or whatever it may be. And I am satisfied with that. I am satisfied that if that individual wants to stay in Bermuda longer than 180 days, they can simply apply through the proper mechanisms for residency.

I do not know any other country in the world where you can just float and skate around the laws, the immigration rules. And I do not think that Bermuda should become a domicile where one could craftily navigate around these specific routes that we have put in place for persons to remain on our Island.

Madam Chairman, we have also been working extremely hard to implement a new work permit policy. And when the final review of a revised work permit policy clarifies some of the challenges that we are having with the current policy, limits some of the confusion or abuses that we actually see, puts additional protections in place for both work permit holders and employees, meaning local employees who are impacted by sometimes nefarious behaviour of employers who try to utilise the work permit policy to secure the labour that they want rather than the suitable, qualified labour that may be on Island already. So notwithstanding you have employers who prefer guest workers over Bermudians in some employment situations and the employer is never called out, it is always the Department of Immigration. People expect that Immigration is going to sort out the behaviour of every employer who may not be operating according to the standards that we have set out there.

So part of this is looking at some of the challenges that we have experienced, looking at some of the nuances in terms of situations, trying to reduce the number of what I would consider to be appeals or discretionary matters that come before the Minister and

clearly set out and define what are the standards that we expect moving forward for clarity. The challenge with a work permit policy is that when you have a policy such as that, you cannot make a wholesale change of large magnitude because what it does is disrupt the entire way in which we bring persons into the Island. But you can refine it. And that is what we are doing, working hard to refine the areas within the work permit policy.

The last work permit policy iteration was 2015, and so this is nine years later. You will see a revised issued work permit policy that I believe that both employees, employers and the Bermudian public will be satisfied with. There are key things in terms of ensuring that the English language requirement is reinserted into the work permit policy. That is important. But not just important that we insert that in, but important that we also have a mechanism for testing individuals set up so that when complaints are made or whatever, maybe when a person may land at Immigration and they cannot answer basic landing questions as it pertains to, *Where will you live? Where would you work?* That you go straight to taking a test before you engage in employment.

And the test is not creating a barrier. But the test is ensuring that you are able to provide goods and services in an effective way to the public of Bermuda, interact with your fellow colleagues. There is nothing worse than having a Bermudian trying to start a job and the entire work crew speaks a different language. That is incivility in some cases, but then bullying and harassments. Cliques are formed. Bermudians are again feeling like outliers. And this is the challenge that I hear when I hear some young landscapers. Imagine you and your colleagues are sitting outside of a grocery store or having coffee and tea. Somebody—three people say a few things. You are not sure what they say. You go into the grocery shop, come back out, and the work truck is gone. And nobody has adequately communicated with you because they are all speaking one language. This is the stuff that goes on, I mean, we need to ensure that we catch in our work permit policy.

Some things we cannot catch within our work permit policy. That is individuals landing with no fixed abode! Employers are bringing in individuals, they have no fixed abode. And then they are staying anywhere and everywhere. It cannot be right! It cannot be right that you sell somebody a dream. They pack up and move from their home country, land in Bermuda and then you have them in some squalid conditions. So these are the things in terms of going [forward] that we have to look out for. Abuses of employees as well, people are coming and they are being abused in terms of not knowing their rights and privileges and being taken advantage of. I could talk about a whole lot of positive aspects, but I am trying to reiterate why we need a sound policy in place. Why we need a Department of Immigration for the protection of Bermudians.

Many times a decision from an employer's standpoint is already predetermined as it pertains to whom they want. And that person's résumé, whom they want, is not even in line with the requirements which are set out in the ad. And the Department of Immigration catches this and says, *No, you can't have that individual.* Notwithstanding what other story you give, you either re-advertise with changed requirements, or you will not land that individual. That is just the bottom line. You cannot create a disadvantage for Bermudians.

It is the same thing when we started looking at cleaners. You have Bermudians who have been housekeepers almost for 20 years and then cannot land a cleaning job because they are not deemed to be qualified as a cleaner. I mean, transferable skills and competencies are what need to be looked at. But you have somebody who comes from another jurisdiction who does not have 20 years of employment service. You may look at their résumé and they have three years working for somebody in some city that you cannot identify; you cannot google the establishment, right? And we are being asked to accept that person's recommendations. But the Bermudian who has demonstrated that they have 15 years of service in the hotel cleaning restaurants is [being told] that they do not have enough residential and commercial cleaning experience.

So these are the things that we are looking at. And this is why the work permit policy is important. Overall, what we will do is we want to enhance the way in which fees are actually paid, Madam Chairman, and ensure that we have better payment gateways. I spoke about reducing the backlog by using automation and digitisation, and that is something that we are working to execute on. A lot of work has been done in that space, but we are now going to do a formal RFI [request for information] so that we can get the most competent people in place so that we do not get it wrong.

And those are just some of the highlights of work the Immigration Department has executed on. We have strengthened our Compliance area. And once I get more data from the staff, I will certainly share that and answer that particular question that the Honourable Member actually had.

When we look at the increase in the funding, the $41,000 increase in funding for Compliance, that is primarily for staff increase. We know that persons have cost of living increases, which was the . . . but then there are other additional costs. You can appreciate Compliance staff have additional costs of overtime. When a plane is scheduled to land at a certain point in time, primarily that Miami flight, and that Miami flight then has to come in later, then you need staff to be there to process that particular flight. The other week we had a diversion that came to Bermuda, a medical emergency. And the person had to be taken off that particular flight. That was unscheduled, Madam Chairman. But there are the things in terms of increased budget allocation; you recognise that over time as it pertains to Compliance.

If you tell me that somebody is working a night job illegally and I have officers scheduled from nine to five, and my Compliance team in the City of Hamilton are nine to five, then I need officers to go out there and check it out at nighttime. That is overtime. Another overtime that is mandatory for the job is when we deport people. There are requirements. Sometimes the jurisdictions that you are deporting individuals to, they set out the requirements as it pertains to the number of support staff that are required to escort that individual—"X" number of police officers, "X" number of immigration officers. And even if you stop to refuel in a jurisdiction, that jurisdiction may have different requirements as it pertains to the staff that is required in that particular area.

And that is extremely important because those are things that we cannot control. But those are compliance functions that the public expect us to carry out. And I want to let the public know in terms of compliance—nobody needs to blow up my phone when a non-Bermudian work permit holder gets in trouble with our law. We track it, we monitor it, and once if they are charged and incarcerated, before they set foot back on our shores there is a deportation order. And you can bet your boots that person is on the next flight. And I want to reassure the public that we do not take that lightly. Our Compliance function in Immigration, we do not take it lightly. And we will enhance it.

We had a management service report review our entire departmental framework within Immigration, also looking at the Compliance area. And we will get additional staff for Compliance. I thank the staff who actually make complaints because that is most times how we are actually catching people who are running afoul of our laws and policies. And it is that Compliance team who are doing the work and they have been listening. So again I want to thank Dr. Ming. I want to thank the Compliance Manager and her team for all of the hard work that they do. But all of the staff at the Department of Immigration because the processing of applications has not been easy based off of volumes. And we have a dedicated staff who have to deal with fluctuations.

The way I look at Immigration is you have peaks and valleys. On a peak you may not have any backlog. In a valley you may have some backlog and it is just working to smooth that out so you minimise the level of backlogs that you have. But I have looked at a lot of departments in other territories, and this is natural in terms of backlogs of applications and the processing. But what is also important is that you are looking at the future. You are looking at change. And that is what we are looking at. We are looking at how we want to operate in the future. We are looking at how we want to change our processes to create the efficiency and effectiveness that actually the public demands from us.

And we have had some struggles with processing passports in the past, to which I have apologised to this Honourable House. And I have apologised to members of the public that we need to do a better job. And we will continue to put our best foot forward in terms of improving the processes.

The Honourable Member talked about penalties. I think that is important to note, that there is penalisation. The majority of the penalties, Honourable Member, are civil penalties. So you have penalties for breaches of the work permit policy. That will be the highest level of penalties. Where you have an individual who has run afoul of our policies, most times that person is not penalised from a personal civil perspective, and we just move forward with deporting that individual. But companies who may have persons working outside of their work permit or even being found to have persons working illegally, those are where the majority of the civil penalties would actually take place.

So I want to reassure the public that based off of the revenue that we expect, which is extremely conservative but in alignment with what we have collected in the past, we do actually penalise companies. We have some pending investigations. And I know that there will be an uptick in terms of civil penalties in the next fiscal period. So I can reassure the Honourable Member who asked about the increase that because of the strengthening of our compliance function, you will see a corresponding increase in the revenue received for civil penalties.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99?

I recognise the Opposition Leader. You may ask your questions.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I would draw our attention to page C-13 dealing with integration, the Digitisation Projects, specifically business unit 76869. This is one where we have spoken about before, and the Honourable Minister—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, if the Honourable Member just can repeat that number so that I can be sure that I am in alignment.

The Chairman: It's page C-13, line item 76869, Digitisation Projects.

You may continue.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

My question relates to the Digitisation Project. We have been discussing this now year on year for a while. And the Honourable Minister spoke to going to an RFI. So my question will connect to that. I ask for a little bit more information. We are well aware it was a multi-phase project. We had some updates from the Minister in December 2021, February 2022 and March

2023. And the Honourable Minister in one of the updates even went so far as to make it quite clear that the outputs of that process did not satisfy his requirements or some language like that. I invite him to reiterate what it was that failed about the project that he had to push it back.

The Chairman: Okay. So you're going to ask your question then?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, ma'am. I am probably going to give quite a lot of context to these questions.

The Chairman: Please do not make it a lot of detail, because it is better that you ask the questions and allow the Minister to answer. Because we are not in the Economic Debate. We are here to deal with the matters line by line. And I do understand that you do have to give context, but I would suggest that you do not make it overly long. Okay?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I will endeavour to comply with your instructions, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: So bringing our attention to page C-13, Revised Estimate column again for 76869, Digitisation Project, has an amount of $356,000 which if I recall was in line with the Minister's statements made as it relates to this project in the past. On a going-forward under column estimate 2024/25, the upcoming fiscal year, we see that we are allocating another $150,000.

Would the Honourable Minister please describe the value for money that was received, especially if any value can be carried over from the previous project? That is for the already-spent $356,000. Please would the Honourable Minister describe what is intended to be accomplished under the new $150,000 allocation? And then obviously, how does this connect to the RFI which he had mentioned, which was in answer to one of my earlier questions?

The Chairman: Ask your questions all before the Minister takes to his feet. Or perhaps you have other Members who wish to ask questions?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: That would be interesting. I have a lot of questions. But I will ask as many as the Minister sees feasible. And then he can answer. Or—

The Chairman: Oh, no. This is your debate. And if you have questions and you are hoping that the Minister can answer most of your questions . . . In fact, he may have answered some before you even asked them. You might want to put most of your questions forward to him so that when he takes to his feet, he can answer all of your questions. You don't want necessarily the clock to run out.

So my advice is that you ask all of your questions. If you do not have any further questions at this time, then of course take your seat and the Minister will endeavour to answer the questions that you have. And if other Members do not have questions that they wish to put forward as well.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, Madam Chairman. I will definitely take your advice insofar as managing the course of the Opposition's line of questions. And—

The Chairman: Maybe Government Members who have questions, too. So that is why I am just trying to suggest you ask your questions.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Absolutely. It has been quite a civil debate, so they can just pop up and ask.

What I would say is my preference would be to ask a question and sit down and have it answered. But I am very mindful that this might not provide for us to get all the information we need. So with that being said, I will manage with a few questions and then sit down. And thank you.

The Chairman: Once you have asked your questions, of course you take your seat.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

So that relates to Capital Acquisitions under Immigration business unit 76869, Digitisation Projects.

And the Honourable Minister spoke to, moving back to Head 27 under Performance Measures, though not cited here, it is something that was brought up in his brief last year, and he did mention it in one of the answers provided earlier which relates to the projects that are being undertaken to address our ageing demographics report. The Minister mentioned it in passing. And to that end, mindful that we have 8,000 people to bring into Bermuda, he mentioned it in passing. If he could expand on that a little bit more.

Also in last year's brief he mentioned the Immigration Reform Project. And so my question would be, What is the status update on the Immigration Reform Project?

Those questions moving on, or moving further up into Head 27, Revenue Summary. That is on page B-184 specifically under Revenue Source, programme 8301, Status and Naturalisation, where we are seeing a 63 per cent increase, that being an increase from some $952,000. So the original estimate in 2023/24 was $1,502,000. And we are anticipating the revenue under that to come up to $2,454,000, again an increase of some $952,000, or 63 per cent. So I was wondering

if the Minister could explain why we are anticipating such an increase. Nationality, especially since last year he had mentioned under nationality revenue and volume that it had increased 90 per cent. So the Minister at that time was anticipating a plateau. It looks like that might not have happened, that plateau. So if you could just explain, that is, Revenue Source 8301 on Status and Naturalisation—Other.

Also I have a question relating to the Work from Bermuda permit status, although . . . there it is. I believe that is Revenue Source 8285 [Work Permits—Work & Reside], although I stand to be corrected, namely, it has come to our attention that . . . obviously it is a one-year residency and there are some controls around that. But if the Minister could speak to, how does that person then shift to a different type of residency if they continue to want to stay in Bermuda? The reason is because I note that the Work & Reside under Revenue 8285, still on page B-184, is moving up. We are expecting $402,000, an increase of $19,000, or 5per cent. So it seems the programme is a success and it is going on and on. It is increasing slowly upward. So if the Minister could speak to Work & Reside, or the Work from Bermuda policy.

Under Subjective Analysis on page B-184, I note that under Repair and Maintenance that that budget has increased by 15 per cent, moving from an original $885,000 to $1,017,000. Could the Honourable Minister speak to why we are seeing an increase in Repair and Maintenance? This is a curious one because I am very curious as to what is being repaired and what is being maintained. Further, the Minister under this exact line item, we saw that in 2023, or the last fiscal period, it was originally estimated to cost us $885,000. It turns out, however, to have cost $928,000. Could the Honourable Minister explain the increase from the estimate to the revised?

And that will give me . . . Oh, and I have a question relating to page B-183 relating to business unit 37000, Status and Naturalisation. Two years ago or two fiscal periods ago it was $33,000 allocated to that business unit. And over the last fiscal period and this fiscal period, or the one upcoming, we see zero money allocated. And yet we have a corresponding, or at least similarly named, revenue source. So I am wondering, how is one area not funded to cost, but somehow it is bringing in revenue? If the Minister can just spell that out for me, I would greatly appreciate that.

And then I will ask any questions, supplementals, based on Immigration (under Head 27) from his answers. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99?

There being no other Members—

Minister, please.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the first question was asked in terms of digitisation. The funding that was reflected in the [Budget] Book is correct, that we intend on allocating $150,000 in the next year. I indicated that we were going to do an RFI. And the RFI will let us know whether or not we have sufficient funding or we will need additional funding to execute on the deliverables of the particular project.

What we found in the last project was, notwithstanding we had invested resources to ensure that we have a digitised system and we looked at the functionality of that particular system, it did not meet the satisfaction of stakeholders, nor did it meet the satisfaction of myself. We put it out to industry for industry to utilise that process. And what we did was we converted a paper process to an electronic process. But it did not necessarily cut out the steps. So it was not real automation built into the process. So kind of, you are typing numbers from a paper, putting it into a system and then you have to revert back to paper. And we did not get the end result that we desired.

When we talk about lessons learnt as it pertains to our expectations, we now have had a system that we have been able to run. We know what we are looking for. We know what we are not looking for. And we are clear on that being set moving forward.

Sometimes when you are trying to innovate and do things new, you run into these challenges in terms of the first iteration of what you put out there is not what will meet what I would consider to be the published litmus test. And it would have been easy for me to take a win and say, *Now we have a digitised system!* and then say, *Look! I promised digitisation; I got it.* Tick the box. But I do not think that this gives the public any justice, [nor does it do me] any justice to take a false win. So yes, this is something that we need to get right. We will invest in getting it right, and we will continue to put our best foot forward to ensure that it is right.

When it pertains to the Honourable Member's comment as it pertains to we need to bring in 8,000 more people, that has never been articulated from this Government. What has been articulated is we need to increase the workforce by 8,000, which is a combination of local workers entering the workforce, able-bodied local workers entering the workforce and a combination of guest workers. It is always this thing of, *We need to bring in, bring in more people.* And I am going to have conversations on the doorstep, people [equate] that to being displaced.

And I want to make it clear to Bermudians that our Economic Development Strategy sets out that we are investing in our local population. We are ensuring that we increase social and labour protections for our local population so that they are empowered to take advantage of opportunities within the workforce. That is what we have done with our Youth Employment Strategy. Our youth unemployment was at 33 per cent. We said that that was too high. We have embarked on a Youth Employment Strategy. No, I cannot give all of the

credit for the fall in youth unemployment to the strategy, but we actually had a concerted effort. And if you look at the results now, our youth unemployment was last registered at 11 per cent.

That is where we made a concerted effort to ensure that Bermudians who were locked outside of the world of work actually have a bridge into the world of work. And we will continue to do that with the training and development scholarships and the training programmes that we have put on. So I do not want the public to leave here and say, *We just need to bring in, bring in people.* No. Part of this is having able-bodied persons within our country being productive in our world of work as well. And I just wanted to put that out for clarification.

Now, the line item is Status and Naturalisation. And then one will trigger, *They must be granting status because the status and naturalisation revenue is going up.* But it is naturalisation which would actually increase. And there is a natural process between, you know we created two new avenues, [sections] 31ZA and 31ZB [of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956] for permanent residency. Those are parents of Bermudian children and non-Bermudian parents of Bermudian children; and the other would be persons who have resided here for over 20 years, having issued now over 200 certificates.

The next step for those individuals underneath the UK legislation, which we just do the administration for, but those applications go to Government House under the UK Nationality Act. They are allowed to then apply for BOTC [British Overseas Territory Citizenship] and become naturalised. And as a result of that, you would see a natural increase in that particular line item based off of the increase in PRCs [permanent residency certificates] that were actually given out.

We also see an increase in the line item for those items responding to PRCs as well because I have made it abundantly clear we seek to make further changes to permanent residency. I will be putting out a position paper shortly which indicates the Government's appetite for changes in that particular space for consultation in short order. It is important that we do so because we are going to have huge challenges with our labour force based off of our ageing population. This is a challenge that a lot of developed countries have been confronted with.

But if you fail to act, you will fail. And I know it is not going to be popular in all quarters of Bermudian society, but it is for me to explain that I will run the risk of losing some of my (I do not know) political popularity for doing what I . . . or the party is doing what they believe is in the best interest of the country. No, we are not granting status. But we would want to make Bermuda a choice jurisdiction for employees who have an option to reside anywhere in the world based off of their skill set. You have some employees who have a skill set which means that they will be in demand throughout this world. And we need to begin to close some of the competitive differences between Bermuda and other jurisdictions that they are looking to go to. And hopefully we can have a mature conversation around that and that does not get highly politicised.

I am expecting it will because that is just the nature of what we have to deal with. But failure to do so means we are grappling with a challenge, with a solution that may be forced on us rather than a solution that is deliberate. And I will say that because if you look at Japan, Japan has had an ageing population for some time. Japan has been even more conservative than Bermuda as it pertains to their immigration policy. But what you have seen now is Japan becoming more liberal in their immigration policy because they realise that they need expatriate and guest workers in their workforce as well.

I talked to colleagues in the Caribbean and one colleague in particular from Barbados. And I asked them about their challenges. And they said they are going to have the same challenges. And social security and health care costs are challenges, and the labour shortage is a challenge. But they said that the way in which they will benefit is that with the CARICOM free movement of individuals, Barbados will actually be a net nation in terms of a nation that is more attractive to Caribbean nationals. So that is how they are sorting out their problem. So they do not have to make tweaks as it pertains to permanent residency and things of that nature. They would have a natural increase in residency as Barbados is being a magnet in the region for other Caribbean nationals.

So different countries are grappling with different strategies. And I will put ours in front of the population and clearly explain what we need to do in that area. But if we revert back to the Economic Development Strategy, number one is ensuring that we empower our local population to take advantage of opportunities, and then welcome our guest workers.

One thing will remain constant. We will always have more jobs in Bermuda than able-bodied Bermudians able to fill those jobs. And when I speak to people who feel as though only foreigners are working, I continue to dispel that by just putting out the numbers. The vast majority of workers in Bermuda are Bermudian. A full 70 per cent of our workforce is actually Bermudian. There are 5 per cent who are spouses of Bermudians, and the other categories make up the rest. And I think that should be clear to members of our public.

Even when we started looking at sectoral breakdowns, tourism being a top employer of Bermudians, wholesale and retail being a top employer of Bermudians, international business now being a top employer of Bermudians and obviously the Bermuda Government being a top employer of Bermudians as well. And that is where we find out . . . when you start talking about the vast majority and where Bermudians are working, that is where they are working.

Unfortunately, our financial services industry was a large employer, but our banks have continuously, systematically shed jobs year after year. And that is a result of efficiency and innovation and global expansion of our local banks, which allows them to leverage resources from other areas as well.

Some trends we are not going to be able to stop. But then there are promise and shoots as it pertains to greater levels of development and building back up our hospitality offerings. When our hospitality offerings build up, they become economic hubs and you start to see greater levels of economic activity in other areas of our economy as well. So there is opportunity and promise if Bermudians can see a little bit forward.

But I would say that the increase in the number of workers year over year has been excellent trends in the right direction. Are we to where we need to be? No, certainly not. And I have set out the marker as to what we need to achieve. The next census will give us a better opportunity of how we reset that old age dependency ratio to determine what is the actual number that we require. But our targets that we set out as it pertains to the 8,400 (actually) stands. And we will continue to close that gap as best as we possibly can. But some of it requires political solution, and you will see reflected in this [Budget] Book where one of the solutions is changing the rules around permanent residency certificates.

The Member asked a question regarding Work & Reside. That Work & Reside that you see in there is not the one year "Work from [Bermuda]" certificates. Those one year Work from [Bermuda] certificates are extremely cheap. They are like $263 for a certificate. So they do not generate significant amounts of revenue.

The more important question is whether or not persons can transition. They can transition into residing in Bermuda on an annual basis according to our laws for greater periods of time if they have the sufficient income. We are not allowing persons to transition into employment opportunities because one aspect of both policies is that the persons did not intend to work in Bermuda. Where we do see flexibility around that is where persons are invested in opening up companies and then that person becomes the CEO of that company. Then it would be a natural sense to say, *Okay, that person is not eroding our employment opportunities from a Bermudian; that person is actually creating an enterprise which will create greater levels of job opportunities.* And this is where we see the transition.

But what I have found is that Bermuda sells itself. Once persons come here, they live, work and reside. They determine that, *You know what? This is a place that I would like to stay. This is a place that I would like to raise my family,* especially persons who have families in our school system, whether they are public or private. Most times we beat ourselves up, but when we look at benchmarks from some of the jurisdictions that they come from sometimes, they are pleased with the outcomes of our school system and the overall family environment that Bermuda actually has.

Bermuda is actually a safe, secure environment. Bermuda is clean, notwithstanding some of the chirping that I hear on the other side. But when you look comparatively, Bermuda is the *Gem of the Atlantic*. It will remain the *Gem of the Atlantic* underneath this Administration. And I am pleased with the feedback that I get from Members.

Now, where we have to work on is business efficiency and some of the costs associated with businesses. They cannot believe some of the legal fees that they have to pay just to do simple setting up of things. That is when the empire creates a cash avenue for itself, and then we have been trying to dismantle that for some time. But we are kind of stuck with it because there is no real justification when you compare jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The cost of legal fees to have a company licensed and incorporated in Bermuda, I mean, there is no justification as to why we pay some of those particular costs. And that is some of the feedback we are getting, and those are some of the ways in which we are trying to close the gap.

You saw me present this morning where we are trying to entice family offices to come here. And part of that is, well, *Why Bermuda if it is going to be more costly for us?* And that is why we wrote out the solution and said, *Oh, no. We're looking to change the legislation in a number of areas to make doing business in Bermuda a bit easier.* For not just the family offices, but all companies that come out of that legislation will benefit from those changes that we will make, notwithstanding that falls underneath our family office framework.

Repair and maintenance. I know when people think of repair and maintenance, automatically they think facilities. But this is infrastructure in terms of electronic infrastructure, software and things of that nature. So you know that Immigration has a number of systems, some old, some new. But they are all integrated at some point, and they have to talk to each other and it is ongoing maintenance. Sometimes just the contract of that system requires a maintenance component of that particular contract that needs to be adequately budgeted for.

But then as these systems age, what you also find is that you may pay for maintenance, and then something happens and you need to put in a ticket. Then it is an additional cost for that as well. It is like some way these companies create these mechanisms so that they are ongoing-ly needed. So I think that is appropriate.

But the other area in terms of compliance having $33,000 allocated underneath that particular cost centre, and now we are moving to zero, you would note that that $33,000 could not hire a staff member. And so

that is not material funds. All we did was put the appropriate funding under the appropriate cost centre. And there had been some previous consolidation of the department in that particular way.

I think that covers the questions that were asked by the Honourable Member. And I await further questions from Members of the House of Assembly.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: I recognise the Opposition Leader.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I would like the Honourable Minister to speak to the immigration reform in totality. He has spoken to parts of it. But he did mention last year the goal of immigration reform was to ensure that the big picture is one that benefits all Bermudians. So I am wondering, Is the immigration reform everything he has spoken of thus far? Or is there a higher level to which he can speak to it? Or are we done on immigration reform?

Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Excuse me, Member. Thank you. I think you sort of posed that question before. And I think the Minister in his answer spoke to immigration being so dynamic that policies and laws are constantly being revised to accommodate the society within which we live. So I am not sure what else you are hoping he will be able to put in that answer. I am not going to try and preclude any answer that he may have.

Minister, I recognise you.

Hon. Jason Hayward: There is no one cost centre for immigration reform. And so it kind of talks about operational plans rather than how the budget allocation is actually set out. So I think it was appropriate for you to give that intervention just now, Madam Chairman.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, he is being accurate now.

Hon. Jason Hayward: But I would speak to immigration reform. And how I outlined it is that there are a number of items that fall underneath immigration reform. Number one would be to strengthen our compliance function. I have gone into great details as it pertains to work that we have done in terms of compliance, some of the laws that we have changed to aid our compliance, the change in the work permit policy, the restaffing of our compliance function. So as it pertains to reform of compliance, then we can tick that area.

As it pertains to [reforms], one of our reforms is automation and digitisation. We are working to utilise technology and greater utilise AI, as well as digitising some of our processes and the way in which payments are made. So that talks to automation and digitisation. So we are progressing in that particular area.

The other area of immigration reform was ensuring that immigration works to unlock greater levels of economic activity and things of that nature. And this is where that ties into those areas of the Economic Development Strategy that we have set out regarding permanent residency. But not only that, [but] how do we make it easier for non-Bermudians who are here to invest economically in the country? And you have seen some changes that we have made in terms of laws to increase and improve residential schemes within the wider City of Hamilton, which gives greater access to the housing supply that persons can acquire, being a restricted person in Bermuda.

So there are a number of items. And I think that if we look at this from a systematic standpoint, you see that all of those areas of reform are touched on.

The last area of reform was a wholesale review of the legislation. Now, we attempted to do a wholesale review of the legislation, but we went backwards to come forward, meaning there was a lot of work that was done and reports that were given and suggestions that were made by joint committees in the past. And so we first reviewed that. What I have now tasked the Immigration Board, chaired by the Honourable Scott Pearman to do . . . I mean Scott Simmons. Apologies.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: —Scott Simmons to do is focus on how we can move forward in a systematic way to review that legislation. I have also contacted the Attorney General's department and asked the chairman to note if other resources have to be allocated to get the legal support that is required to support the board in its operations. So I am not asking the board to do heavy lifting. But the broad map of the strategy and where resource interventions are required, then they report back to the board as the body for the proposed changes. The board mulls over those changes and makes recommendations.

So that is how we are moving forward with wholesale immigration reform. And it falls under this guidance of where we currently are as a country and where we are trying to go from a workforce standpoint, where we are trying to go from a natural justice and fairness standpoint and where we are trying to go as it pertains to best practices as well. And they will do jurisdictional reviews to see how some of these matters are handled.

For example, you see a number of jurisdictions, they list the status, a key portion of legislation. Other immigration legislation and just have a clean status legislation. We do have that as it pertains to Bermudian registration. So we have this thing of status underneath one Act but then being registered as a Bermudian under another Act. That creates a little nuance that is a little bit difficult for me to explain to the average member of the public. But a recommendation would naturally be consolidation of those two pieces under one framework. That is just one of our items that, you know, if you ask practically what we would be looking at, it is something like that.

There are ways in which the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act lists that you can get status that there is no person on earth who exists who would be able to get status under that piece of legislation based off time periods passed and things of that nature. That list needs to be either removed from our legislation . . . So it is also about cleaning up as well. This is not about creating channels where they do not exist. And if we do create a new channel, if we do determine that, okay, at some point in time we will open up status to another person, that will be something for the Government and, wider, the Progressive Labour Party to decide and give a mandate to the Government as it pertains to this as to what is actually desired.

Right now there is no political mandate for status. Notwithstanding, a report can come back that recommends certain areas. Moving forward with those areas of recommendation would be a political matter. And so we are kind of hands-on so we do not stifle what the recommendations may be coming from the board or the experts who are working to review that particular legislation.

I hope that gives a full, comprehensive overview of how we are progressing immigration reform. I know persons would like to see it all in one pretty package wrapped in a bow, but that is not the way of the world.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The Minister is taking his seat.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99?

I recognise the Opposition Leader.

Honourable Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman. And I thank the Honourable Minister for his clarification and explanation on a number of points.

I am going to move on for myself to Head 60, Madam Chairman, for the Department of Workforce Development. Specifically questions . . . if you like, I can read out all of the business units and revenues.

The Chairman: We would prefer you to read out the question with the business unit so the Minister is clear what your question is based on.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Okay, Madam Chairman.

So there is under pages B-189 through B-191 the original 2023/24 column and [2023/24] revised, which sets out the values or quantification of every cost centre, or business unit revenue centre. What I am trying to do is in the ministerial brief, there is a portion where major achievements are outlined for those business units. So my first question to the Minister is, Would he outline the major achievements for not only Head 60 . . . well, he can do it for Head 60. He does not have to do it for every cost centre, but there are a number of cost centres, or business units, here. So I would like to get the major achievements for Head 60, Workforce Development.

And also, there are fluctuations in department funding which would otherwise have come under the ministerial brief. And this is under, for example, the General Summary where we see the 2023/24 original estimate for (let us just pick one) 70000, the Administration business unit being at $817,000. And it moves by 2 per cent to $837,000. Before, we would get an explanation for why these fluctuations or changes are happening. So I would like to ask the Minister to speak to those changes.

So with that on the record, mindful that might take a second, I can move into specific questions, which would be . . .

[Pause]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I note specifically under page B-188 under Department Objectives that the department objectives from last year have changed. And I suspect it has to do with the previous objectives being based on certain performances. And the department may have achieved those performances. So that goes back to my question for the Minister . . . could he outline the major achievements for Head 60? The objectives from last year, for example, under [2]Hansard [page] 870, [are as follows]:

- "to implement the Youth Employment Strategy;
- "continue to execute Phase 3 of the National Re-employment Strategy;
- "strengthen partnerships that facilitate industry training, development programmes and initiatives;
- "to expand Apprenticeship Training Programmes . . . ; and
- "provide support to the newly formed National Workforce Development Advisory Board" . . .

So what we have here is a little overlap between last year, but the year the department seems to have been realigned to accomplish new objectives.

[2] *Official Hansard Report* 8 March 2023

So pretty big questions: Can the Minister please describe this new alignment or at least the new objectives? Can he please describe the major accomplishments under Head 60, as well as the fluctuations in department funding? Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads under the Ministry of Economy and Labour?

There being none—

Minister, I recognise you.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, programme 6001, which is General Administration, is responsible for the overall management and administration of the Department of Workforce Development. Business unit 70000, Administration, has met their 2023/24 performance measures of three business days for the response of general inquiries, in keeping in line with the financial instructions and fiscal responsibility for the department.

Programme 6003, Career Development, comprises Career Development Administration, programme 7030. This programme is responsible for developing personal employment plans and case management as a result of client assessments, core soft skills training and employment readiness training.

In the 2023/24 performance measures, the input of client and coordination of personal employment plans will meet their targets of two business days and five business days, respectively. There was an adjustment for the number of persons assessed from 350 to 100, and participants in employability training from 500 to 100. These adjustments reflect a decline in clients seeking services from the department since the end of the pandemic.

That is important to note, that we had employability skills at 350 persons and other assessments at 500 persons, employability skills. And we have now gone from 850 individuals to 200 in terms of our target audience. The result of that is that persons have been able to find employment since the pandemic; and as a result, the demand on the Department of Workforce Development has been decreased. That is a plus for this Government. That is a plus for Bermuda. That is a plus for the people who had been seeking employment and had the ability to find employment.

The Career Development team has worked diligently to ensure participation in youth employment programmes and is on track to meet the 2023/24 revised target of 300 persons participating in those programmes. And that is also important. This means, Madam Chairman, that 300 young persons underneath the age of 26 are participating in programmes developed and supported by the Department of Workforce Development to ensure that they are prepared for our world of work.

One asks, *What are we doing for our young persons? Is the Government investing in our young persons? What is the Government doing to support our young people?* Well, this statistic demonstrates that there is support for our young people. This statistic demonstrates that there is investment in our young people. And this statistic demonstrates that the Government does care about our young persons.

Currently, there are 27,791 persons registered as users on the Job Board. With the demographic breakdown, 55 per cent are females and 45 per cent are males. There are also 3,264 employers registered on the Bermuda Job Board.

Programme 6004, Training, provides administrative support to the national certification and oversight of the National Certification and Apprenticeship Board activities such as the apprenticeship programmes, the distribution of scholarship funding for local and overseas students, professional designation training programmes and national certification of designated trades. The training programme has much success in implementing training programmes and advancing national certification. That is work that I believe you as the Minister started in earnest, and I have continued with ensuring that we have diligent work, Madam Chairman, as it pertains to the National Certification and Apprenticeship Board.

The National Certification and Apprenticeship Board, being something new, will focus primarily on skills trades. The National Training Board will no longer be a board that is responsible for covering all occupational categories within our society. It needs a defined focus. We have realigned that focus. And I am also pleased to report that the Honourable Member who sits in this House, Zane De Silva, has agreed to chair that particular board. And that is pleasing because we now have a person who actually cares about the development and has been in this industry for some time as it pertains to understanding the nuances, really working to advocate on behalf of members in that particular space. Hopefully he is able to build an appropriate team, get the occupational advisory committees back functioning the way they should be.

And hopefully we will see greater levels of promotion of skilled trades, greater levels of promotion for apprenticeships, greater levels of promotion and execution of certifications in Bermuda. That is another area that we need to close the loop on as it pertains to certifications. We have legislation that speaks to every tradesperson in designated occupations to be certified. But yet, because we do not have a mechanism of cross-jurisdictional reviews in place, we continue to have persons who land on our shores without being appropriately assessed.

But notwithstanding that, once they get into employment, we then reach out to employers and say that we have minimum standards in Bermuda. And that person, unless they can prove that they have an equivalence, has to obtain that minimal standard. And we

see that in our programmes that we have actually put out.

There was an adjustment to the number of persons awarded certifications from 300 to 125. However, the number of persons sponsored for industry and training courses increased from 200 to 232.

Madam Chairman, I draw your attention to the new Performance Measures for the Department of Workforce Development found on pages B-192 and B-193, which was mentioned by the Honourable Member from the Opposition. The team at the department had undertaken a review of its performance measures, recognising the need for alignment with current workforce demands. The team examined the existing performance measures to ensure they meet the criteria, being specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

I think that is something that the Honourable Member would actually appreciate. I think when he speaks about performance measures this is what he actually hammers home. He wants to see measures which are smart. He wants to see measures which are measurable, those that are achievable, which are relevant and which are time-bound. And so when the Honourable Member rises to his feet, I am expecting that he will express his pleasure with the revision of the performance measures—and not just having performance measures in place for performance measures' sake, but something that departments actually review, do an assessment of and then determine that they want to move in a different direction.

This evaluation aimed at enhancing the position of the department's performance indicators to accurately reflect the diverse range of services provided and the evolving needs of the clients. The revisions process prioritised clarity and relevance, allowing for a more insightful assessment of the department's impact on the workforce in the upcoming 2024/25 budget year.

The Department of Workforce Development has a number of achievements, and I will highlight those achievements. In collaboration with the Department of Financial Assistance, the department developed personal employment programmes. I am extremely proud of that particular initiative, Madam Chairman. That is something that we spearheaded with the reform of our Financial Assistance. We are now not telling people, *In order to remain on financial assistance, go fill out a job application and bring it in.* That is simply not good enough. We are now saying, *We're going to do an assessment of where you are. We're going to talk to you as to where you want to go. And we're going to put the resources in place to close that gap.*

That is a human-centred approach. The other way was administrative. This is human-centred. This is the Government looking to see how we can actually empower persons who are on our financial assistance. Not all persons, but able-bodied persons, on how we can assist those persons with closing gaps. And we just do not help them with closing gaps from an employment standpoint; there may be social gaps that need to be closed. There may be financial literacy gaps that need to be closed. All of that is determined during the assessment, and then the resources are put toward that individual.

This programme will continue to refine itself and only get better. But I believe when we look 10–15 years down the line and we see the fruits of the effective execution, you ask an individual, *What empowered you to get from where you were to where you are now?* And a critical piece of that story for some individuals is going to be the intervention from the Department of Workforce Development, which was a policy objective of the Progressive Labour Party Government.

Additional to that, we did run job fairs for Fairmont Southampton Princess on the 1st and 2nd of June in 2023, and we did support the marketing and promotion of that. Notwithstanding the large marketing and promotion, we still did not get the uptick that we required in terms of filling all of the jobs that will be available for that particular site. According to the conversations that we have had, it is the company's responsibility to ensure that it exhausts the options of able, qualified [local] persons before any persons are brought in. But what is typically being done is that sub-contractors are being hired, and sub-contractors most likely have their own staff. Where that sub-contractor has to beef up staff is where we have a conversation as to the work that the sub-contractor has done to attract locals who may have the competency in that particular area.

We continued with the National Centre for Construction Education and Research, with basic safety training. We ran technical cleaning courses, which saw 13 participants gain nationally certified cleaning certificates from the Academy of Cleaning Excellence. And nine of those individuals received employment opportunities. So that is where we see where the policies or the works and the training that we have put in place bear fruit. But I would say there is a challenge with our cleaning industry. The challenges we have with our cleaning industry are that there seems to be a reluctance to hire Bermudians. I had mentioned that in terms of the janitor situation. But then there is also a reluctance from us as Bermudians wanting Bermudians in the house cleaning.

While I understand the rationale, we have to look at the greater impact. We have to begin to trust one another. And so expatriates are no better human beings than our Bermudians. So it is hard to say that you can have a Bermudian plumber. You can have a Bermudian electrician. You can have a Bermudian carpet installer. You can have a Bermudian painter around your house. But for some reason you cannot have a Bermudian clean your house. It is absurd. So that is something that we need to look into, the paradigm around that and the impact that it is having on persons who are trying to obtain gainful employment in a lower-skilled area.

So when you even see our policy changes that are coming out, we are going to take into consideration work done at the lower-skilled area so that we can try to continue to have entry-level jobs at the bottom and jobs at the top. So this is what we are actually trying to correct and have more balance in our society. But the Department of Workforce Development will continue to train persons in those areas to reduce the amount of burden that employers actually have in finding suitably qualified employees.

We ran the Professional Administrative Certification of Excellence programme, which was a 12-week course. And there were 20 successful persons who passed that particular certification. The vast majority of participants were women who ranged from seasoned career professionals in administration to new persons wanting to enter the field. And they all worked together in cohorts and things of that nature. And it was a powerful ceremony when persons were able to give their testimony. And they were happy that they were continuing to refine themselves so that they can provide the excellence in their place of employment.

We also ran the Renewable Solar Energy programme, which saw five participants complete that particular programme. And that was with the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners. And that is a globally recognised designation. What is important about this is, this is our investing in not just current but future alternative energy. It is our future. And to have persons skilled in those particular areas is certainly welcomed by the companies who are looking for employees in that space.

We ran the Construction Asphalt Training programme, and we already know about the demand for this skill set. And hopefully when the plants get back up and running in earnest, there will be a cadre of persons who can jump in to assist the Ministry of Works with executing those duties to ensure that we have safe roadways.

I mentioned already about our Youth Employment Strategy. But another area of success was what we have done in terms of Summer Internship and Summer Employment programmes. We have increased the number of young persons who have taken part in those particular programmes, and now we are up to 180 individuals who are actually funded by the department to obtain summer internships and summer employment. Again, I thank the government departments who actually take on these young individuals and mentor them and provide the career guidance that they require and give them a better opportunity to better understand the employment landscape.

I also thank the private sector employers. Without them this programme would not be a success. And I do that on an ongoing basis. Notwithstanding that the funds come from the Department of Workforce Development and all of the administrative work comes from the department, it is still some work that needs to be done from employers who are actually dedicating staff and resources to ensuring that the experience received by the summer students is one that is fulfilling, one that is enriching, one that is empowering, one that puts them on a pathway to success.

We also had another cohort of our Graduate Trainee programme. This is another one that I am pleased about. And I came to this House and I gave a Ministerial Statement on it, Madam Chairman. But the Graduate Trainee programme, we identified that we had persons who were graduating from university. They had the educational requirements, but they did not have the experience requirements set out in some of the jobs that they were looking for. And it is not always entry-level jobs that we need to put our graduates in, because they exceed—*exceed* the company's requirements for entry level. But what we need to do is find the appropriate job for these individuals. And this is what this does. It creates a natural bridge where that person is able to go in, do an internship for 10 weeks. And then the employer gets to assess the value of the young person and determine whether or not they have availability within their place of employment to retain those individuals.

But we often hear of our young people going away, coming back and not finding jobs. It is a matter of what I would say, *for the most part*. There are some occasions where people continue to struggle. But for the most part, it is a matter of timing. Our statistics will reflect that persons who have degrees are less likely to be unemployed. Our statistics will reflect that persons who actually have degrees are the better remunerated persons within our society, with a few exceptions. So we cannot [overstate] the importance of education, and I do not want persons to believe that, *I'm going to get my degree, and it doesn't matter because I come back home and I don't find anything.* Sometimes it is a matter of timing between their obtaining a degree and an opportunity existing.

But what we also do is we provide emotional intelligence training. We provide the soft skills that are necessary so that they can remain employed in the workplace and conduct themselves accordingly with a certain ethic. Additional to that, we now are moved to provide persons with professional head shots so when they can update their social media, they do not have the party scene. Because employers do look at their social media. But then understanding about their own personal brand, that you cannot be one person on the weekend and another person who plays at employment.

Now, everybody has freedom; do not get me wrong. But you do not want to be judged when you are trying to get in the door or a stigma be attached to you when you are trying to present the best version of yourself. We already know that everybody has a complete version of themselves. But we are trying to encourage our young people to present the *best* version of themselves. I read an application the other day. And one of the responses was that the person did not come in to

the [interview] dressed appropriately. I will not tell you the job that they went in for. But even that interviewer was expecting a different dress from the person who walked in and held it against them because they actually wrote that. That has nothing to do with the person's competency or experience. But we know that these barriers exist.

The other thing that I have learnt, and I have primarily learnt it from being in this particular role, Madam Chairman, is networking matters in Bermuda. Networking provides access to employment opportunities. There are people who do not have degrees or educational experience, but they are in the right circles and they are presented with opportunities. Now, it is that person's work, and sometimes it is relationships, that keeps them in that employment setting. But for the most part if you are a member from a certain community in Bermuda, you have no natural network in the places where you may seek employment. And as a result, you are locked out of those opportunities. While persons who are friends of children and all of that, are within the houses, and people's parents make things available for them.

And it is hard for some of our young people who come from a different social network than some other individuals to find employment in Bermuda. And that even goes down to summer internships. And that is why I am clear that, no, I am *not* opening up internships to non-Bermudians. Because our persons, our young people who do not have that experience need that opportunity to get in that place of employment and show their actual value. They need a bridge because they do not have that natural network. And that is what we are trying to do within the Department of Workforce Development.

Madam Chairman, I cannot thank enough the director and the staff of the Department of Workforce Development for all the work that they do. When I push them and I say I need to see more, they are pushing out more. They are investing in the development of themselves. They are investing in the development of our young people. They are investing in the development of their tools which would aid not just young people but all job seekers. And there has been some stigma around the Department of Workforce Development, *I don't want to go there for a job,* or whatever it may be. But you will be surprised as to who is actually utilising those services. You now have professionals who take their lunchtime courses as a refresher for some of the stuff that they have already acquired in their workplace continuum. And so again, I just want to thank the department.

I think that covers the performance measures and the achievements that the Honourable Member requested.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99?

And before I recognise the Member who has taken to the floor, I just want to inform the House that we have 30 minutes remaining in this debate.

Member, I recognise you. You may speak.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I do have some questions under this Head and supplementary to the Minister's brief. But I need to hop to one that is quite crucial in the remaining heads, and we want to make sure we get that dealt with.

Save this point, the Honourable Minister is absolutely correct that I cannot state with more vigour and encouragement the performance measures being properly outlined, documented, being measurable, achievable, time-based. This is the kind of material that makes sure the job of, certainly, mine anyway in the House, gets done. This is how it works. It looks fantastic. It reminds me of the Office of the Tax Commissioner. And I hope that this momentum spreads across all the various departments, that we do not look at things that are outdated or just clearly do not match what we are supposed to be doing. So, a fantastic job and I thank the Department of Workforce Development for that work.

The part I wanted to jump into is a bit contentious. And I know the Honourable Minister has spoken to it before. And this is under Head 94, Economic Development. This one the Minister and I have been talking about back and forth for, well, since I got the job, really. And last year, he spoke of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation based on my question. I am looking at page C-19, relating to Head 94, and this is the BEDC Operational Grant, business unit 7000 on the bottom two-thirds of the page.

To this end, we see the BEDC getting $2.2 million in 2022, $2.2 million in the original estimate for 2023—this fiscal period, and, again, $2.2 [million] in 2022. And unfortunately, we are again without an annual report or audited financial statements. I would be remiss to not bring this up every year and to insist that these are crucial to receiving sums from any government or any taxpayer money but especially $2.2 million. The work of the BEDC is crucial to Bermuda, and the Minister has made that point a number of times. I could not agree more. But at this point, we do have to have the unpleasant conversation which is, where are their audited financial statements? Where are their annual reports as are supposed to be generated under section 18 of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation Act? And section 19 requires the Minister to lay those in the House. So what are we going to do about those? Where are we at?

The Chairman: Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads under the Ministry of Economy and Labour?

Recognising that there are no other Members, Minister, do you wish to answer the Member's question?

Hon. Jason Hayward: The [Shadow] Minister is correct. We have an obligation to provide those reports in a timely manner. I know from time to time there are a number of reasons why reports do not come to this House in a timely manner. I know that for the National Training Board I laid reports from 2019 to 2023. This one is a little more important because it has financials attached to it, while those other ones do not. I am waiting on the technical officers just to provide me with clarification as to the status of the reports as set out in the Act. And once I receive those, I will be happy to relay that to the Honourable Member and members of the public.

I do not skirt around accountability, and if the Act says that we should have reports produced, it is my aim to ensure that they come to this House in a timely manner, understanding that there may be challenges that prevent me from doing so.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99?

I recognise the Member.

Opposition Leader, you have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman, for allowing me to jump around on that one and Honourable Minster for taking that question and making that commitment.

I am going back to Head 60 now, so a gentle glide path. Head 60, Workforce Development, page B-189, specifically on programme 6003, Career Development. The Honourable Minister pointed out that [the number of] clients seeking services has declined since the end of the pandemic. I believe the numbers he said were from 800 to 200. That demand has decreased. And I invite him to speak to that as it relates to this question, because what we are seeing under programme 6003, under Career Development, there were previously two business units. And one is obviously defunded, and it looks like the funding has gone into the other. But under that total programme head, under 2022 actual—that being last fiscal period—that would be $1.3 million. And then under this fiscal period, there was $1.4 million. And then going into the next fiscal period, the department is requesting $1.6 million. So we are looking at $150,000–$200,000 increases every year. But the Minister had pointed out that the need for services is diminishing, and yet we are spending more.

So there are two questions there. Why are we spending more if service requests are going down? And if the Minister could speak to this line item 6003, Career Development, could he speak to the original 2023 which we have at $1,478,000, but the actual revised estimate is $1,634,000? So, two questions there: Why is it going up if the service requests are going down? And why the increase in this fiscal period?

I can keep asking questions.

The Chairman: Yes. You are on the floor. As long as you are on the floor, you may ask questions. That's—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jason Hayward: While I stated that there is a decline in demand for services in one area for able-bodied adults, I did state that we are focusing on the economic development strategy priorities, in particular the Youth Employment Strategy. And you can see now how we are allocating funds. And it is important to note that the demand for the population has gone down, but we are reinvesting more funds. And I articulated how, number one, we have increased summer internship and summer employment programmes and number two, how we are expanding graduate training programmes and those career development programmes that are focused on our youth.

So this is a reflection of where the Government actually puts its money where its mouth is, where there is direct alignment in terms of where we have increased funding in certain areas, which are particularly designed to ensure that our young people have greater access to opportunity, get the experience they need and get acquainted with the world of work in a formal way. There could be some other areas that I will wait for responses. But the main area would be reflected. I would note that, no, we did not budget for the increase in the summer employment and summer internship programmes, but we spent money in that particular area, and that is why the revised reflects it. And that is important. We increased opportunities for our young people (even though we did not define them) because we determined that it was a priority.

And you can see in this Budget Book where the numbers are aligned. And we were still able to execute on a number of other items while increasing opportunity for our young persons. That cannot be underappreciated. And I know that the young people who were actually able to take advantage of our Graduate Trainee Programme, our Summer Employment Programme and our Summer Internship Programme appreciate that.

But I want to say another thing. We did not just increase the number of persons. We increased the delivery of the programme in terms of providing those additional wraparound services that the young persons required, the employability skills and all of that as well. So now we have a more comprehensive programme.

We have more young persons. And I am happy to stand behind the reallocation of those numbers.

The Chairman: Minster.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak . . .

I recognise the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: You took to your feet before I could even finish.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Well, the Honourable Minister went straight to my next question which was under that same head but on page C-19, for the schedule dealing with grants and contributions, speaking to the increased funding in the Summer Student Programme, which is listed on this page as 7098. And insofar as . . . let me just spell this out a little bit.

The Department of Workforce Development has some five grants and contributions here for scholarships, apprenticeship scheme, sponsorship—trainees, national certification training and Summer Student Programme. So the question . . . page C-19, it will be on all of them.

My question under Workforce Development is, of the five programmes, four have received reduced funding—that being scholarships, apprenticeships, sponsorships and national certification—where the Summer Student Programme is going up. Would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to the decrease in the grants and contributions?

The Chairman: Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads under the Ministry of Economy and Labour?

There being none, Minister, would you like to answer the questions?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes. As it pertains to the BEDC, the OAG [Office of the Auditor General], in January 2023, commenced the audits of the 2018/19 and that fiscal year as being audited. They paused to deal with other Government consolidated funds. And now they have picked back up. But this is a challenge that we have identified in a number of areas as it pertains to quangos. There just has not been prioritisation, and as a result, we have changed legislation to remove OAG from being the primary group that could audit documents and have moved to the private sector. That may be something we may have to look at for this quango as well. But certainly, there are financial statements on an annual basis which are produced. They currently remain unaudited. And those are some of the challenges with utilising the internal resources that we have to ensure that they are audited.

Again, the overall numbers may speak to client declines and so this does not speak to the demand. Where there is demand, we ensure under Workforce Development that we actually fund. So, this may not be a matter of . . . this is not a reduction of overall scholarships. And even if you look at the scholarships, we are talking about an actual that was $432,000, the original estimate which was $430,000, a revised estimate of $430,000 and an estimate of $400,000.

So what you will see, right, is that each Ministry has a balanced budget which produces a budget ceiling. And as a result, to make it work, you have to reallocate funds within the department, and that could be just a shave coming out of here so we could put towards other areas in which we do that. And we typically do this through virements. We could have held the numbers the same, but that does not mean that we will service less individuals or there is less funding available for individuals. And I just want everyone to be mindful of that. Because the way in which this is done here is we give money for scholarships and things of that nature that go directly to institutions.

That does not mean that we cannot place more funds when we have more funds in another cost centre that we do not pay for the training and development that people actually require. The budget kind of just keeps up with the parameters. And every year is not the same as it pertains to the funding needs of individuals. And so I just wanted to be mindful of that.

The other thing is that what I do know is that where one group was responsible for funding, what the department did internally was a level of consultation. So the efficiency that is created creates efficiency in terms of the numbers, but there is no disruption in terms of volume or service delivery. And I am abundantly clear on that because I am not a Minster to cut funding on these particular areas.

So I will say categorically now, there will be no reduction as it pertains to the service we provide, as it pertains to scholarship and things of that nature underneath this particular Ministry. And, like, we fund funding for our young people. Why would I turn back around and not do the exact same thing year after year? I know how important it is. And I know that sometimes we are the only option that people have. We are the only option for scholarship funding where they may not get scholarships elsewhere. We are the only option for additional training. If that cannot go to . . . We can reduce funding on local scholarships as well because we allow them to absorb the Bermuda College funding that the Ministry of Education provides for financial assistance first before they come to us.

So, notwithstanding the fact that we have funds in this particular area that are not always utilised and we reallocate that to other areas within the department. This is where the department remains extremely agile to meet the objectives. But no stone gets unturned when we are trying to find resources to ensure that we empower our people.

I know how important workforce development is to economic development. I know that we cannot have a sustainable economy without a sustainable workforce. I know that in order for some persons in our community who come from certain social economic backgrounds to get ahead, this intervention is absolutely required. And we will continue to ensure that we empower individuals. We will continue to ensure that we fund individuals.

We have another cohort of individuals who are at the [Prison] Farm, and in order for them to get parole, they need employment. But if the Corrections Department is not providing that support, then it falls on Workforce Development. So, Madam Chairman, I can assure you that the efficiencies are reflected in the numbers but there are no reductions in actual output as it pertains to funds that persons will receive coming out of the Department of Workforce Development.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99?

I recognise the Opposition Leader. And Leader, before you speak, I just want to say that there are about 11 minutes remaining.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

These questions relate to Head 94, Economic Development, and are pretty straightforward ones. Starting on page B-195, we are about to wander into my favourite area of performance measures again. We are looking at Concierge Services under General Summary, page B-195, programme 9405, Concierge and Engagement, specifically business unit 104120, Concierge Services. It was defunded this fiscal period and has not requested any further funding. But I would just note to the Honourable Minister that under performance measures on page B-197, there is still some, I am guessing, work to be done where it is talking about work permit applications. So, this is where the compliments go out to those who have worked incredibly hard on their performance measures because I am not entirely sure how that defunding works, but they still have work to do, and I do not believe I saw any full-time equivalent numbers there. Oh. There it is under Administration. But I just wanted to bring that to the Minister's attention. He can speak to it if he likes, but I just wanted to point out that there is a—

The Chairman: So that is not an actual question.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: —lack of coherence there.

Not a question. Just to bring it up.

But I do—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Point of information, Minister. Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I do have an answer to a previous question that was asked regarding the annual reports of BEDC if the Honourable Member—

The Chairman: Do you—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I yield. Absolutely. Thank you.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I have received a report that the annual reports from 2014/15 through to 2022/23 all have been prepared and lie with the board in preparation to be audited.

The other thing I have been informed of is that the quarterly financial statements of the BEDC is online at their website and they are up to date up into the second quarter of 2023/24 as well. And so there is public reporting of the funds that have actually been spent. All the financial statements have been compiled and are currently with the Board awaiting audit.

The Chairman: Okay, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the respective heads under Economy and Labour?

I recognise the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson Thank you so much, Madam Chairman.

I have a question relating to Head 94 on page C-5, looking at business unit 75281, Shoreside Facilities. This has obviously been in the Economic Recovery Plan. And there have been a number of statements both publicly and by the Minister relating to shoreside facilities. So, my question is . . . this report indicates that $124,000 has been spent and that there is $1.5 million allocated. If the Honourable Minister can just clarify what has the $124,000 been spent on so far and the $1.5 million. If he could speak to that.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: I recognise the Minister in response.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member will recall that I did make a public statement as it pertains to the shoreside fishing facilities. The work that was executed by the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation was a feasibility report. That feasibility report was then externally vetted by . . . what are they called? . . . Professional service agencies? You know, one of the "Big Four."

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: And that does not come free. So the funds you see allocated are the funds associated with the feasibility study produced. You would then

know that there was a recommendation that I indicated was made that this matter now move over to the BOPP (Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme) and fall underneath that. So there is alignment between that facility and the items which are set out in that particular plan. The BOPP Steering Committee and the BOPP team will determine whether or not they move forward with the shoreside fishing facility, notwithstanding that there was grant funding provided for the execution of that.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I think sometimes you have a vision and you put funding in line with that vision. But then when you do the feasibility, you actually determine that the appropriate administrative body is not always the body that, you know, you initially ask to carry out that activity.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: And so, the scope . . . the feasibility study has been done. And the BOPP Steering Committee will determine how we move forward with shoreside fishing facilities.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members . . . There are five minutes remaining for the debate under this Ministry.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the respective heads?

I recognise the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. And I thank the Honourable Minister for that.

I would ask . . . still under Head 94, taking us over to page C-28, under Head 94, Economic Development. This is dealing with department accommodation rentals. And I note that Economic Development has requested some $71,000 for, presumably, office space. But before, in this fiscal period, they had none. So if the Honourable Minister could speak to why they did not have any and then why they now need $71,500 for accommodation rental.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes. It is estimated the Economic Development Department is looking for a new home. So the assumption is that the move will require additional funding outside of what was allocated for in the previous budget period. I think that is the explanation that underpins why there is currently a line item of $71,500 in the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads under the Ministry of Economy and Labour?

I recognise the Opposition Leader. You have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Moving over to Head 99 on page B-198, dealing now with the Department of Labour whose mission statement is to provide services to support and foster positive employment relations and harmonious industrial relations within Bermuda in alignment with international best practices. We have discussed this at some length as it relates to the labour relation section. And I have asked, or rather, the Minister has already answered a number of those questions, so I will just leap right into very, very specific questions. And starting with the Performance Measures for the newly formed department. As previously formatted, it was business unit 54200, Labour Relations Section.

How much time do I have now?

The Chairman: I was going to tell you that you might want to ask all of your questions because you only have approximately two minutes, and we need to leave just a little small piece of time for the Minister to move his heads—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Well, I do not want to be accused of—

The Chairman: —and answer your questions.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: —not using up all of the Minister's time. I might get in trouble for that with my colleagues.

[Laughing]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: So I will defer.

The Chairman: Ask your questions. The Minister can always answer you after.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I can always fire an email. What I can do is, I just wanted to . . . I will end here.

I wanted to thank the Minister for his presentation, and I wish him the best in his Ministry this year.

The Chairman: Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

There being none, Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, it is a shame that the Opposition Leader did not get to finish his questions when I tried to put a mechanism in place where he could ask all his questions so he would not find himself in the position he finds himself in today.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jason Hayward: But he chose not to move forward in a more efficient and effective way, and we are unable to complete this debate. That is extremely unfortunate, Madam Chairman.

With that said, Madam Chairman, I move Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: Members, it has been moved that Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99 be approved as printed.

Are there any objections?

There being no objectives, it is agreed to.

Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Economy and Labour Heads 44, 14, 27, 60, 94 and 99 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2024/25.]

[Pause]

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members.

We are continuing the Budget Debate on the Ministry of Transport Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35. This debate will be led by the Minister of Transport, the Honourable Minister Wayne Furbert.

Minister Furbert, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thought the Honourable Member did a great job just now. And the suggestion earlier that he made to the Honourable Members on that side was a good idea.

The Chairman: Yes, it was.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will be glad, if the Honourable Member Susan Jackson wants to do that . . . I will be glad to take that up also.

However . . . speech. The Honourable Member does not want to go in that direction, so I will move the followings Heads: Head 48, Ministry of Transport Headquarters; Head 30, Marina and Ports; Head 34, Transport Control Department; and Head 35; Public Transportation be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Yes. Just one second.

This is a four-hour debate. And we are starting at 4:30 and are due to finish at 8:30. We can finish earlier. There is no problem to the Members.

[Laughter]

HEAD 48—MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We will do our best to finish at 5 pm. I believe the Honourable Member Mrs. Jackson wants to go to dinner, so we will move ahead as swiftly as possible.

The Chairman: All right. Continue, Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I stand before you today to emphasise the paramount importance of the Ministry of Transport in Bermuda, a vital institution responsible for ensuring the efficient and safe transportation of people and goods across our beautiful Island. Transportation serves as the lifeblood of any thriving community, connecting individuals, businesses and communities alike. Whether it is commuting to work, transporting goods to markets or simply enjoying leisure activities, reliable transportation infrastructure is indispensable to our daily lives.

The mission of the Ministry of Transport is clear: *To transport people and goods efficiently and safely.* Efficiency ensures that our resources are utilised effectively, minimising wastage and maximising productivity. Safety, on the other hand, is nonnegotiable. It is a cornerstone upon which all transportation systems must be built, ensuring the well-being of our citizens and businesses alike. However, fulfilling the mission comes at a cost.

The Ministry of Transport operates with an expenditure of $68,246,000 and a capital expenditure of $15,410,000. This investment, Mr. Chairman, is necessary to maintain and improve our transportation infrastructure, ports and public transit system. It is an investment in our future ensuring that Bermuda remains connected and accessible for generations to come.

While the expenditure may seem significant, it is crucial to recognise that the Ministry also generates revenue amounting to $42,048,000. This revenue is derived from various sources including transportation fees, licensing, passes and, yes, advertisement. Mr. Chairman, Parliament should also be aware that transportation generates approximately $26 million in passenger taxes, which goes to the Consolidated Fund which sits under Finance. In addition, it generates a further $7.7 million in visitor fees which goes to the Bermuda Tourism Authority; $12 million in infrastructure fee which goes to Finance, and $10.2 million which goes for Port expense. Mr. Chairman, overall, the Ministry generates not just $42 million but just under $100 million in revenue.

The Ministry is committed to fiscal responsibility, ensuring that our transportation systems are sustainable and self-sufficient. In conclusion, the Ministry of Transport plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of Bermuda. By investing in efficient and safe transportation infrastructure, we not only enhance connectivity

and mobility but also foster economic growth and social development.

Mr. Chairman, the departments which come under the Ministry remit include the following:

- Ministry of Transport Headquarters—Head 48;
- Department of Marine & Ports Services—Head 30;
- Transport Control Department—Head 34; and
- Department of Public Transportation—Head 35.

In addition, the Ministry of Transport maintains oversight of three authorities, namely the following:

- Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority;
- Bermuda Shipping and Maritime Authority; and
- Bermuda Airport Authority.

The budget appropriation for the entire Ministry, as I mentioned earlier, is $68,246,000, and I mentioned earlier, the revenue was $42,048,000.

Ministry Headquarters—Head 48
Cost Centre 58000

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, it is the Ministry Headquarters which is responsible for transportation matters within Bermuda. As I mentioned earlier, the mission for the Ministry of Transport Headquarters is: *Transporting people and goods efficiently and safely*. That is found on page B-202.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Transport Headquarters, Head 48, includes two Business Units: an Administration Section and a Transportation Planning Team, which is found on pages B-201 and B-204 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the current capital expenditure for the Ministry of Transport Headquarters, Head 48, is estimated to be $15,849,000. This represents a decrease of $7,265,000, or roughly 31 per cent, over the prior year's budget of $23,114,000. This decrease is primarily due to the elimination of the $5 million previously budgeted for project agreement guaranteed minimum regulated revenue, which the OBA had put in place, which represents an estimated amount to be paid to the Bermuda Skyport Corporation Limited should actual regulated revenue fall below the predetermined threshold. The particulars of the calculation are set out in the project agreement. This reduction underscores the growth in airlift in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I will provide an overview of the trends in airlift to Bermuda over the past five years, highlighting the challenges faced during the pandemic and presenting a positive trajectory for the future. I shall provide an update on the commendable progress in the air transport sector, tracing our journey from 2018 to the present and outlining successes that have assisted our continued growth. I look forward to the future with the pending reopening of the Fairmont Southampton in 2025.

Mr. Chairman, in 2018, we had a substantial seat capacity of 611,000. This success was a testament to the collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Tourism and industry stakeholders overall. The subsequent year, 2019, witnessed a slight dip of 580,000 in capacity, a fluctuation that was likely influenced by global economic uncertainties.

The year 2020 marked a significant downturn due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Bermuda, like many nations, faced a profound impact on its air transport sector with the numbers plummeting to an all-time low of just over 170,000 seats available. The air travel industry—a vital component of our national infrastructure—faced unprecedented challenges leading to grounded flights, economic strain and operational disruptions.

Mr. Chairman, despite the adversities faced in 2020, the year 2021 signalled a gradual recovery with approximately 237,000 air seats available. This positive momentum continued into 2022, with a further increase to 355,000 seats, which represents an impressive 50 per cent increase from the prior year. As we recently completed 2023, the upward trajectory remained, and the total number of air capacity reached an estimated 432,000, reflecting a 20 per cent increase from the preceding year. These escalating figures not only underscore a robust recovery for Bermuda but also serve as a testament to our resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. The substantial growth in air seats availability shows our ability not just to endure challenges but to emerge stronger, thriving as a destination of choice.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Transport in collaboration with our valuable partner stakeholders has been consistently and diligently working towards enhanced airlift services. Allow me to highlight some of the noteworthy achievements that were made recently which have assisted in our increase in seat numbers, reflecting an astounding 150 per cent increase since the COVID-19 impact in 2020.

Mr. Chairman, it is important that this Parliament is aware of what assisted us to increase our air capacity in 2023. The reinstatement of JetBlue's daily service to Boston has markedly improved our connectivity and heightened local passenger satisfaction, particularly for medical travel. The reintroduction of this crucial route not only broadens our array of travel choices but also affirms our dedication to delivering convenient and efficient air travel services. The introduction of BermudAir—this new link not only unlocks exciting possibilities but also enhances the enthusiasm and accessibility of our region as a compelling travel destination. American Airlines is resuming its daily nonstop service to Miami on November 5th, extending its year-round connectivity from Miami to Bermuda. This complements the already established year-round service from JFK and Charlotte.

Mr. Chairman, as we reflect on our successes in 2023, it is important to recognise that our journey is far from over. In 2022 the total airline capacity for January, February, March, November and December was 113,000. In 2023 it was 133,000. Hence, we could applaud, colleagues. But, Mr. Chairman, we are not satisfied because for the same period in 2019 the airline seat capacity was 195,000. Despite achieving remarkable strides in air seat capacity for 2023, our vision extends beyond mere accomplishments, encompassing our commitment to continued growth and innovation.

Mr. Chairman, our aspirations soar higher than ever before. We envision a Bermuda that not only attracts visitors but captivates their hearts and minds, leaving an indelible impression that beckons them back time and time again. To realise this vision, we must push the boundaries of possibilities, pushing ourselves to increase our seat capacity even further. [During] the off-season, particularly as we hear November through March our Island home still has beauty offering a sanctuary of tranquillity and adventure for travellers seeking respite from their daily lives and the colder weathers of snow and ice. Achieving this vision, Mr. Chairman, requires dedication, innovation and collaboration. As we embark on this journey, we must draw inspiration from our past successes, fuelling our determination to reach even greater heights. Together, let us write the next chapter of Bermuda's tourism story—one of innovation, growth and unparalleled hospitality. The work ahead may be challenging but it is also exhilarating. For it is through our collective efforts that we will shape a future where Bermuda shines brighter than ever before.

Mr. Chairman, here are some actions that the Ministry has taken and some we are working on to fulfil the vision. American Airlines intends to relaunch its flight between Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Bermuda with seasonal flights resuming April 2024. BermudAir has added two new routes which includes Orlando, which will fly out March 26th and Baltimore, on March 18th. They are also seeking permission to fly to Halifax and Toronto. Mr. Chairman, the Halifax travel will greatly help tourists and our students who go to school in the Halifax area. Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Halifax flight will reduce the flight costs for our students and their families. Let me applaud BermudAir for their continued growth and for their exceptional flight service and passenger comfort.

United Airlines has committed to extend their Newark Liberty International Airport to the Bermuda seasonal service to 26 October 2024 and a larger airplane with 166 seats, which is a 737 Max 8. This represents a 71 per cent increase in total days of scheduled flights from 123 days in 2019 to 210 days planned in 2024. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to also say further discussions are being held with United Airlines on extensions for the period of November to March, which could potentially increase capacity in the region of 66 per cent. Mr. Chairman, we will rise to the challenge, unite in purpose, and our pursuit of excellence. Our journey has just begun. And as I said before, the best is yet to come.

Mr. Chairman, the remaining $2,265,000 decrease was a majority split between the Bermuda Airport Authority's operational budget, which was decreased by $1,700,000, and the Air Service Development budget allocation, which was also decreased by $1 million over the prior year. The purpose of the Air Service Development budget is to better position Bermuda for transformational change in the commercial aviation industry. And this will help out overall as far as increasing our air capacity, and in doing so, aid in economic recovery and enhance the lives of Bermuda's residents. As stated earlier, the Air Service Development Committee will continue to work to expand current air service to protect our key gateway cities and enter and expand into new markets.

Mr. Chairman, throughout the fiscal year, the Ministry will engage in a collaborative effort with its authorities to identify and implement strategies aimed at enhancing efficiency and realising cost savings. This collaborative approach involves a concerted examination of operational processes and resources utilised to streamline operation and achieve financial economies. Throughout this ongoing effort, the Ministry aims to optimise its organisation performance and financial outcomes.

Mr. Chairman, the Headquarter budget includes funding for two business units mentioned previously, as well as the Current Account Operational/Expenditure Grants and Contributions as seen in the Ministry of Transport Headquarters budget found on pages B-201 and B-204, and Schedule 1 for Grants and Contributions found on page C-19 of the Budget Book.

Administration
Cost Centre 58000

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Administration section within the Ministry of Transport Headquarters, cost centre 58000, is comprised of four full-time equivalent staff and will have a budget of $15,708,000. As provided previously, the bulk of the allocation—93 per cent—is comprised of the Bermuda Airport Authority's operational grant of a smaller amount going to Air Service Development.

Transportation Planning Team
Cost Centre 58010

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will move on to the Transportation Planning Team, Head 48, cost centre 58010.

Mr. Chairman, the Transportation Planning section sits within the Ministry of Transport Headquarters. Cost centre 58010 includes one full-time equivalent employee and has allocated a budget of $141,000 and can be found on page B-202 of the Budget Book. The Transportation Planning Section oversees cruise ship contractual, operational, regulatory and logistical

matters to ensure the efficient integration of transportation services to meet expectations in Bermuda. In addition, this section spearheads various transportation projects and policy research initiatives deemed important by the Ministry.

Cruises are one of the fastest growing sectors of travel. And tourism worldwide was forecast to reach 106 per cent of 2019 levels in 2023 with 31.5 million passengers sailing worldwide and approximately 35 million passengers estimated in 2024, as reported by Cruise Lines International Association. We have just experienced a significant achievement as the 2024 season is off to a great start. Seven cruise ships have visited our shores in January and February with an influx of over 22,000 winter visitors so far compared to 9,466 passengers in 2023, with another eight cruise ships planned for March.

Mr. Chairman, you will recall when cruises did not come to Bermuda in the off-season. They mainly came in our regular season from April going forward. So this is a remarkable achievement for the team that works within the department. As I said, [there have been] 22,000 winter visitors already.

Mr. Chairman, 2023 has promised to be Bermuda's biggest cruise ship season in recent history, originally forecasted at 224 calls following the relaxation of pandemic protocols. Travellers were excited to cruise without restrictions to Bermuda and bookings were pacing at an all-time high. Cruise lines were happy with Bermuda's shoulder season weather in 2021/22 and booked more calls than usual as our team and the local port agent worked hard to attract additional calls all year round.

Mr. Chairman, the 2023 season saw the return of normal service to Bermuda with great excitement. Bermuda welcomed 15 inaugural cruise ship visits, each showcasing the latest advancement and technology and amenities available in the market. The impressive features of these ships underscore the reasons behind the widespread popularity of cruising.

In 2023, there was encouraging news as passenger spending surged by 46.8 per cent compared to 2022. However, I must highlight that the season was marked by unprecedented weather conditions. Thirty-five out of the 41 cruise ship calls had to be cancelled due to these weather events. And I think we all can recall those weather events. Despite these challenges though, the 2023 season concluded with a total of 183 calls, attracting an impressive 524,413 passengers to our shores. This marked an increase of 19 calls, representing a growth of 11.5 per cent and 122,756 passengers, reflecting a substantial rise of 30.5 [per cent] compared to the previous year.

Mr. Chairman, by June 23, favourable weather conditions allowed for smooth operations and ships were consistently arriving with full occupancy reaching 100 per cent. This trend continued with occupancy levels reaching sometimes 110 per cent by July. The robust numbers persisted both before and after hurricane activity through to November.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, 110 per cent.

Notably, the presence of larger 5,000-passenger calling ships played a crucial role, compensating for potential revenue losses and contributing to a resilient financial performance.

I understand that Honourable Member was asking about 110. How can it be 110 per cent? And basically, what it is, you normally go . . . I have gone on many cruises. You go on a cruise, and you will have a bed. They will put an extra cot in there for the children or whatever. That makes it go up to 110 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, revenue estimates for 2023 was $24,700,000 in passenger taxes, $10,700,000 in Transport infrastructure tax. Other cruise ship revenue includes $7,700,000 in cruise ship visitor fees, $150 million in passenger spending, $6,900,000 in crew spending, $10,200,000 in cruise line disbursement expenses, locally for an estimate of $210,200,000 in economic activity in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I think it is important at this time . . . maybe I will just reflect back on some numbers so people are aware of the significant progress we have made since 2017. (And I think everyone in the House understands why I say 2017.)

- Total cruise calls in 2017 were 161. Total cruise calls that will be in 2024 are 184—14 per cent [increase].
- The number of passengers in 2017 was 418,000. The number of passengers for 2024 will be 587,000—a 38 per cent increase.
- Passenger spending was $47.9 million in 2017 and, Mr. Chairman, will be $172.4 million in 2024—a 265 per cent increase over 2017.
- Passenger and cabin tax was $24 million. In 2024, it will be $34 million—a 54 per cent increase.
- Transport tax in 2017 was zero. In 2024, it will be $12 million. I am sure you can all know what percentage increase that is.
- Cruise ship port was $8 million in 2017. It will be $10.2 million in 2024—a 28 per cent increase.
- Economic impact, Mr. Chairman, in 2017 was $81 million. In 2024, we are expecting $228.7 million—a 181 per cent increase.

Mr. Chairman, securing smaller ships for St. George's and Hamilton remains a key objective for the Ministry. However, the challenge lies in the fact that the identified smaller vessels tend to be luxury or expedition ships. Today's discerning luxury travellers increasingly seek multiple ports, extended itineraries to hassle-free destinations, and immersive cultural experience. While Bermuda is an attractive stopover, finding

smaller ships willing to commit to a weekly transatlantic journey has proven to be a significant or formidable task.

Once these ships arrive, there is a distinct set of expectations from both passengers and ship staff, particularly those who have visited Bermuda previously. Complicating matters further, our product has undergone changes within Front Street, for instance, experiencing changes since the pre-pandemic era. Despite these challenges, the Ministry remains dedicated to enhancing cruise offerings and adapting to evolving preferences of luxury travellers.

I and the cruise individual who is in charge, Miss Stacey Evans, will be traveling to Florida next month to the Seatrade and particularly talking to cruise lines and trying to attract some more cruise lines to Bermuda.

The Ministry of Transport has met with the Ministry of Tourism, Bermuda Tourism Authority, Corporations of St. George and Hamilton, Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, and other key local stakeholders to address areas of improvement.

Suggestions have been made to better the product experience of our cruise ship passengers in 2024 and bring life back into our ports. This, we believe, will enhance the overall experience of our cruise and [air] visitors alike.

Mr. Chairman, Bermuda will also see nine inaugural cruise visitors in 2024 such as: March 19, Oceania *Vista*; April 2, Ritz Carlton; April 10, Holland America; April 14, Celebrity; April 22, *Island Princess*; September 14, Oceania *Nautica*; October 21, Holland America; and October 23, another Holland America *Rotterdam*; and September 12, *Sky Princess*.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024 cruise ship schedule is available for download on the official department of Marine and Ports website at www.marineandports.bm. It is important to know that cruise ship calls are subject to change, and the schedule is regularly updated to provide the latest information.

Mr. Chairman, I continue to be grateful for the dedicated individuals in the transportation sector including minibus, taxi, ferry, and public bus operators and teams who work together harmoniously to ensure the smooth movement of our passengers. Their commitment is vital to creating a positive impression of Bermuda from the moment our visitors arrive. Additionally, I would like to recognise the invaluable efforts of our traffic officers at TCD. Their dedication and expertise help maintain order and efficiency further enhancing the overall transportation experience for our guests.

Manpower

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Ministry of Transport Headquarters will employ five full-time equivalent employees under the following [cost centres]:

- 58000—four persons; the ministry comptroller, an accountant administrator officer, an executive assistant, and a policy analyst; and
- 58100—a transportation coordinator. Compensation is estimated at $549,000 or approximately 3.5 per cent of the total budget.

Bermuda Airport Authority

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to discuss the year ahead with respect to Bermuda Airport Authority 2024/2025. The only authority that receives a grant from the Ministry of Transport is the Bermuda Airport Authority. The Bermuda Airport Authority is nearing the end of the seventh fiscal year as a quango under the Ministry of Transport.

The current account expenditure can be seen in the Ministry of Transport Headquarters Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates Grants and Contributions budget line located on page B-203 and C-19 of the Budget Book.

The Bermuda Airport Authority delivers a range of essential air and navigation services also known as retained government services at LF Wade International Airport, including air traffic control, air traffic engineering, Bermuda public aviation and weather, aeronautical information services, and the authority's facilities, our vehicle and equipment maintenance.

On behalf of the Government of Bermuda, the Bermuda Airport Authority, as owner of LF Wade International Airport, also oversees the performance of the airport developer and operator Bermuda Skyport Corporation Limited and its 30-year concession to operate, maintain, and redevelop the LF Wade International Airport.

Oversight of Skyport includes the monitoring of key performance indicators such as compliance with standard airport operating procedures, international aviation regulations, building and equipment maintenance specifications, growth of the airport revenue streams, and energy consumption. The Airport Authority regulates the airport fees charged by airport-to-airport users. These regulated revenues remain lower than projected compared to 2019 volumes due to the reduced frequency of commercial airline flights and lower passenger volumes in [the] post-pandemic period. While the Airport Authority remains contractually obligated under the project agreement to fund a portion of Skyport's revenue shortfall as determined by the guaranteed minimum regulated revenue, it is estimated that the extra regulated revenue will exceed the guaranteed minimum regulated revenue in 2024/25.

The Airport Authority, in coordination with the Tourism Authority and Skyport with the Ministry of Transport, also leads Bermuda's airport service development with a focus on rebuilding Bermuda air service. These efforts are key to maintaining air service links to our key overseas markets. And I mentioned earlier the

new additional air capacity in 2023 and what we are looking for in 2024.

Expenditure Overview. The total Ministry of Transport operational expenditure grants [to] the Airport Authority will be $12,700,000 for 2024/25 representing a $1,700,000 decrease, or approximately 11.5 per cent less than the 2023/24 allocation. The Airport Authority currently employs 47 full-time equivalent staff. The mostly Bermudian professional workforce has the mandate to provide essential retained government service as direct employees of the Airport Authority thus enjoying long-term job stability under the management of a local leadership team with a high-performance culture.

The 2024/25 capital budget grant request for the Bermuda Airport Authority totals $800,000 [and] represents $1,000,000 decrease, or approximately a 55.5 per cent decrease, versus the prior fiscal year. These funds will be allocated to several ongoing key airport infrastructure-related projects including but not limited to instrument landing system replacement, aeronautical information services, Bermuda weather service, [and] immigration eGates for the new airport terminal building. It is anticipated that a number of these capital projects will be completed over a time span of two fiscal years.

I would like to thank the dedicated team at the Ministry of Headquarters and the authorities under the Ministry for their unwavering commitment to the Ministry.

This concludes Head 48 Ministry of Transport Headquarters.

I now move on to Head 30, Marine and Ports Services.

HEAD 30—MARINE AND PORTS SERVICES

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget for Head 30, the Marine and Ports Services, commonly referred to as the M & P, can be found on pages B-205 through B-209 of the "Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures for the Year 2024/25."

As stated on page B-205 of the Budget Book, the mission of the Department of Marine and Ports Service is *The regulation and safe operation of Bermuda's maritime affairs including marine border security, search and rescue, and public transportation*.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure for the Department of Marine and Ports Head 30 is estimated to be $22,996,000, which represents an increase of $942,000, or an increase of 4 per cent, over the 2023/24 budget. The increase is required to address the Department of Marine and Ports Services' staff shortages as the department will continue to fill all vacant funded positions. In addition, it will address the rising cost of electricity, diesel fuel requirements, and the increased cost of vessel maintenance.

The Pink Harbour Ferry will continue to operate with already added additional runs to service the public. The Department of Marine and Ports Services expenditures are set out under the following three Business Units and can be found on page B-205 of the Budget Book. Programme 3006 West End (Dockyard): Navigational Aids cost centre 40040, $798,000; Tug Service cost centre, $2,044,000; Tender Service cost centre, 40210, $396,000; Dockyard Maintenance cost centre 40260, $3,461,000.

Programme 3007, which is Central (Hamilton [Office]): Ferry Service cost [centre 40090], $8,293,000; Mooring and Boat Registration cost centre 40150, $302,000; Administration cost centre 40220, $2,922,000.

Programme 3008, which is East End [(Fort George]): Maritime Safety and Security cost centre 40100, $2,587,000; Pilotage Service and Offshore search and rescue 40180, $2,193,000.

Revenue provided on page B-206. It is anticipated that in 2024/25 the Department of Marine and Ports Services will generate revenue of approximately $6,314,000 to be realised primarily through fees charged for the provisional ferry services, tug services, boat haulage, pilotage fees, boat mooring, and port dues.

Capital expenditure. Capital development expenditures for the department are found on page C-5 of the Budget Book [and] set at $2,564,000 representing a decrease of approximately $5,067,000 over the 2023/24 revised budgetary estimate of $7,631,000. The decrease represents the decreased cost of the Marine and Ports dockyard workshop renovations funding as the project is due to be completed during 2024/25. And I thank the Minister of Public Works, Honourable [Minister] Burch, and his team, leading the charge. Every effort is being made to reduce delays. A total of $1,350,000 has been appropriated for the floating dock refit project.

Mr. Chairman, capital acquisition expenditure for the department is found on page C-13 of the Budget Book [and] is set out at $10,010,000. Two hundred fifty thousand dollars have been set aside for Navigational Aids which represents an increase of $50,000 when compared to the budget of 2023/24. The funds will be used for the ongoing repair and replacement of the department's ageing ship navigation infrastructure. The bulk of the budget, which is $9,737,000, has been allocated to the purchase of two new 550-passenger ferries to address the department's ageing fleet.

In a significant move to elevate public transportation services, the recent contract signing on February 6, 2024, with Strategic Marine for the acquisition of two new ferry builds brings positive news for the commuters. Despite a robust procurement process with the highest bid reaching $36 million, the Government successfully secured a contract at a notably lower cost of

$19.5 million all while ensuring quality assurance within the agreement. The investment in our ferry fleet stands as the most substantial budget allocation in the 2024/25 capital plan. As an integral component of the infrastructure capital plan, this purchase is set to replace the ageing *JL Cecil Smith* and the *Warbaby Fox* ferries. [It] signifies a commitment to modernise the ferry fleet and meet the growing demand for our efficient and sustainable transportation option.

The introduction of these new vessels, each capable of accommodating up to 550 passengers, not only represents a significant investment in maritime infrastructure but also promises to enhance the overall commuting experience for both the residents and tourists alike.

The department's full-time equivalents found on B-207 of the Budget Book is 162 persons. The department's performance measures found on B-208 through 209 of the Budget Book remain positive. It is important the department continues meeting its performance target measures to meet the required international standards. Maintaining these levels continues to be challenging with the rapidly ageing fleet that requires additional maintenance year over year. Nonetheless, the department continues to work diligently to manage these processes and ensure that delivery of safe and reliable service is maintained.

As mentioned in previous years, the Department of Marine and Ports Services represents one of the most critical operational arms of the Government of Bermuda as it facilitates the movement of vital shipping commerce in and out of Bermuda's ports. There were a total of 1,006 international ship movements in Bermuda waters over the reporting year. The services the department provides include the public ferry boats, pilot boats, tug-boats, ship tender service, and Bermuda Maritime Operations Centre. Additionally, the department is responsible for coordination of international search and rescue operations in this region of the North Atlantic and retains oversight of . . . oversees seaport security, maritime border control, and compliance with international standards. During the fiscal year, the department responded to over 347 search and rescue cases assisting both ship and aircraft locally and internationally.

Output measures. The target outcome for the Marine and Ports operations for 2024 is to continue delivering the required marine service in a timely and professional manner to ensure customer satisfaction.

Over the last few years, the Government revenue has been widely impacted, and Marine and Ports continues to look for cost savings measures.

The assisting vessel refit replacement projects already in progress are on time and on budget ensuring that the department's infrastructure maintenance programmes continue to contribute to an effective, reliable, and sustainable service to our commuters and cruise ship visitors.

Major policy changes. The department will continue consulting with stakeholders to ensure that implementation of the Marine and Ports Services Act 2021 remains a smooth transition to the new legislation. Plans for the upcoming year [will include]

- training of departmental staff to international standards will continue to ensure the department meets its international obligation in line with safe manning requirements;
- continued progress with the department's succession planning to ensure highly technical posts with the department are filled by qualified Bermudians with the relaunch of the department's training programme;
- continued training for tug crews of the department's state of the art tugs;
- continued progressing of the renovation project of Marine and Ports' workshop in partnership with the Department of Works and Engineering;
- continue with the public/private partnership programme for the removal of derelict boats;
- oversee and manage the new ferry build project to ensure the project remains on time and on budget; and
- the transition to the digital age by the implementation of digital fare media (which we had mentioned in a former message to the House).

I would like to thank the staff of Marine and Ports Services for their excellent search-and-rescue and piloting services as well as for delivering an efficient, consistent, and reliable ferry service.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the brief for Department of Marine and Ports Services Head 30.

I will now move on to Head 34 the Transport Control Department—as we all know it as TCD.

HEAD 34—TRANSPORT CONTROL DEPARTMENT

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The budget for Head 34, the Transport Control Department, commonly referred to as TCD, can be found on pages B-210 through B-213 of the Budget Book.

The mission is simple: *To assure the safety of all road users.*

Transport Control Department, or TCD, is responsible for the management of all motor vehicles and road users on Bermuda's road network. This includes vigilant oversight and regulation of vehicle sizes, appropriateness, roadworthiness, appearance, and quantity. The department undertakes the following activities to ensure compliance and safety: oversees the administration of the vehicle safety and emission inspection programme, manages the registration and licensing processing for all vehicles, administers practical driving and riding examination for individuals applying for driving licences, regulates traffic through continuous monitoring of drivers and vehicles to maintain safety standards, issues permits for the operation of commercial

and public service vehicles, actively implements road safety initiatives to enhance overall traffic safety and awareness.

The department is responsible for conducting inspections and issuing permits under Garages Licensing Act 2022, and monitoring rental minicar and cycle liveries to ensure compliance. TCD also issues special permits such as a one-day permit, which allows a person to use an insured but unlicensed vehicle on public roads used to be repaired or driven to department for inspection, and Sunday permits for commercial vehicles.

As a result of recent legislative amendments, the department also administers the application process and permit issuance for classic cars.

Department Overview

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: TCD is divided into five separate business units: Administration, Registrations, Examinations, Traffic Control, and Road Safety.

The Administration Section is responsible for the overall operation and administration of the department's three facilities, North Street, Rockaway, and Southside. This includes professional service for the management of the Safety and Emissions Inspection Programme, external IT support for the eTCD online programme, the driver and vehicle registration system, the appointment management system, and the electronic vehicle registration system.

Each of these systems are critical to ensuring optimum customer service. Moreover, customers will soon have the convenience of applying for permits to operate a commercial vehicle through an online programme. We are all aware or have had challenges in regard to the time it takes to register or get a commercial vehicle. So, now we will go online, and we hope to turn this around in very, very short order. This online initiative is slated to expand the service to encompass other requests including but not limited to vehicle imports or replacements.

The Registration Section is responsible for registering and licensing all vehicles issuing drivers licenses along with identification, senior, and special person's card[s]. This section collects the revenue generated by transactions conducted at the department.

The Examinations Section conducts all driving and riding tests to ensure that applicants are proficient at operating a vehicle before acquiring a licence to ride or drive on Bermuda's roads. The examiners also inspect the vehicles for roadworthiness and carry out write-off procedures for private motor cars prior to their disposal. Examiners also conduct site visits to garages to ensure that all safety equipment is in good working order. The department's examiners also assist the Bermuda Police Service with investigations into serious and fatal collisions by conducting [a] thorough inspection of the involved vehicle.

The Traffic Control Section is responsible for enforcing road traffic and motoring laws, issuing moving violations and parking tickets, and monitoring commercial and public service vehicles. Traffic officers are deployed on street patrols to ensure all vehicles operating on Bermuda's roads comply with our legislation.

The Road Safety Section is managed by the Road Safety Officer. (And the chairman sits in this Honourable House, the Honourable Mr. Lister.) This section promotes road safety awareness through education, training, for example, Project Ride, which became mandatory in 2010, and public events such as Road Safety Week normally held May 8th of each year. This year's events are scheduled for May 7 through May 11. This section works closely with the Bermuda Road Safety Council to advise [the] Minister of Transport on road safety matters and motoring trends. The council also devises and implements strategies and programmes to address topical motoring issues, for example a road safety initiative soon to be implemented is on-road instruction and examination for all Project Ride students.

Between 2013 and 2023, 128 people have lost their lives on Bermuda's roads. Therefore, the priority of this section is to reduce collisions [and] to decrease serious injuries and deaths on our roads. This effort includes the Bermuda Police Service and the Bermuda Road Safety Council with monthly meetings held to discuss initiatives to combat poor driving and risk-taking on public roads.

Mr. Chairman, TCD continues to implement and maintain an effective and convenient vehicle examination and registration programme that is increasingly more user friendly. In addition, the vehicle testing equipment has recently been replaced with state-of-the-art technology. The installation phase is complete. Training and commissioning of the equipment will begin prior to the March 31st fiscal-year end. Customer waiting times remain between 15 and 30 minutes.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: TCD [has a] budget allocation of $5,561,000 for 2024/25, a $355,000 or 7 per cent increase over 2023/24.

Mr. Chairman, it should be noted that approximately 67 per cent of $3,704,000 of the $5,561,000 is allocated to salaries. Also, external professional services are allocated $473,000. [The] allotment is used for external IT support, EVR, eTCD, the DVRS, and AMS, all of which are critical to the department's daily operation and maintaining its excellent customer service level. The remaining budget is used for general operating expenses such as utilities, repair and upkeeping of the facilities, vehicle and equipment, printing and office supplies.

The estimated budget for the Administration Section 44210 will be $2,286,000. The estimated budget for the Registration Section is $1,028,000 for the fiscal year. This is cost centre 44040. For this fiscal

year, the Examination Section estimated budget of $1,345,000 represents an increase of $87,000 or 7 per cent. Traffic [Control], which is cost centre 44110, has an estimated budget of $642,000. Road Safety cost centre 44090 will have a budget of $260,000. This represents a 2 per cent increase.

Revenue found on page B-211. It is anticipated that during [the] 2024/25 budget cycle, TCD will collect $31 million. You will find that on [page] B-211, $31,534,000 in revenue in line with the prior year's actual.

Capital Expenditure found on C-13—$194,000 has been allocated to complete the repairs and upgrades to vehicle testing equipment.

Manpower [page] B-212: 46 full-time equivalent employees.

Plans for Upcoming Year

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Transport Control Department continues to review and upgrade the Road Traffic Act 1947, the Motor Car Act 1951, the Auxiliary Bicycles Act 1954, and their ancillary regulations. The department continues to focus on modernising and harmonising the public service vehicle industry by consulting the owners of minibuses, taxis, limousines, and airport limousines. Ideas discussed include new dispatching technology, increasing the seating capacity for taxis, and allowing the importation of second-hand limousines. Research is also ongoing regarding the introduction of fare payment by credit/debit cards and new vehicle models.

Mr. Chairman, the Island welcomed 525,000 cruise ship passengers in 2023. Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Road Safety Council will work in conjunction with the Road Safety Officer to continue the implementation of Operation Caution, the Government's five-year road safety strategy that is from 2018 through2023. Operation Caution has been extended to 2024 to cover the time lost during the pandemic.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the brief of the Transport Control Department Head 34. I now will move to Head 35, the Department of Public Transportation.

HEAD 35—DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The budget for Head 35, the Department of Public Transportation, is found on pages B-214 through B-217 of the Budget Book. Their mission is *Moving Bermuda with a quality public bus service.*

The total current expenditure which you can find on [page] B-214 of the Budget Book is estimated [at] $23,840,000, which is $1,863,000, or 8 per cent higher than [the] 2023/24 budget.

The department has three business units: Transportation, Maintenance, and Administration. The budget breaks down as follows:

- Programme 3501—Transportation $12,437,000
- Programme 3502—Maintenance $4,625,000
    - Inventory Management, cost centre 45115—$1,463,000.
- Programme 3503—Administration
    - Administration, cost centre 45120—$4,347,000;
    - Management Support, cost centre 45200—$968,000.

Transportation—Bus Operations

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the public bus service is in operation 365 days a year (when it is a leap year, it is more), 18 hours per day to provide Island-wide transportation across 11 bus routes. Unlike most public transportation systems around the world, the school bus service is coordinated during the school year with free transportation provided year-round to resident school students.

The current account expenditure for Bus Operations under cost centre 45010 is estimated at $12,437,000 for 2024/25. This is an increase $1,196,000, or approximately 11 per cent.

Maintenance

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The department employs a team of professionals in repair servicing to maintain the fleet of public buses, support vehicles, and equipment. You can find that on cost centre 45090. The cost for that is $4,625,000 for this year coming up. This is an increase of $64,000, or 1 per cent change over the prior year.

Inventory Management

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Inventory Management, cost centre 45115, [is] $1,463,000 for 2024/25. This is an increase of $69,000, or approximately 5 per cent more than the prior year's budget, largely due to the increase maintenance required for the rapidly ageing remaining diesel buses.

Administration

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Administration, cost centre 45120—$4,347,000 for 2024/25. This is an increase of $364,000, or approximately 9 per cent over [the] prior year's budget.

Management Support

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Management Support [is] responsible for selling and processing bus and ferry fares and providing administrative services for accounts, procurement, and human resources. The expenditure for

Management Support is estimated to be $968,000 for 2024/25, an increase of $170,000 or 21 per cent.

Revenue

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It is anticipated that in 2024 (this is found on page B-215) Revenue will generate approximately $4,200,000 for the year. This will be generated from an anticipated surge in bus and ferry fares after the introduction of the state-of-the-art digital fare media system that I will elaborate on shortly.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Capital Expenditure [on page] C-14, $951,000, is primarily for the introduction of the new digital fare media system. The remaining amount is budgeted for replacement support vehicles, updating computer equipment, and other necessary upgrades to the facilities, tools, and equipment.

Manpower

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Manpower: 243 individuals working. These are called full-time equivalents. Mr. Chairman, it should be noted that approximately 75 per cent, or $17,948,000, of DPT's total budget, or $23,840,000, is allocated to salaries and wages.

Here is the breakdown of the FTEs by each section as follows:

- Bus Operation cost centre 45010, 168 full-time equivalents;
- Repair Service, cost centre 45090 five full-time equivalents;
- Inventory Management cost centre 45115, five full-time equivalents;
- [Administration] cost centre 45120, has four full-time equivalents;
- Management Support cost [centre] 45200 has 14 full-time equivalents.

Major Policy Changes

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Here are some of the major policy changes. It was Monday, January 2, 2024, one day after the beginning of the year on a cool morning when the Department of Public Transportation returned to self-sufficiency after seven years of relying on the assistance of minibuses. DPT reinstated an exclusive public school bus transportation service. With continued investment over the next few years, DPT fleets of buses will be completely electric and assuredly sustainable to sustain a reliable service for the people of Bermuda.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: [The] Department of Public Transportation has realised advances in technology in recent years and plans to maintain positive momentum in tangible enhancement to the public bus service.

Public experience. The Department of Public Transportation aspires to be the mode of transportation choice of Bermuda residents and visitors. This year, introduction of digital fare media will create an easy and efficient way of paying bus fare. Passengers will be encouraged to download the mobile app from the comfort of their home or an environment to purchase fare, plan trips, and monitor bus locales.

One of the most impactful advantages of the app will be the ability of passengers to tap their cell phone or bank card on a device installed on the bus which will automatically verify that the bus fare has been paid.

The benefits to the public will be phased in over the course of the next eight months. Passengers using the mobile device [will be able] to monitor the location of the next bus while waiting at the bus stop. Having access to free Wi-Fi to monitor the next bus coming up on the bus could very well be termed as the crowning point [of the] project with respect to the customer service. I am sure that somebody is going to ask me about seniors.

Let me say it up front that for seniors we will make sure that we have a simple card, like the one they have now, and [they can] just tap and on the bus they get. But what we are trying to do is record all significant changes, monitor and create data for the future. So, I am not expecting those seniors who do not use mobile apps to download any funds at all.

Investing in talent within the department will be a continued focus. Training experience will be afforded chiefly to those that desire and have a capacity for advancement. And it will be the same thing for students because they do not pay at all. The team has once again exhibited the benefits of internal development by daily observation and the continuing nominations for the public service excellence award.

Mr. Chairman, as I conclude the brief for the Department of Public Transportation Head 35, I would like to thank the management and staff of the Department of Public Transportation for their commitment to serving the residents and visitors of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I express my heartful gratitude to the entire Ministry of Transport team for their unwavering dedication and hard work ensuring the establishment and maintenance of a secure and efficient transport system. Additionally, I extend my thanks to all valued partners for their collaborative efforts with the Ministry. It is through these meaningful relationships that our collective endeavours continue for the wellbeing of the community.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation for the Ministry of Transport, and I believe we have given sufficient time for the Opposition to ask questions and get them down fast so we can go home early.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister Furbert.

Any further speakers?

The Chair recognises the Honourable Member, Shadow Minister for Transport, Susan Jackson. Ms. Jackson, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Good afternoon, Chairman. Thank you so much. And I certainly would like to begin as well by thanking all the Members of the Ministry of Transport. It certainly is a critical service that they provide to the people of Bermuda, and I certainly am a bus rider, so I appreciate—

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No, I am not a free bus rider yet, but I am getting there.

And certainly, I enjoy riding the bus, and it is always pleasurable. But I do have some questions for the Minister. And I would like to begin on page B-201.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: And I would like to focus, if you do not mind, Mr. Chairman . . . I would like to start with . . . excuse me. Well, I am going to start on page B-201 and just ask a very general question. And that is . . . given the fact that we are spending $68,426,000 a year on the Ministry in total—that is all of the departments—but our revenue is at $42,048,000, I would like to ask the Minister how we might be able to balance that out a little so that we are earning our keep. And we certainly have an opportunity here to do this.

The Ministry of Transport, at least in my opinion, is a ministry that does allow us an opportunity to earn money. And certainly, many of our other ministries are expenses, and very well-deserved expenses. But this ministry has an opportunity to make further contribution to Bermuda's earnings, and so I would very much like to see whether we might explore some ways in which we might increase our revenue and be able to make a greater contribution to the greater good.

Having said that, I would like to turn first to page B-202. And I have some questions under the line item Administration, which is 58000, and under the Airport Authority and the Air Service Development. It has been in the newspaper lately that we have engaged in negotiation with British Airways regarding the change of our destination airport from Gatwick to Heathrow. So I would like to ask the Minister if he might be able to provide us with an update on how that is going, if we might be able to get some statistic on the volume of traffic that we had at Gatwick in order to be able to make a comparison to how we are making out with volumes going into London Heathrow Airport.

I do not know whether there have been any surveys to find out from a customer satisfaction perspective whether we are finding that passengers prefer Heathrow over Gatwick. If the Minister might also be able to give us an indication of what the benefits are being at Heathrow versus Gatwick . . . We paid a price to British Airways in order to switch the airports, and we also had to offer some rebates, and multi-year rebates at that. And so, it only enhances—

An Hon. Member: Rebates?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, and maybe if the Minister might be able to give us an indication of what some of those rebates might be . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I guess that that would be some form of either refund back to British Airways or certain benefits. I am not sure, which is why I am asking the Minister so the Minister can just say.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: So, if we might be able to find out what those five years of rebates are and get some general idea versus the chirping in the room . . .

I would also like to ask the Minister why there was no appetite to continue at Gatwick.

The Chairman: What business unit are you talking about?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am on page B-202 under the line item Administration, which is Business Unit 58000 under the Airport Authority. There is an air service development committee, and they do the negotiations for air service to Bermuda. And so, I am just asking for an update on the British Airways service that has changed from Gatwick to London Heathrow.

I have another couple of questions around the British Airways agreement. We know that the British Airways direct flight from Bermuda to London and return is probably the most lucrative return flight that we have and may even be one of the more lucrative, profitable flights in the BA's portfolio.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I hear confirmation it is.

So, I am just curious if the Minister might be able to just give me a little information or give the listening public as well a little information about the agreement that we have with BA. I do not know whether it is a multiyear agreement. It certainly—whatever is in that agreement—is keeping British Airways as a monopoly, and so, I just am curious how long that agreement is and whether we have had an opportunity to renegotiate

that agreement to possibly allow for some competing airlines to fly out of England to Bermuda.

The Chairman: Ms. Jackson, I am trying to follow you to see that you are dealing with the specifics of the Budget. And I am giving you some latitude, but I cannot give you everything. Let's try to stay within the Budget. If you want to question the figures—like how much you are paying to this or that, no problem with that because it would be in the Budget. And I do not want to knock you off your thing, but I just want to state, be very specific on the heads.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you. Thank you very much. I did finish that, so all those questions have been asked.

I would like to move on to page B-203 under the Subjective Analysis Grants and Contributions which is listed on [page] C-19. It is the cost centre 7099. Again, it is still with the Bermuda Airport Authority. And I would like to ask the Minister, Are we still paying airlines to fly to Bermuda? Are we providing . . . And I remember from last year that we are not specific in any amounts, but just even a yes or no or a total amount that we might be using as a negotiation for the minimum revenue guarantee that we often times do pay to different airlines to fly to Bermuda . . .

I would also like to ask whether United Airlines, American Airlines, JetBlue, and BermudAir are getting payments. And what is the status of insufficient airlift from Bermuda to Canada? Now, the Minister did mention that Bermuda Air is looking at Halifax and Toronto, which is fantastic, but I am curious to know whether there is any communication with Air Canada in an effort to bolster their air lift.

Continuing on in the same vein under the Bermuda Airport Authority and the Air Service Development Committee, have we done any research at all generally to find out where the potential visitors are? Can we honestly, let's say, say that all or 75 per cent of our visitors are coming from the United States, and if we do have that kind of data, where would they like to go? What are the preferred destinations? And of course, the UK and even potentially the Caribbean . . . It would be interesting to know if we have done any research just to find out where our potential visitors are and where they want to go.

I have a couple of questions from the brief. Still on Head 48, the Ministry of Transport Headquarters, and still on Administration 58000. The Minister was giving us some seat capacities over the years from 2018 through 2023. They are numbers that are becoming more and more healthy especially after COVID-19. So that is a wonderful thing, but I just had a question, What is our total seat capacity? Do we know what our total seat capacity is?

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Sorry?

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Well, these would be like, just as an example, you said that 432,000—

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: —those are people that were actually sitting in seats?

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: That is total seat capacity. Okay, thank you. Thank you very much.

Another question I had about from the Minister's brief—

The Chairman: You are still on—

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am still on Administration on Head . . . Yes.

The Chairman: Okay

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: How is the transport accommodating . . . I am going to save that question for a little bit later.

So, I would like to now move on, if you do not mind, to page B-203 under Subjective Analysis. I am just curious if the Minister might be able to give us a breakdown of the costs for Professional Services, which has been increased by $274,000 this year and now stands at $487,000. I am curious to know whether we are still engaging with consultants to help us to negotiate with airlines and cruise ships or whether we have any other professional services coming on board to sort of quantify the increase of the $274,000.

Do you mind if take my seat at this point and just—

The Chairman: You tired?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: —answer some questions?

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No. You want all of them?

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Sorry?

Okay. Last year you liked it head by head—

The Chairman: Let's have the conversation . . . don't leave me out of the conversation.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Don't leave me out, please.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Last year we did it head by head. You were not very excited about that, so I did not know whether the Minister wanted to do that again this year or not.

So, I would like to move on then to Head 30, Marine and Ports. That is on page B-205. Of course, it was publicly known . . . and I got my information off of the Marine and Ports website under incident reports. On October 25 last year, we did have an accident with one of our ferries. And if I may read from the site just to give context, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Well, I think that is unnecessary. Just go right to your question.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you. I am curious to know what was actually involved in the repair and maintenance of that ferry.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am at Head 30 Marine and Ports, and the line item will be Repairs and Maintenance on page B-206, Repairs and Maintenance, which is $2,370,000. And I would just like to know sort of what happened with the ferry—it was the ferry *Georgia*—and whether it was able to receive the maintenance and the body work that was necessary to bring it back on line, what the costs involved with that [were], and the time that the ferry was out of service.

I also have a question on page B-206, same with ferries, line item 8187 Ferry Receipts. It is showing that this year we are expecting our ferry receipts to reduce by $250,000. And so, I am just curious why we would think that the ferry receipts are going down so significantly this year.

If we can switch back to page B-205, under Moorings and Boat Regulation, that is business unit 40150. We have $302,000 budgeted, which is fine, and I am just curious whether the abandoned boat project falls under that line item.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Moorings and Boat Registration. I could not find any other place where the abandoned boat project would be, unless it is boat haulage. But that is a revenue generator. So, I did not think it was that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: But we have found that a number of boats have been abandoned due to storm or neglect by owners, and so I have some questions around that. The Minister gave the statistic that some 29 boats have been abandoned as of January 2024. And so, I am wondering how much of the . . . Well, I am guessing the $302,000 allocation is going to be directed toward the abandoned boat disposal . . . well, collection and then disposal of the boats. And how is this allowed to get so bad before something is done about it?

I would also like to ask under abandoned boats, What impact is this having on our environment?

The Chairman: He is not the environmental Minister. You need to . . .

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Well, the cost . . . he is not. But certainly, when it came to the cars and bikes that were abandoned . . . just on Monday in his Ministerial Statement—

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: He did not speak to the boats, but he did speak to the environmental impact, the need to drain the oil out of the cars, et cetera. So I am now asking whether there are costs associated with that kind of disposal for the boats, and if there is any cost that comes with it.

I am just looking at my questions . . . and my final question under abandoned vessels, I don't know . . . I mean, certainly, the photographs are posted in the news so we can see the abandoned boats, Mr. Chairman. But I am just wondering whether there would be any opportunity to recycle and earn some revenue. I don't know if any of these boats are worthy of auction or something to that effect. Some of the boats are in, you know, a stage of development where they might be able to be restored. I will move on from that, the abandoned boats.

I am still looking under General Summary, the total amount of the spend in this area which includes sort of the navigational aids, tug services, Dockyard maintenance. We have had an increase of $942,000. And in most line items—actually, every line item—there is an increase in the budgets from very small amounts to—

The Chairman: What line are you on?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am on page B-205 and I am looking at the total expenditure under General Summary, the bottom-half of the page.

The Minister had mentioned that there is . . . he mentioned that, or at least I thought I heard him say that there was a staff shortage. And so I am curious whether all of the positions that are unfilled will be filled.

The Chairman: That is not on the [page] B-205. There is no General Summary on page B-205.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Right. But the Minister . . . I made a note that the Minister did mention that there was a staff shortage when he mentioned the increase in the funding. So, I am just curious if some of those funds will go to fill and have a full complement of staff at Marine and Ports.

The Chairman: Well, when it comes to staffing, that would be [on] another page. That is page B-207.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes. And you know, these would be unfilled, so these on page B-207 there would be the sort of total number of jobs that are available. I do not know how many of them may not be filled and whether the increase in budget funding will assist in filling those posts.

Moving over to page B-206, under Subjective Analysis.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Again, the Repair and Maintenance. This is for Head 30, Marine and Ports.

We are maintaining a budget. We seem to hover around $2,370,000 for Repair and Maintenance for the boats and such, the ferries, and I guess the pilot boats and tugboats, et cetera. As the boats age, you know, are we increasing our maintenance or are we expecting with . . . Just as an example, the new ferries coming on board. Will we see the repair and maintenance go down over the years or so? But it seems like quite a substantial amount of money for repair and maintenance. I don't know if that is because extra attention needs to be given to our ageing fleet, our ageing boats that are there. Would the Minister reflect on that?

The Chairman: You asked a similar question already and the Minister has not answered yet. You were on Repairs on Maintenance earlier.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Mm-hmm. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am just moving on. On page B-209, under Performance Measures, under business unit 40150, Moorings and Boat Regulations. The top one says, Removal of 500 illegal, unregistered moorings by year end. I am wondering if the Minister might be able to give us an update on the cost associated with removal of moorings, monitoring, identifying how they work. I remember last year there was a quite a bit of concern about the number of moorings that were out there, unregistered, and with boats on the moorings. [I wonder] whether there is any policy put in place either to be able to identify these moorings and enforce any fine if they are unregistered or whether Marine and Ports will just pull up those moorings. Would the Minister be able to give an update on that?

I am going to move on now to Head 34 which is Transport Control Department.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Better known as TCD, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: The Minister answered a couple of questions in [his] brief, but on page B-211, under the Revenue Summary, 8471, Private Car (the licensing).

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: We are expecting to earn $18,673,000 for folks to re-licence their private cars. And this year there is an increase of $1,540,000. And I am wondering whether the Minister can explain what that is. Are we going to have an increase in the private car licensing fees this year?

On page B-213, under Performance Measures, business unit 44090, Road Safety.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am just curious whether there has been any data collection for the young people who are participating in the Project Ride. In particular, I am curious to know whether we would be able to cross reference those . . . if we are collecting data on the young people who go through Project Ride and then are able to identify by cross reference those young people who may be in accidents, in particular serious accidents, and be able to cross reference their participation in Project Ride to see whether there is an opportunity for some remediation where they come back into the programme after.

I am not sure. If we could see even the age difference, if they have participated in Project Ride and they get into a serious accident a year or 18 months after they completed the programme whether there is any way to provide some form of remediation where they come back in or, of course, if they are older and then they may have aged out. But just an opportunity to be able to track and keep an eye out on our young people and their driving habits.

And I am also curious whether the Minister conducts or has any kind of survey for the Project Ride students so that we can maybe find out what we could do better and maybe what is not working well for the young people so that everybody . . . we can sort of reach that 100 per cent where the children really buy into and accept the programme and the behaviour on the roads.

I am just going to flip back to page B-210 for a minute, still on Head 34, Transport Control Department, line item 44210, Administration. The Minister was saying that under that business unit is part of the Operations, yes. And he also mentioned emissions. And I am curious whether within the examination and testing centre if the emissions programme is still part of the vision of TCD to be able to test for that. All right? Given the fact that we are looking to start to transition to electronic vehicles, but at the same time we will find that over the years we will have more and more ageing gas cars because people will probably try to hold to them as long as they can, for various reasons. So, in the future we may find a need for emission testing. And I am just curious whether that is a feature that is a part of the vision of TCD to re-instate.

I also have a question on page B-211. Mr. Chairman, you might get at me on this one.

The Chairman: Probably.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: At line item 8480, and this is the Truck Permit Fees. I am just curious, the Minister did mention Sunday permits and special permits and that sort of thing. But I would like to know whether there is active enforcement when we give out the permits for Sundays or special permits for special occasions, whether we are actually monitoring to make sure that everything is running smoothly. And the reason I ask this is that, you know, we have had incidents, certainly reported to me over the weekend, of very huge hauler dumpster—

The Chairman: Member, Honourable Member—

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes. I am getting to my question.

The Chairman: No. Do not come up here and report about what you saw in the newspaper.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. Then my question will be—

The Chairman: Honourable Member, when you hear me speaking, please don't try to talk over me. Right? Do not bring what you see in the newspaper up here. We are dealing in this debate with the budget. You have to deal with the specifics of the heads. Now let's not get there; let's deal with the budget.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Does] the Minister have an appetite to increase any of the special or Sunday permit fees? And then I will leave it there.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: And now I would like to move on to Head 35, Public Transportation.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Page B-214, line item 45090, Repair Services. We have allocated $4,625,000 which is an increase of $64,000 this year. And I wonder if the Minister might be able to give us an update on costs associated with maintaining our new electric buses. We have had, of course, teething pains, Mr. Chairman.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Sorry? Where?

The Chairman: Continue to talk to me, Ms. Jackson.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, if we could just get an update on costs that are associated with the maintenance of the electric buses in particular. I don't know, body work, any adjustments that have had to be made to the engine in order to accommodate services here in Bermuda and adjust to our different varying geographical road systems and such. Might we get an update there?

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I notice that the Repair Services is increasing by $64,000. Can the Minister say if that is because we are having to spend extra money to keep the existing diesel buses maintained?

The Chairman: You just asked the question to explain why the increase. And he has not—

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: For electric.

The Chairman: Well, you said electric.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, and I now just want to ask if also we are having—

The Chairman: Well, Repair Services will require him to give answers on the electric plus the gas buses they have there.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: And if he has not broken it down, you can get back up and say, *Will you break it down for me?*

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you very much.

We have had some repairs (staying with the same line items), and I would like to know if there were are any costs associated with having to, you know, if we had to bring in any mechanics in order to assist us?

Maybe from the manufacturer, Golden Dragon, if we had to incur any costs in that regard in order to get through what I would hope would sort of be our sort of guarantee period, warranty period.

We are still in Repair Services.

The Chairman: [It's] 45090, page B-214.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: [Line item] 45090. And my final question here, still under Maintenance. Would the Minister be able to give us an indication of what may be some of the mechanical problems, or might have been with the electric buses? You know, I am not certain . . . I am not going to go too far, but you know, I was super impressed being on the bus and the hydraulic system lowers so that those who may have difficulty climbing up, you know, it goes down nice and smoothly and comes back up.

The Chairman: Probably had to send you to China to get a course.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, well, they did. Right?

The Chairman: Did they send you there?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Not me!

The Chairman: Oh!

[Laughter]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: But I'm pretty sure last year I heard in the budget that mechanics were trained in China right at the factory. Absolutely.

The Chairman: Yes. Mm-hmm. Okay.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Still staying on Head 35, Public Transportation. I am going to go down to the Revenue Summary. And I noted that the line items for . . . Do I have to name all these numbers, Mr. Chairman, for passes, tickets—

The Chairman: Well, it would help the Minister.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay.

The Chairman: All those different numbers.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: [They are] 8679, Passes. It is all going to be one question.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. Well, you—

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: See what I mean?

The Chairman: Okay. You are going to do one question. He can understand.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Under the Revenue Sources, on page B-217 *[sic]*, Passes, Tickets, Tokens and Cash. They all have pretty substantial revenue increases.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: [Page] B-215.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: [Page] B-215.

So, Passes, we are looking at an increase in the budget of $192,000. Tickets, $169,000. Tokens, we are expecting an increase in Revenue of $133,000. And then Cash, we are expecting an increase of $262,000. I just would like to know, is that going to be a fare increase or are we just expecting more people?

The Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: And I am at the end of all . . . so I would like to take a seat now and —

The Chairman: Oh, most certainly.

Minister.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes. Thank you.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I want to be clear, you have asked all questions?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Well, Minister, if the MP wants to get back up—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I know that. But I just want to make sure what she meant . . . okay.

We will kind of go over a few things for the Honourable Member.

You asked about the budget regarding . . . million for Expenditure, $42 million for Revenue, and asked what are we doing about matching them up. If you recall, at the very beginning I said you have . . . $42 is what we normally put through the TCD, the Ministry of Transport. But the Ministry of Transport really makes a lot more money than that when it comes to the cruises, passenger tax, et cetera, et cetera. It should really come to $100 million. But some money goes to the Consolidated Fund under Finance or other departments, BTA, et cetera, et cetera.

Now, if you are asking me if we are going to increase passes for our seniors—

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No, I didn't ask that.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I'm just asking if you ask me, these are earning other revenues. So the only way to earn other revenues is by increasing charges on individuals who are using the service now, such as passes

or permits, et cetera, et cetera. If you ask me . . . is that the suggestion, or are you asking me as far as to do it?

From time to time there is an increase in certain fees. The Government decided this year not to do any increases in those particular fees. As time goes on we may look at it a different way. But as of now we are not increasing those fees at all.

I think you asked also about British Airways. Mr. Chairman, we do not get involved in negotiating or discussing in this Honourable House the agreements, or whatever arrangements we have with airlines. We do not get involved in that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am sure the Honourable Member is quite aware why not. I am sure when they sent out the . . . very well, I guess this side, they did the same thing. They did not disclose that type of information to the public. What we do have is funding which the Government puts for developing of airline service. What goes where, where goes where, we do not disclose that information at all.

You asked a question about Gatwick and passengers. We do not track that at all. That is not our job. You may find that the Bermuda Tourism Department, if you go in their year report on tourism, they will say where certain individuals are coming from, like the United States, Canada, London, or wherever. They track that type of information. We do not. It is there. So it is plain for yourself to see. But we do not do that. Our purpose is to get that cruise boat in. Get that airline. Get more cruise boats in. Get more airlines, et cetera, et cetera.

You asked a question about Heathrow versus Gatwick. You know, they move that . . . and there are benefits. One benefit is that area is closer to for business. People go down . . . city. Also better connections. But that is a decision made by British Airways. Right? We do not negotiate with them which terminal they should come out of, which airway they should come out of. So we do not get involved in that at all. So there is nothing to do with . . . there is no funding in here that deals with that particular issue at all. All right?

And yes, we have funding for Air Service Development. And my team is well aware. We have to look at ways of, How do we find ways to get another airline from UK here? It goes back donkey years. I am sure everybody in this House who has been here for a while would understand the challenges.

We have had Dr. Brown, the former Premier and Minister of Transport, I think he had two airlines for a while coming out . . . particularly out of the Europe area. But, you know, there is competition. The British kind of hold you to the fire for a while and then after that you kind of decide what you are going to do and they back out. We are going to continue to have some discussions with other airlines to see what they can do, but it is challenging. Yes, and British Airways does quite well on that route. One of the best routes that they have.

Why [were] ferry receipts down? If you looked at the number itself, and I refer to 8187, page B-206, the actual amount for 2022/23 was $523,000. The amount is $1 million projectable for 2023/24. The actual [is] roughly $700,000. And so we are accounting the part about being conservative in their projections. And so by looking at those two past ones, particularly the year before, and what happened even before that, we did not come up to 2023/24. And there could be many reasons. Because you may not be aware that Norwegian Cruise Line has its own ferry. So when they leave Dockyard, particularly going down to St. George's, they get on the Norwegian ferry operated by Bermudians, but they actually have one ferry up there. So that helps . . . that could have caused a reduction. And people just not getting on the ferry, get on minibuses or taxis or whatever, and so on. But we have been conservative in the $800,000 because we were $700,000 before.

Now that we have some ferries they have had some improvements in their . . . they have come back from overseas and maintenance has done well. We may get some more in. With an increase in tourist arrival, and people . . . Well, let me tell you right now. You are not aware of what we are working on. We are trying to enhance the experience, and the Honourable Member Renee Ming would know what we are trying to do, enhance the experience and encourage more people to go down to St. George's. Because that is one of the reasons why over the years . . . one of the reasons why some cruise ships actually pulled out of St. George's, because of the experience that they had there. So, what we are working with . . . and I mentioned in my brief. We are having meetings with BTA, Minister of Tourism, Chamber of Commerce, BEDC, et cetera, et cetera.

What type of experience can be improved? So what we are doing, coming out of Dockyard it is a 45 minute ride. And so we are going to have . . . BTA has produced a video on St. George's. All right? So we are going to play that. And maybe a little speech before by myself or the Mayor. Then we will also have the *Proud to be Bermudian* video played. And then we are going to have . . . we have asked the commercial retail stores down in St. George's to do a 30-minute clip. They had to produce it, but we will tie into the video. So there is a whole experience going on down at St. George's, going down from Dockyard to St. George's. They will know what is going to take place.

Then there are other things that are being worked on within this team that we are working with. More opening up of the museums, the Town Crier is going to be on the budget to get more of that feeling of old Bermuda, et cetera, et cetera.

So, by doing that . . . and like I said, we are heading down to the Seatrade [Cruise Global Conference] next month so we hope . . . not hope, but we will talk to the directors and the CEOs of the cruise line who

. . . we want them to push for more travel down to St. George's. And I am going to tell them about the experience that we are going to be having in that place.

So that is one of the reasons why the receipts could be projected as higher because we expect more activity in that area. Plus, normally in St. George's we had, I think, three days a week and we are now increasing it to five days. Right? So a lot more things are happening. By increasing the volume, of course more receipts. Likewise for Hamilton. We are doing the same thing for Hamilton.

[Line item] 8471. This is page B-211 under Revenue Summary for private cars. So, what accountants do is look at the prior year's experience and also look at what the current experience is. So you look at the budget for $17 million, for 2023/24, the revised estimate is $18,673,000. So, based on that revised number the Ministry or the department decided to put that number in as $18,673,000. That is why it was. Okay?

Project Ride and accidents. I remember asking that question myself some time back. They do not track the Project Ride. I mean, the majority of those individuals have now been on Project Ridge. Pretty well everyone has . . . not if you are, you know, not my age. Not your age.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Maybe a few around here have had Project Ride, but we never had Project Ride. We just got—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Young *bye*. And the Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member Burgess also had Project Ride.

But you know we just jumped on the field, got on our bike and just rode around the yard. All of 16 and we got on our bike and rode off. So Project Ride came in. It was very rewarding and helpful. And it is still helpful. It really actually has worked. But you cannot stop that individual who, you know, has overtaken you on Shelly Bay stretch in front of ten. That is not what we teach in Project Ride. All right? I am just saying, *Lord, you will go around the corner and find somebody down.* That is not Project Ride. That is just silliness. All right? And taking a gamble with your own personal life. Or three people come dashing across you at a speed that you cannot even believe.

So yes, that is not what we teach in Project Ride. But, unfortunately, people have to take their own consideration and their own value on their whatever . . . I told my granddaughter you ain't going to get a bike. My daughter never had a bike. Now, my son did. I am not trying to say that my boy could ride a bike better than my daughter, but he got a bike. My daughter, I said, *I'll take you in my car.* And my granddaughter I'll take in my car. Whatever . . . but [her] mom might change her mind and give her a bike. I don't know. But it is some responsibility with the family and the individual. So, no there is no tracking in that regard.

Electric energy cost. So Energy, this is page B-215, and this is under Energy. Yes, page B-215, Energy, Public Transportation. You are talking about Energy. Because Energy comes under electric and the diesel. All right? The fuel for the other vans. Well, it is going down a little. But that is one of those . . . diesel and electric. We all know that electricity went up. All right. Electricity went up and we all, everyone in this room has felt it and that is one of the reasons why electricity now . . . PTB . . . I'm saying PTB because when I grew up it was PTB. The Department of Transport will be . . . it is now putting on solar [panels] on top of the roofs, done by Works and Engineering. And they are hopeful to even cut down further some of the energy as we go along. But as it stands right now we have put a significant amount of new electrical charges up there. So buses run more efficiently and that works out well for us. But, yes, the price went up. And that has impacted our energy although we are down $100,000 and maybe next year once we get all of our solar [panels] up hopefully that will come down even further. But we will have to see.

Yes, we have discussions. We have actually visited Air Canada. This is page C-19. I think you were talking about . . . under the Bermuda Airport Authority, 7099. We actually flew up to see Air Canada and we have discussed with them as far as increasing the number of times they fly to Bermuda. Also, larger aircrafts. And I believe they have put larger aircrafts. You may recall that WestJet used to fly to Bermuda from Toronto. West Air has moved more to the West Coast so they are not flying here. So, yes, we do have discussions with them.

We have basically had meetings with every airline that currently comes to Bermuda. The most important thing I believe (this is just my personal belief in how you do things) is that you got to build relationships. Nothing hurts by knocking on doors and sitting down and talking to individuals and trying to find a common ground in moving forward.

So we found a common ground with JetBlue. We found a common ground working with United. We found a common ground working with Air Canada. We found . . . I think we got some more work . . . we met with Delta, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. We have not met with British Airways.

I remember meeting with British Airways way back when I was first Minister of Transport. Way back in 1994 or 1995. And I said, *Your price up front* . . . The ticket price for business and first was up here. And the price for economy was about, let's say, halfway. I said, *We are trying to get more people on the flight. Let's think of a way of trying to reduce the price for* . . . *Because you are doing quite well in business, you are doing quite well in first [class]*. And I asked them to find a way to reduce the price for economy so we can attract

more common individuals coming from all of Europe to Bermuda.

They were quite happy with what they were doing and they did not care if the flights were . . . if the back of the plane was empty. That is the impression that I got at that time. I have not had any further discussions with them on that. And maybe one of these days we will have a discussion with them. But we are sort of talking to another airline to see whether they will have the ability to come to Bermuda.

You asked where our guests are coming from. I think you asked me that question. That again, comes from . . . it is in the booklet produced by the Bermuda Tourism Authority. It tells you every area that comes out of Boston. And New York is our largest pulling ground and then it goes to North Carolina and Miami as well, and North Carolina and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So that information is there. I don't have it readily available.

Let me see if I recall any other questions here. I'm missing . . .

Traffic officers do work on summons and monitor . . . I assume they have a car so they actually look at . . . there was tinted glass or tinted whatever and so they do these little surprise visits and that is part of their job.

[Pause]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I answered the question about the car licences, yes.

So, you asked about whether we have consultants who come down, the Golden Dragon contractors. They have been here. You recall that the earlier part when we got the first electric buses, some are breaking down because of going through our potholes, waters, pools of water. They have changed that now so that you do not hear of any electric buses breaking down like that. So they were here actually working on that bus. Many of the staff from DPT have actually gone overseas for training. And I am sure they will get more training as time goes on.

There is no increase in fares, as I mentioned earlier. You asked a question if there was any cost associated with bringing in mechanics at Golden Dragon during the warranty period. There was only a minimum cost to bring a mechanic to work on the buses, as I mentioned earlier, on the warranty issues.

What are the costs associated with maintaining the electric buses? The answer is the costs of maintaining electric buses, in contrast with the diesel buses, have decreased considerably. The mechanical system of the diesel buses are more intricate and call for more manhours to maintain and more to finance the required parts that keep engines and transmissions, et cetera, going. So there is a bigger cost for the diesel. And I mentioned that there were a handful of buses that were stalling when going through a puddle.

I am sure you have asked more but I can't remember. I would be glad to [answer] and I'll try to take them again.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

The Chairman: Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Ministry of Transport Heads 48, 30, 34, 35.

I recognise Member Jackson.

Member Jackson, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you.

I just had one other question that came to mind. In Head 34, the Transport Control Department, page B-211. Under Repair and Maintenance—

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Page B-211, under Repair and Maintenace.

Now does this include the equipment at TCD? So would this replace broken generators or other pieces of equipment that may just be a part of the operations of TCD?

And then I had another question in Public Transportation under Revenue Summary, page B-215. The Revenue line item is 8699, Advertising. And again, curious about how we might be able to earn revenue. But with the new electric buses, does that provide us with a greater opportunity to have the back-of-bus advertising? I don't know how much money we earn from that. Certainly this advertising budget . . . Well, we have gone from $12,000 in 2022/23 to a projected $21,000 for 2024/25. But whether we will see the advertising on backs of buses . . . which I know that a number of private enterprises like that idea. High visibility. And also the advertisement gets to stay on there for a little longer than the 30 seconds on television or on radio. And whether we have an opportunity with these new buses to increase advertising revenue.

I would like to move . . . I have some questions in the C section. Let me find the page. This would be under Capital Acquisition. On page C-5, line item 75351, Workshop Renovations. So we spent $7,626,000 and the Minister did reflect on that expense for the workshops. But I am just curious what the additional $1,214,000 is for. Is that continuing renovations or was that a bit of an overrun, cost supply issues? If we might be able to just get some clarity.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: This is the Workshop Renovations for Marine and Ports. It is on page C-5. Item number 75351. We spent $7,626,000 and this year we are going to spend an additional $1,214,000 and I was just curious what that additional cost was. Is it not finished? Or are we doing some more work on that?

And if we can turn to page C-14. I have a few questions here. The first is around the Recovery Vehicle that is slated for purchase, 76541. And this is for public transportation, under the Public Transportation Department. We have estimated a $300,000 investment for recovery vehicle. And I am just curious if the Minister could just say which is . . . is that going to be for the abandoned vehicles, or is there some other purpose for the purchase of the vehicle?

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: That is page C-14, Public Transportation, line item 76541. It is $300,000 for recovery vehicle. I don't know if that is just one or are we going to buy a few.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: One.

On page . . . I am just waiting for the Chairman and the Minister.

The Chairman: Member, you may continue.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes?

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. I am staying on page C-14, line item 76912, the Digital Fare Media. So last year in 2023 we invested $604,000 into the digital fare media programme, or that investment. And this year we are expecting to pay an additional $384,000. So we are looking at close to $1 million that we are going to spend on this digital fare media.

I would like the Minister to be able to provide us with some background or overview on exactly what we can expect to receive for that investment. What will that involve? Are there going to be any additional services that we are going to have to purchase as well? Is this $604,000 from last year and the additional $384,000 this year, is that going to also include things like how we are going to put GPS in buses, how we are going to get . . . I do not know how we are going to have Internet on the moving buses, the Wi-Fi service that the Minister mentioned.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I just want . . . a point of order. I apologise. I got sidetracked and I missed the point here, the heading.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am actually under Capital Acquisitions, page C-14, Public Transportation. So did you get the recovery vehicle?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. So my next question is digital fare media, 76912, and the close to $1 million that we are investing in the media. The digital fare media, I got to get used to saying that.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: What's the question?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: And the question is, what is included in that investment? Are we including any kind of GPS that might have to be installed? Internet? How will we provide the Wi-Fi, if we are going to have Wi-Fi for people on the buses? If we could maybe just get a little more information around the digital fare media and what that investment will look. This is a really big purchase and a big change in our public transportation moving forward.

So, the more the public can hear about what it is actually going to look and feel like . . . and certainly in my research there are varying levels of how digital fare media plays out on public transportation. So I would just like to know where we are going to start, what investments will be made, Internet access, global positioning systems. If we are going to have debit card payments, what kind of local companies [will] we have to engage with in order to get the banking aligned with the payment of the card? If the Minister might be able to just expand on that investment, because it is a big investment for the taxpayer.

It is a new concept for Bermuda, so I just would not feel that we would be serving the community if we did not provide them with a good understanding of what will be involved, maybe the various steps, introducing digital fare media into our public transportation system.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35?

I recognise the Member—

[Audio skip]

The Chairman: Sorry. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Minister, I had a few questions and maybe a comment or two.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Turning to—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Turning to—

The Chairman: Talk to the Chair Member.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I didn't realise I would get a chirper this early. I only said but two words.

Minister, I know that the Shadow Minister of Transport asked a question about advertising and I just wanted to know if we could get some further information on the advertising on the back of buses. I certainly know that when I was Minister it was something that we did quite often. So it would be interesting to know if we continue on pressing to get the advertising on the back of buses and what the projected net revenue might be estimated at if you have it.

The second thing I wanted to ask, Minister, was also on page B-201—

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Page B-201 with respect to digital fare media. And I think you will probably elaborate on that when you come, but I just wanted for you to emphasise, if you could, what sort of revenue you expect to make once we make that change. Because I think it is . . . Certainly, again, when I was Minister, we were looking at doing, I think it was looking at . . . actually at saving a lot of money and also making some extra revenue. So I look forward to that.

Before I take my seat, two other things. Page B-201, Head 34. I was wondering if the Minister might advise us if he is going to consider implementing, reinstituting the Trucks Advisory Committee. He knows that has been close the heart of someone who used to sit on that committee. And I was wondering if he was going to give that any thought going forward.

And to close, I am sure you do not mind, Madam Chairman, if I give congratulations to Mr. Chris Spencer who was promoted to Director down at TCD just recently.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35?

No other Members.

Minister, would you like to get up and answer some of the questions?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. Let me just start with the Honourable Member Zane DeSilva regarding the Trucks [Advisory] Committee. No, the Trucks Advisory Committee will not be put back.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Madam—

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I read out in my brief that the actual process will be done automatically. So we will not need actual . . . So they will come in and there is a five-day turnaround from that point on. So that should kick in around 1 May. They will still be able to appeal to the Minister for those types of things.

I believe you also asked about . . . the Honourable Member Ms. Jackson asked about the Recovery Vehicle on page C-14, [item number] 76541. That is being purchased. That is for the new buses. We do not have one in place right now. It is broken down. So we had to buy a new vehicle (to use the word *vehicle*) to actually be able to recover buses, et cetera, et cetera.

Digital Fare Media. I said a lot in my brief in regard to the digital fare media. We hopefully will kick off very soon regarding where people will get on the bus and show, you know, whatever, like a pass. Right? And so that will be done at the beginning until we actually get the money all sorted out and stuff like that. And then there will be kicked in, hopefully shortly thereafter . . . well, a couple months after that, where we actually . . . where you will come on a bus and it is already paid for directly. So you will show your phone and I said seniors will be doing something different.

I don't expect my 93-year-old mother to get on and try to download some funds on an app. It is not going to work. So you need . . . most seniors have a cart and so the process will be to use the . . . what are those little things? You put the little codes in back?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: QR codes. And so all we want to do is record information. So the QR code would be Susan Jackson, 85 years old . . . no it won't say that.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, you will live that long.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. And so it is just collecting data. Because right now we don't collect data on who gets on the bus as far as signals, et cetera, in our students.

You asked a question about advertising. Advertising! Honourable Member Zane DeSilva. Yes, so the advertising still takes place on the back of . . . you will see them on the buses now. They are there. And the revenue that we raise is not a lot. But those individuals who want to . . . particularly if there is a particular event that might take place. You know, a football team coming here or the pro golf teams here. They do that. And other people. I have seen times when I believe the Ministry of Health has done some advertising on the back of the bus. We do not collect a lot of money but it gives a good message. And so it works.

Worshop renovations. Yes. We are doing workshop renovations working with the Ministry of Works up here at WEDCO. And we spent "X" amount of dollars. You see that we are up . . . we will spend

another million dollars this financial year. And so they have to finish that work there and then from there we head down to the area down on the main office down here to renovate that department, the workshop down there.

You asked a question on . . . I believe I already answered those questions. Have I missed a question that you asked?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. All right.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 48, 30, 34, and 35. And I would at least like to let the public know that we have approximately 30 minutes left.

I recognise Member Jackson.

Member, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you so much.

I am just doing sort of a supplementary on the digital fare [media]. So we will do these in little steps then?

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. So right now it is still sort of the same behaviour where you would go and you would purchase in advance, whatever. Either you would get a card, if you are a senior or a student and such, and then you could use that card. And we would be able to track data. So we will start with data tracking first. So no Internet would be needed. Just get on the bus with this new card.

But if you have a phone, will you have to purchase an app or will we . . . is there sort of an app that goes on that will show the QR code? And so I guess my question really is, What . . . this million dollar investment, or close to a million dollar investment, although we are budgeting for it now, it may not be spent right away because we are doing this in tiny steps, baby steps? If the Minister might be able to answer that.

And then I have another question under Head 48, so this is a Headquarters question on page B-202. And this comes under the business unit 58010, the Transportation Planning Team. And I have not asked any questions about cruise ships, Madam Chairman, but I was reading an annual report. And again, I have kind of had this, Where can we earn money? Let's look for revenue. And I saw in the Gaming Commission's annual report that they were mentioning in there, under casinos and lotteries, that the cruise ships are able to have casinos and gaming while in port. So, my question is, What is the status? And what revenue is generated, if any, for this in port amenity? And then, if there is a licence, is there a way to increase the licence?

And they mentioned in the annual report that ships can ask for, or request, either extended hours while they are in port, so I believe now it is sort of like (I don't know) from 9:00 pm until 5:00 am, or something. It is during those unsociable hours in the day. How many of the ships are engaging with the casinos while in port? And whether either the 12-month licence that is provided, whether there is an opportunity to increase the fee for that and also whether there would be any revenue that we could generate from extended hours if they were to request extended hours on the cruise ships.

I can see through the Budget Book that this is not necessarily a revenue line item within the Transport, but it is the Planning Team under the Headquarters that would at least be aware of this and would be in a position to negotiate any changes for the on board amenity. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35?

There being no others, Minister, you may reply to the Member.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, there are always opportunities on whether we should increase fees. That is . . . you saw that the Bahamas increased fees not too long ago. We have some of the highest fees out there right now, as far as cruise ships. I did mention the significant increase we have had since 2017. That is because the Government looked at it and found a way to increase the fees.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Infrastructure tax I thought it was done by the Honourable Member Zane DeSilva which we have benefited from over the years.

Passenger tax. We never collected the . . . they used to call it . . . used to call it . . .

An Hon. Member: Head tax.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They used to call it head tax. You know, they collected a head tax because they used to pay off the loan for building . . . not building, the trench, the new trench, the trenching out there. We were clever enough at the time to realise that . . . you guys were not clever enough to work it out, but in 2017 we came in and you were still letting them collect the head tax. But what we said to them was, *We want to increase the fees.*

They said, *Well, you know, we are paying off our loan.*

I said, *Okay. We'll take the loan on.* The Bermuda Tourism Authority took it on and the money then went to Bermuda Tourism Authority, which is now $7 million. And the loan I think has basically been paid off

at BTA . . . as a matter of fact, it was $6 million in 2019 so it was pretty well done. All right? So I think it was paid off. If not, it is very close to paying off. So we have collected a considerable amount of money from . . . and this is a time when you look at the . . . you know, building friendships.

We are increasing the numbers of ships. We are looking at . . . I am not going to disclose yet but we are looking at other ships to pull into the Island. We are having discussions with them next month, which I will say are a little larger, which means more people. So that is the way the world is going as far as ships are concerned.

It has come through our channel (we are having a discussion now), I am not going to say, all right? But that increases the numbers. So if we are able to do those types of things, there is more money coming into the coffers. So it is finding a balancing act. We don't just don't need it. And there are some discussions.

I don't mind telling you. Most people are not aware that to go from Dockyard to Horseshoe Bay, they charge $50 a head. Per head! And you know that adds up. I'm sorry. And the guy said, *You guys are charging too low. We charge $4.50.* (Or $4.00, I think it is $4.00 to take a bus.) And I said, *We can make this thing work.* And so we are going to be looking at further increases in certain aspects because RCL (I shouldn't call them) tell us your fees are too low for the charge for going down there. Which we can get things, you know, taxis got more, minibuses got more, et cetera, et cetera. So we are working on a few things to make that happen.

But I can just tell you that we have done a significant improvement in revenue collection from the cruise line. And to a certain degree, you know, just work with us. You know. And we brought a balance budget. We could have increased everything. We could have increased permits and the list goes on and on. But then you guys would have been complaining.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, you would have been complaining if we had increased those fees significantly. Bus fees, et cetera, et cetera. No. We are working with what we have. We believe that we can make work. We have cut certain expenses. We have cut expenses down at BAA to make things work. I go down to BAA and they had, when I looked at their cash flow for the next two or three years, they were doing quite well. I said, *You got a positive cash flow.* I want a positive cash flow on our side. So we cut some of the grant that was given to BAA. As time goes on, we will make sure that they . . . I see one Member sitting in his seat there. We will make sure that they will work. But this year, no. No, no, it wouldn't go down.

So it is about looking at efficiencies, looking at how we can make the system work, looking at those increases that we want or do not want. And the Premier/Minister of Finance, as time goes on, you know, he has talked about other things that are possible revenues in the future. Those times we will look at things. Whether we want to make sure at the end of the day that we find ways for Bermudians to work, live here, and be happy like they want. So things will be done in the future.

If you guys want to increase the fees, that is up to you. But you know, but let us know if you do—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They won't get that opportunity.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Well, no, they should tell us, though, so people can be aware that they want to increase fees.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member . . . yes. So anyway, I think that is it. Is there something else that I missed?

An Hon. Member: No, that's it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35?

Member, I just want to correct my error before. We have approximately an hour and 25 minutes. The debate ends at 8:30.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I won't keep the Minister that long. I promise.

The Chairman: Okay. But I just didn't want you think I was cheating you of your time.

So you have the floor, Member.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you very much.

And certainly, to just respond to the Minister's assertions, it would be my intention and certainly any kind of fee increase is directed toward those who visit our Island. In particular, those who visit our Island by cruise ship. And so in particular, it would be interesting to explore the idea of seasonal tickets out of Dockyard. It could even be specifically to Horseshoe Bay. And that we could certainly compete with $50 round trip as a cruise excursion by providing public transportation at a lower price than $50 but much more than $4.50.

While we are still up in Dockyard speaking on the cruise ship industry, I have some questions. This would be page B-202, still looking at the Transportation Planning Team, which is business unit 58010. And this has to do with the ground transportation at Dockyard. I would like to find out, in preparation for the onslaught

of hundreds, and hundreds of thousands of tourists that will be visiting our shores and landing in Dockyard—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am just asking, where is she talking about ground transport? Because we don't provide funding for that; where is it?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: This would be the Transportation Planning Team and it isn't so much the funding of anything but the Transportation Planning Team does negotiate and organise and provide an efficient service for passengers and public service vehicles to navigate through the Dockyard area. I can read maybe the objective of the—

The Chairman: So Member, are you asking what strategies they are going to be using?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: The point I am making is, What are we going to do to make sure that we have a system of public transportation for the cruise ship passengers who disembark from their ship and being able to have a systematic and fluid flow of the ability to be able to pick up public transportation or to get into a public service vehicle, be it a minibus or a taxi, to just alleviate bottlenecks. We know that many cruise passengers all get off the ship at the same time. If we might get some insight on what the Transportation Planning Team has in mind. Whether that is personnel that will be provided in the Dockyard area and maybe the very popular Horseshoe Bay, just to be able to not overwhelm our infrastructure during the height of the cruise passenger visit. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to ask questions on Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35?

There being no other Members, at this point, Minister, I invite you to . . .

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member refers to the Transportation Planning Team. That has nothing to do with the actual moving of minibuses or taxis up at–

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No.

The Chairman: Talk to the Chair, Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member, no, no. Actually, as a matter of fact, most of them are controlled by WEDCO. They have a team up there that actually does that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Well, I'm letting you know that. It is not TCD at all. We go up there. I like going up there and shaking tourists' hands, and saying good morning, good afternoon and everything. But we don't . . . we don't . . . and we kind of help out, but we don't . . . there is no funding in there for that.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35?

I recognise the Member Susan Jackson.

Member, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I actually am getting to my feet to say thank you. Thank you to all involved and [for] the answers that have been provided today. I believe that all of my questions have been exhausted for today. And I thank the Minister and the Chair for the opportunity to ask questions.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35?

There being no other Members, I call on the Minister.

Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35 be approved as printed.

But I would also like to rise and report progress until the next day of sitting.

The Chairman: Hold on. I will . . . let me get the approvals of the House first.

It has been moved that Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35 be approved.

Any objections?

There being none . . . Minister.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Transport Heads 48, 30, 34 and 35 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2024/25.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, Madam Chairman.

I move that we rise and report progress until the next day of sitting.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we rise and report progress until the next day of sitting.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Any objections?

Yes, Member.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Just a clarification.

The Chairman: Sure.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I understand the Budget Debate is finished and so why the need to rise and report?

The Chairman: We are rising and reporting progress until such time that the Finance Minister moves all of the other heads, and deals with the Appropriation Bill. This is something that has been agreed to in the House by the Speaker. So we will rise and report progress until Friday.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I can appreciate that there might be some need, but I would think that the House would be able to understand the reason to rise and report since I have seen the Premier in the Chamber.

The Chairman: Okay. Since we are now . . . since the heads have been moved, and we have finished this part of the debate, it is now time for me to turn the House back over the Speaker. The Speaker can then speak to the House with his understanding that we have reported progress and we have sought leave to sit again. And if the Speaker wishes to speak to why leave has been sought to sit again (and I am assuming on Friday), he will do that. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Committee agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 7:15 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members.

Are there any objections to the [Committee of Supply] rising and reporting progress and seeking leave to sit again?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would just like to ask for clarification why the need since the debate is finished.

The Speaker: Technically, there is . . . there is a technical issue that has to be resolved first. And both parties have been consulted, with a discussion with myself in the Chamber. I do not know if your representative has informed you. It was not for me to inform you. But both parties have agreed that we will sit again on Friday after the matter has been resolved.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand and I assume that maybe supplementaries will be tabled at that time as well?

The Speaker: All the business will be done on Friday. Okay?

Members, that brings us to a close of the discussion on the budget for today. We will now move on to the other items on the Order Paper. There were some other four items on the Order Paper. And I understand Order [No.] 5 is the item that is going to be done this evening, the tourism.

Premier? Tourism, correct? Okay.

Members, the next item is the consideration of Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024 in the name of the Junior Minister of Tourism, and Culture and Sport.

DRAFT ORDER

TOURISM INVESTMENT (AZURA BERMUDA) ORDER 2024

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the draft Order entitled the Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Continue.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of bringing this Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024 before this Honourable House is to enable the grant of tax relief to the developers investing in the tourism product Azura Bermuda Clearwater Development, Limited, which is in the National economic interest of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to invite this Honourable House to take this Order under consideration. Mr. Speaker, the Clearwater Development Limited ("CDL") is a Bermuda registered company and is presided over by John Bush III who was the executive vice president of residential development at Tucker's Point. Mr. Bush has extensive knowledge of hotel and residential development in Bermuda including the associated marketing of these products.

Mr. Speaker, in anticipation of purchasing the hotel property, the former Surf Side Beach Club, CDL applied for a Hotels Concession Order in February of 2016. The [then] Minister of Tourism, with written consent of the Minister of Finance, made the Order—the Hotels Concession Former Surf Side Beach Club Order 2016. Mr. Speaker, this Order expired on 31 March 2023.

Mr. Speaker, the Tourism Investment Act 2017 was amended in 2019 so that it applies to specific hotel developments presently using a Hotels Concession Order made under the Hotels Concession Act 2000 and relevant hotel developers are able to apply for a Tourism Investment Order.

Mr. Speaker, the former Surf Side Beach Club (now Azura Bermuda) is one of those aforementioned specific hotel developments. CDL submitted an application for a Tourism Investment Order for a new hotel to the Minister of Tourism in [October] 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Azura Bermuda consists of nine hotel residences [which are] 60 units and is actively operating as an upper mid- to high-quality condominium hotel. The units have been sold by way of a 999-year lease to each end-buyer. Each buyer has signed a management agreement in the form approved by the Chief Immigration Officer. This management agreement provides the details by which the end-buyer permits a key of the unit to the hotel inventory for a minimum of six months each year.

Mr. Speaker, in mid-2023, CDL began work on a new amenity: an interior oceanfront restaurant. Plans for additional amenities include a new ocean view fitness and wellness facility, an expansion of the lobby, the conversion of the gym into executive management offices, a new resort entry and an ocean pool and beach bar. Mr. Speaker, CDL estimates that the construction of these amenities will be completed by mid-2024.

Mr. Speaker, CDL's total investment for the project costs (including acquisition, renovation, professional fees, transaction costs, reserves and working capital) is approximately $47,005,000.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will note that Azura Bermuda has been awarded the full terms of relief allowed by the legislation.

- Full relief from customs duty for eight years from the operative date of the Order.
- Full relief from hotel occupancy tax for 15 years from the hotel's opening date.
- Full relief from the employer's share of payroll tax for 15 years from the hotel's opening date.
- Full [exemption] from land tax for ten years starting from the sixth anniversary of the hotel's opening date.
- Deferral of the landholding charges.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will note that exemption from land tax is subject to the hotel confirming in year six through fifteen that 70 per cent of the hotel staff must be Bermudian.

Further, Mr. Speaker, exemption from the employer's share of payroll tax is subject to a management training programme for Bermudians verified by the Department of Workforce Development is in operation at the hotel.

Mr. Speaker, upon the completion of the new resort amenities, the fully open and operating resort will generate significant new hotel and resort employment. Income earning opportunities for service providers including taxis, restaurants, retailers, golf courses and, Mr. Speaker, potential summer employment for students.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to commend this Order for support of this Honourable House.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

Opposition Whip, you have the floor.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, and good evening, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Not really much to add to this here other than we are hoping that they move along quite swiftly with the work that needs to be done. I believe the Junior Minister said $40-plus million. So, I really don't have much to say to this here, other than to ask maybe two questions. And one of those questions would be, Understanding that hotel rooms are of a priority right now to get up and going. This has been in since October and we are now five months in. Maybe there was a delay for some reason. Or is it customary to take five months to get something along and to the table at this point in time?

The other [comment] is on page 2 of the actual [draft Order] the terms and conditions we have already set some time ago, the 70 per cent is really unrealistic when we are trying to get our numbers up. We are nowhere near close to that. It is going to take us a decade before we can actually see something like that happen. So as long as the Junior Minister and Minister are keeping that 70 per cent, as something that they will work with, I just realistically see us coming to that point.

So, with that in mind, we support this [draft Order] and wish the best for Azura and Bermuda as they get more rooms going.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a comment at this time?

Any other? None.

Junior Minister.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the second question by the Shadow Minister with regard to the 70 per cent being unrealistic, I will note that and certainly share that with the substantive Minister. I can say whilst I am waiting for some response to the first question to come in, that considerable training is being offered to Bermudians in the hospitality industry to try and encourage as many Bermudians as possible, Mr. Speaker, to avail themselves to the opportunities that are not only going to be available at Azura, but also at the Southampton Princess and the Bermudiana Beach Club and Ariel Sands.

I think the Shadow Minister does raise a very good point. It is a nice problem to have with increasing beds. And I am waiting for the replies as to whether or

not there was a delay. And if the [Shadow] Minister would prefer, I can provide that answer just as soon as I receive it. But with that, that is the answer to the question thus far.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

That is an Order so it does not go into Committee. Correct?

Yes, Junior Minister, being that it is an Order we do not go into Committee so you can now send the appropriate message after it because there is no other business to be done.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I move that the draft Order be approved and that a suitable message be sent to her Excellency the Governor.

The Speaker: Any objections?

None. Continue.

A suitable message will be sent. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024 was approved.]

The Speaker: That brings us to a close of the business for today.

Mr. Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Friday, 15 March [2024] at 10:00 am.

The Speaker: MP Dunkley, you would like to speak to this?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Glad I have a support base on the other side of the Chamber.

[Laughter]

SEEKING AN EXPLANATION WHY THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY IS BEING CARRIED OVER

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments in this Honourable House, time to just make a brief comment on what just took place. This is not about your ruling to rise and report progress because I respect that. And I have been in this House too long to even get close to being sent to the door by the Speaker.

But Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Well, let me say this much. Let me say this much: You are going to be very guarded and if I call you, I expect you to [respect] the fact that I am calling you back.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: And keep that in mind.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, sir, I would certainly respect your position on that.

But Mr. Speaker, I believe this Honourable House is owed an explanation by the Honourable Premier on how we got to this position. Because we have had . . . I think we have had a pretty reasonable 56 hours of debate. There have been some . . . in my opinion, there have been some good debates. There have been some debates that certainly have been back and forth with a lot of questions answered and posed by Shadow Ministers. So I think it has been a healthy process. But to come to the end of the debate, a half an hour before, and hear rumours that it might be carried forward, I think the people of Bermuda deserve an explanation. Certainly I think Members of the Chamber deserve to know what took place. There has got to be an explanation.

The Speaker: Let me . . . let me . . . if you yield, I will help you.

The reason that you are not getting an explanation tonight is because the matter is as current as it can be. We only were aware of it when I summoned your representative and the representative from the Government into my Chamber and we had a discussion about it. I made a decision. I made a decision. The Speaker made a ruling that it would be carried over until Friday morning. And on Friday morning, we will get the appropriate explanation as to why we go on Friday morning to resolve it. But the matter is extremely current right now and it would be inappropriate to try and put a response to that when we do not have all the facts in hand. Okay?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Could I ask you a question, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You can ask me a question.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: By the matter being current, can you give a little bit more understanding on what that would mean?

The Speaker: It means there is a resolution that needs to be found to resolve what happened that caused us to be here tonight. We do not have that resolution at this moment.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Okay, Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate that. And could I also assume that on Friday

we will see supplementary estimates? Because this budget period we have not seen any.

The Speaker: The business will be done on Friday when we do the normal business that would have taken place at the end of the Budget Debate, will be done on Friday morning.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your guidance and understanding and this is a first that I have seen so I had to rise—

The Speaker: It's a first for all of us!

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I had to rise and say something about that because I am sure the people of Bermuda are questioning it. So I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

No further speakers, Mr. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: I will speak, if you . . . just to close out.

The Speaker: Okay.

SEEKING AN EXPLANATION WHY THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY IS BEING CARRIED OVER

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand the Honourable Member would like to make a point, and I will just make it very clear. We are trying to make sure that we do all things right and all things proper. It is that simple. The fact is that there have been 56 hours of debates, the Committee has risen and reported progress. We have asked for leave to sit again. On Friday morning we will meet, we will report all the capital estimates, go ahead and pass the budget in good time for the Senate to able to debate on Monday. There is no need to make a point out of this. I know that some persons would like to make a political point, but there is no need to do so because all things will be done in the way according to Standing Orders. And that is all I have to say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And Mr. Premier, let me just . . . because I do not want this going back and forth. The ruling that I made was based on all the information that was provided to me. If I had assumed, taken the assumption that we could have this resolved tonight, we would have it resolved tonight. I made the decision that we will come back. And I want that clear.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I respect that, Mr. Speaker. And a question, a point of order to the Honourable Premier.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: I do not want this back and forth.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Have a seat. Have a seat.

I could . . . you all could have come here tonight and I [could] have told you from this seat what was happening. But I took the time to have your representative and the Government representative in my office earlier. And we walked through what was before us and the option and the position that I was going to take. With proper consultation, it was done. Meaning, had I not had that consultation or had I just consulted the Government and came here and said, *This is what we are going to do,* I would expect your side to get up and do as you are doing. But I took the opportunity to have both Opposition and Government in that room where we had the conversation. And all parties in there realised the sensitivity of what was before us and we agreed on the position that I put.

An Hon. Member: Might be next week.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: I don't expect any more. The Speaker took a ruling.

Thank you, Members. We now stand adjourned until Friday morning.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members, this is unnecessary. The Speaker took a ruling. I expect everyone to respect that, even in their side comments.

[At 7:33 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am Friday, March 15, 2024.]

[This page intentionally left blank.]

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
15 MARCH 2024
10:02 AM

Sitting Number 16 of the 2023/2024 Session

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

The Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House now stands—

[Laughter]

The Speaker: The House is now open. (That would be nice!) The House is now in session, Members.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes from the 8th and the 11th of March have been deferred.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

MR. CLARK SOMNER APPOINTED CLERK TO THE LEGISLATURE

The Speaker: Members. Members, just now when we did Prayers—under the Announcements I just will say one announcement by the Speaker. But just now when we did prayers, I do not know if you noticed, I did not say that the *Acting* Clerk would lead us in prayer. I said that the *Clerk.*

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: I said that the Clerk would lead us in prayer because now Mr. Somner has been officially appointed as the Clerk. He served us well over the past year as the Acting Clerk. And we look forward to continued valuable service and direction from Mr. Somner in his role as Clerk. And we appreciate his accepting the position.

I am sure the whole House will join me in offering congratulations to Mr. Somner.

An Hon. Member: Yes! Yes!

[Desk thumping]

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: We have been informed by the following Members that they will be absent today: MP Scott Pearman, MP Curtis Dickinson and MP Scott Simmons have all indicated their absences today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: We have five such papers this morning. The first is in the name of the Minister of Finance.

Premier.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE CONSOLIDATED FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Financial Statements of the Consolidated Fund for fiscal year ended March the 31st, 2023.

The Speaker: Thank you. Continue.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 1) FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2023/24

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the powers conferred by section 96 of the Constitution I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) for Financial Year 2023/24.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next communication this morning is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

CONSULTATION ON RETAINING THE LOCAL WORKFORCE POSITION PAPER 2024

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Consultation on Retaining the Local Workforce Position Paper 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next paper this morning is from the Minister of Education.

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

BERMUDA COLLEGE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda College Annual Report 2022/23

The Speaker: And would you like to do your second one as well?

BERMUDA COLLEGE AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda College Audited Financial Statements for the year ending March the 31st, 2023.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: Thank you.

And before I move on, I would just like to acknowledge the presence of the President of the Senate.

Madam President, welcome to our Chambers this morning.

[Desk thumping]

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: we have six such statements this morning. The first is in the name of the Premier.

Minister of Finance, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, Mr. Speaker. I printed out the same thing twice. It is a problem. (We will make it work.)

Mr. Speaker, if I could, could I deliver the Statement on the Consolidated Fund first?

The Speaker: Yes. Are you saying you need a copy of the second one, the one?

Hon. E. David Burt: I am certain I can print one up on this fancy device.

The Speaker: Well, I can provide you a copy if you like. Your call. Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

CONSOLIDATED FUND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2022/23

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to advise Honourable Members of the completion of the audit of the Consolidated Fund Financial Statements for the year ended March 31, 2023, which were tabled in this Honourable House earlier today.

As Honourable Members are aware, the Consolidated Fund is the general operating fund of the Bermuda Government and is the fund through which the Government conducts the majority of its transactions. The Consolidated Fund financial statements report the financial position, operations and cash flows resulting from the activities of the Government. This includes the accounts of the Senate, the House of Assembly, all Government departments and all courts.

Mr. Speaker, in her report the Auditor General highlighted that (with the exception of one matter that I will address later) the statements were deemed to fairly reflect the financial position and operations of the Consolidated Fund. This positive endorsement in almost all areas of work in relation to the financial statements is a testament to the efficacy of our financial processes and operations, and to the hard work of our teams to ensure that financial integrity is upheld.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has qualified her audit option in relation to the assessment of the Government's compliance with a new accounting standard that came into effect on April 1, 2022, relating to the estimates associated with the legal obligations for the eventual retirement of tangible capital assets and the associated disclosures. The Auditor General based her opinion on the audit evidence provided to support the asset retirement obligations of the

Government as of the year ended March 31, 2023. However, the disclosure in the financial statements recognised that the Government has not yet completed its assessment in this regard.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as highlighted in the recent Statement given by the Minister of Public Works, the Government has already done considerable work on this new standard, using its teams of internal professionals. However, as evidenced by the disclosures made by other governments subject to the same standards, such as Canadian provincial governments, validation by external experts of the estimates and methodology was deemed to be a key factor to meet the new requirements.

Mr. Speaker, this new standard requires the Government to provide an estimate of potential future liabilities, and the focus of the outstanding work relates to the potential costs for the removal of asbestos in buildings, which it is yet unknown when they will in fact need to be retired. Therefore, Government has had to carefully weigh the cost versus the benefit of allocating funds for external experts to assess and verify our approach, or investing in much-needed infrastructure upgrades. With a full year of implementation of this standard now having been completed, we will continue to assess the best approach to ensure that the interests of the people of Bermuda are appropriately balanced.

Mr. Speaker, the Government was able to meet the required disclosure requirements of the other significant new standard that came into effect on April 1, 2022, in relation to financial instruments. This information is provided under Significant Accounting Policies Note 3g. Compliance with this new standard was also noted as a key matter in the audit opinion of the 2023 statements of the Canadian provincial governments.

Mr. Speaker, under the Audit Act 1990 the Auditor General is able to include in her report any comments she considers appropriate. Accordingly, the Auditor General has this year, as in prior years, included an "Emphasis of Matter" paragraph to draw attention to the usefulness of the financial statements and her view that "these financial statements are not summary consolidated financial statements." In other words, they do not represent the combined financial position and activities of all government entities, only the activities of the Consolidated Fund. This section of the report does not alter the Auditor General's opinion on whether the financial statements are presented fairly. The other information section is inclusive of the financial statement discussion and analysis which is included within the identified audited financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, highlights of the Consolidated Fund Financial Statements are as follows:

(1) The March 31, 2023, total accounts receivable net of provision for doubtful accounts increased by 8.5 per cent, or to $222.8 million, as compared to $205.3 million on March 31, 2022. The net accounts receivable balance was 19.7 per cent of total revenue for the year. However, it is important to highlight that a significant portion of the gross receivable on March 31, 2023, represents payroll tax which was due and payable on April 15, 2023, which is of course in the next financial year. During the month of April 2023, the government collected approximately $145 million in payroll taxes.

(2) A full actuarial valuation was carried out on March 31, 2023, to produce the estimates included in the financial statements. The actuarial valuation resulted in a liability for pensions and retirement benefits of $2.027 billion, representing a 7.6 per cent increase from March 31, 2022, which is net of plan assets of $613.9 million.

(3) The total revenue raised by the Consolidated Fund for fiscal 2022/23 was approximately $1.129 billion, representing an increase of $43.5 million, or 4 per cent, from fiscal 2021/22's total revenue of $1.086 billion. This exceeded original budget estimates by approximately $51.3 million, or 4.8 per cent. The most significant generators of revenues for fiscal 2022/23 were payroll taxes, accounting for $488 million, or 43 per cent, of revenue and customs duty, accounting for $225 million, or 20 per cent of revenue.

(4) Current expenses for fiscal 2022/23 were $1.32 billion, representing an increase of $30 million, or 2 per cent, from fiscal 2021/22's total of $1.29 billion. The three largest components of current expenses were employee costs, grants and contributions, and interest on debt. Total employee costs were $623 million, or 47 per cent, of total expenses. Grants and contributions were $329 million, or 25 per cent; and interest on debt was $136.5 million, or 10 per cent. Total current expenditure on a modified cash basis (which is important, Mr. Speaker, because that is how this Honourable House conducts its budgeting) was $1.1 billion, which was $22.8 million more than original budget estimates.

(5) The all-inclusive result (from both current and capital) on an accrual accounting basis for the year ending March 31, 2023, was an accrual deficit of $260.8 million, $26.8 million lower than the prior year's accrual deficit of $287.6 million. However, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, the Government's budget reflects expenditures on a modified cash basis (which adjusts for all of the non-cash expenses that are required to be included on a financial statement for accounting purposes), and the cash all-inclusive results from government operations (on the same basis shown in the Budget Book) was a deficit of $34.7 million. This compares to a deficit of $70.0 million that was originally budgeted. Therefore, the actual budget deficit was down by $35.3 million, or more than 50 per cent, when compared to the original estimate. The decreased deficit is primarily a result of higher-than-budgeted revenues. This deficit reduction is part of the Government's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework strategy to achieve a balanced budget.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Auditor General and her team, the persons in the Accountant General's Department and persons in other ministries who were involved in progressing the audit. The 2022/23 fiscal result is indicative of the Government's ability to prudently manage current and capital expenditures while increasing revenues as we progress toward a balanced budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Would you like to do your second Statement?

Hon. E. David Burt: I will try. I am going to be like the young people and read from the phone, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will move on to my next Statement if I may, which is Launch of Red Tape Reduction Consultation.

LAUNCH OF RED TAPE REDUCTION CONSULTATION

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in this year's Speech from the Throne, the Government recognised the need to deliver more efficient services for the taxpayer and declared, "Governments have an obligation to ensure that Government services that fall under legislation are delivered well. Service must translate into efficiency and Bermuda's residents deserve a level and ease of service that matches our claim to jurisdictional sophistication. Some of these services will be improved through a focus on digital transformation of Government Services, others will be improved through the streamlining of regulations."

Mr. Speaker, to support our pledge to improve government services and enhance the customer experience, in the 2024/25 Budget Statement, the Government outlined several initiatives that it will [undertake] in this fiscal year to deliver on this promise. These initiatives included increased investment in information technology, implementation of online payments, harnessing advancements in artificial intelligence and reducing regulation to support economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has in the past reached out to private sector organisations to ask them to submit suggestions regarding regulations that could be streamlined or reduced to boost economic activity. Unfortunately, the response to date has been limited, and therefore in this year's Budget Statement the Government announced that it will be going directly to the public.

Mr. Speaker, it is not lost on this Government that many in the public have expressed concerns about outdated regulations and bureaucratic processes that have hindered local businesses from conducting some activities and expanding their operations, or simply have caused frustration due to time-consuming processes. We recognise that streamlining processes and reducing regulation can support economic development and is also one of the key action items under the strategic initiative of Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy, "Ensuring Bermuda Is Business Friendly."

Mr. Speaker, the Economic Development Strategy states, "Being business friendly is ensuring that regulatory and other barriers are reduced. To ensure Bermuda remains a jurisdiction of choice it is important to recognise the impediments that limit a business's ability to survive and thrive. Creating certainty in a business environment will work to ensure business confidence is maintained."

So today, Mr. Speaker, I am announcing the opening of the promised consultation with the government's largest and most important stakeholder, the people of Bermuda, to hear directly from the public about what regulations they feel can be reduced.

Some may ask, *Why is the Government going to the people? They should know what the issues are.* Mr. Speaker, I can understand that perspective. But the truth is that Governments do not have the same interaction internally within the government that the public may have, and the experience will be different.

We want to hear directly from those affected about the obstacles faced and receive recommendations on processes that can be streamlined to reduce frustrations, or multiple points of contact, with the government to accomplish tasks. Today members of the public can visit forum.gov.bm and submit their ideas for consideration. And the Government will do what we have done since returning to office—listen, take on feedback and act.

Mr. Speaker, we acted when the electorate told us that taxes on workers were too high, and reduced taxes for 86 per cent of workers and business. We acted after persons said to us that more affordable housing is needed, with an initial $15 million investment that has seen 67 new units already brought online with more to come. And this year we are providing an additional $10 million to accelerate our efforts. We acted when young Bermudians said that more support was needed for them to own *a piece of the rock* and implemented the Mortgage Guarantee Programme which has seen 49 Bermudians put on the path to home ownership. We acted when persons told us that we needed a minimum wage in Bermuda to ensure dignity for all workers, and we implemented our Island's first minimum wage in June of last year.

Mr. Speaker, we will also now act now to reduce red tape and encourage further economic growth that will benefit Bermudian businesses and entrepreneurs. Together, in line with Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy, we can build a Bermuda that is even more business-friendly, efficient, resilient and innovative. In addition to the benefits to business, reduced regulation will support our hard-working public officers and enable them to focus on improving customer service rather than outdated administrative processes.

Mr. Speaker, this year's Speech from the Throne was entitled "Serving the People." The 2024/25 Budget Statement was entitled "Investing in Our People and Our Future." These vital statements placed the people of Bermuda at their centre, as this Government continues to take a people-centred approach to our daily work. Our legislative and financial agendas are focused on delivering enhanced services to the people of Bermuda and investing in areas that will improve their quality of life and economic opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all persons to visit the website forum.gov.bm today and share their thoughts and experiences with the Government to help us make Bermuda an even friendlier place for businesses. This site is interactive. So residents can make submissions, read submissions that have been made, comment on those submissions and voice their support for a suggestion with a simple click.

Mr. Speaker, this Government's agenda is ambitious, but with the support and participation of Bermudians there is no limit to what we can achieve. We are committed to making Bermuda work better for everyone, enhancing our economic landscape and ultimately improving the lives of all Bermudians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour

Minister.

RETAINING THE LOCAL WORKFORCE

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members.

I am pleased to rise today to lay before this Honourable House of Assembly a position paper on Retaining the Local Workforce. Mr. Speaker, I have spoken many times in this Chamber and elsewhere of the crisis befalling our country as a consequence of declining birth rates and an ageing population. We all know that these demographic trends are a global phenomenon. Many high-income countries around the world are facing the same problem. But in a small country like Bermuda, it can have a severe impact on our economic performance and the cost of living for ordinary working people.

Mr. Speaker, for this reason my Ministry has prepared the position paper that I lay before the Honourable House today as a means to address these challenges and propose solutions. Significantly, I am inviting consultation on the proposals in the position paper in the hope of harnessing the best ideas from the community and seeking feedback on proposals to retain Bermuda's local workforce for the long-term benefit of our country.

Mr. Speaker, many will be aware that the working population plays a vital role in a country's economy. A strong working population not only enables opportunities for growth and wealth creation, but also ensures the sustainability of economic development in the medium and long term. Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has already begun to experience the adverse effects of a declining birth rates and an ageing population. We are seeing challenges such as labour shortages, skill gaps and increased labour costs, and increased health, pension and social insurance costs, all of which contribute to an increased cost of living and have a negative impact on the Island's long-term economic prosperity and social well-being. This demographic reality presents a significant challenge for the sustainability of the local economy.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that this problem is not unique to Bermuda. Countries worldwide are also experiencing similar challenges. However, at the current rate of decline of Bermuda's working population, we will struggle to sustain the current or future economy if [this decline is] not addressed now. As such, the Government is committed to taking aggressive steps to retain Bermuda's workforce because doing nothing would not be in the best interest of Bermuda. The country must take a strategic and targeted approach to retaining the current workforce, as well as encourage Bermudians to return home.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's working population is made up of Bermudians and guest workers. Therefore, the demographic problem we face concerns both of these groups. Accordingly, the solutions proposed to mitigate the demographic cliff that we face targets both Bermudians and guest workers. Overall, the Government is committed to making sure that Bermudians are provided with every opportunity to equip themselves with the knowledge and prerequisite skills needed so that they can have a fair shot when competing for jobs.

As a Government we want to see more and better opportunities for Bermudians. The chance to earn a living wage doing meaningful work. The opportunity to enter the most sought-after industries, create new ones, be entrepreneurs and be socially conscious contributors to our economy and society. We want Bermudian workers to have a real chance to thrive. And to our guest workers we want to give stability and certainty, in addition to fairness and a chance to feel at home in the place where many are raising families and contributing to our community economically and socially. I will stress from the outset, however, that the proposals for guest workers do not contemplate pathways to Bermuda status. As a Government, we believe that it is possible to live, work and thrive together without status becoming a dividing factor.

Mr. Speaker, considering Bermuda's current population and workforce demographics, it is critical that the Government take action to ensure Bermudians are offered opportunities that enable them to thrive in Bermuda. Additional investment and continuous collaboration with the business community will be required to support activities and interventions for long-term and future development and growth. The Government

proposes to retain Bermudians in the workforce by focusing on four key areas:

1. encourage and motivate working-age Bermudians to remain in Bermuda;
2. strengthen labour protections for the local workforce;
3. ensure Bermudians studying abroad return to Bermuda to reside and work; and
4. encourage the retention of older Bermudians in the workplace.

I want to elaborate on each strategy and the actions proposed in the paper. First, Mr. Speaker, we propose to encourage and motivate working-age Bermudians to remain in Bermuda by undertaking a number of specific actions in alignment with strategy 5 of the Economic Development Strategy. We will continue to invest in the development of the local workforce and develop strategies to address the labour shortage in the skilled trades sector.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the Government is conscious of the growing assertions that Bermudians are emigrating overseas in search of better job opportunities and a lower cost of living. An independent survey last December by Global Research found that 21 per cent of persons had household members who had left Bermuda to live abroad for at least 12 months in the last five years. And 15 per cent stated they had household members who had left Bermuda to live abroad for non-educational reasons. To gain a full understanding of whether such emigration is happening and why, the Ministry of Economy and Labour will commission research and, based on the results, will develop policies to reduce the drivers of forced migration and encourage Bermudians to return and remain in Bermuda.

Second, Mr. Speaker, to strengthen labour protections for the local workforce, the Government will implement policies that expand the rights and interests of Bermudian workers to ensure that Bermudians are protected in the workplace. In particular, the position paper proposes to

1. partner with the unions to create a campaign supporting collective bargaining and union organising;
2. produce guidelines that clarify how minimum wages will progress beyond $16.40;
3. place equal work for equal pay provisions into the labour code and advance pay transparency provisions;
4. increase allowable severance pay by increasing the maximum payout from 26 weeks to 52 weeks;
5. amend the work permit policy to ensure that Bermudian workers are protected from being first out during layoff and redundancy when there are work permit holders in similar positions;
6. amend the work permit policy to ensure that there is a hiring hierarchy which places Bermudians first amongst all other groups;
7. amend the work permit policy to ensure that all work permit holders have basic proficiency of the English language;
8. ensure that greater consideration is given to firms with Bermudian employees for awarding government contracts; and
9. continue to revise closed and restricted job categories.

Third, Mr. Speaker, to ensure Bermudians studying abroad return to Bermuda to reside and work, we will develop new ways to stay in touch with Bermuda's graduates abroad and create opportunities and incentives to encourage them to return home after gaining their qualifications and securing valuable working experience abroad. In particular, the position paper proposes two initiatives: (1) Create a register of Bermudian graduates within the Department of Workforce Development with a focus on keeping members informed about policy, legislative and other changes; and (2) amend the Workforce Development Scholarship agreement to require that, upon the completion of the recipients' studies, graduates must return to Bermuda and actively contribute to the local community by engaging I n professional work within seven years of completing studies for their first degree.

Mr. Speaker, finally, to improve the number of Bermudians in the workforce, we will encourage the retention of older Bermudians in the workplace. In line with the 2023 Speech from the Throne, the Government is committed to providing benefits to businesses that retain able-bodied capable workers beyond age 65. Accordingly, the position paper proposes to (1) eliminate the employer's portion of payroll tax for all Bermudian employees over the age of 65 years; (2) promote the retention of workers over 65 years; and (3) encourage employers to find creative ways to allow workers over 65 years to remain in the local workforce.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, and as I stressed earlier on, Bermuda's workforce is made up of Bermudians and guest workers. Both are at the bedrock of Bermuda's economic success, and this Government believes we must ensure that all of our local workforce remains committed to and invested in Bermuda. Therefore, we also make proposals regarding non-Bermudian workers. Mr. Speaker, during the consultation for the Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027, it was made evident to the Ministry that the 20-, 15- and 10-year periods required to obtain a Permanent Resident Certificate [PRC] have not had a significant positive impact on worker retention in Bermuda. The position paper thus makes proposals regarding Permanent Resident Certificates. Specifically, it is proposed that by lowering the time requirement for persons to obtain a PRC, it is more likely that the current guest worker residents will remain in Bermuda, as they will be able to enjoy all of the benefits of a PRC holder: to reside, work and invest their savings locally. The position paper proposes to

1. reduce the eligibility criteria for the granting of PRCs to any person who has been ordinarily resident in Bermuda from 20 years or more to 10 years or more, with an annual income requirement of $83,000;
2. reduce the eligibility criteria for the granting of a PRC to the non-Bermudian parent of a child with Bermudian status who has been ordinarily resident in Bermuda from 15 years or more to 10 years or more;
3. reduce PRC eligibility requirements for a job maker from 10 years to 5 years; and
4. reduce PRC eligibility requirements for the following occupational categories to five years:
    a. Registered Nurses;
    b. Chartered Financial Analysts;
    c. Certified Actuaries;
    d. Computer Engineers;
    e. Software Developers; and
    f. Certified Accountants (CPA, CA, ACCA, ACA).

Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier these proposals do not give a pathway to Bermuda status. The impact on jobs for Bermudians is minimal, as the majority of those who would be eligible to attain a PRC are currently working in positions they have held for an extended period.

Mr. Speaker, that sums up the details of the proposals in the position paper which we are publishing today for consultation with the public. We welcome feedback and public debate on the proposals with the goal of securing the best outcomes for our country. The position paper will be posted on forum.gov.bm today where feedback can be offered on the proposals for the next month until the 15th of April.

Mr. Speaker, to close, I reiterate the crisis unfolding before us due to declining birth rates and an ageing population. This demographic cliff-edge must be addressed immediately. It would be irresponsible to do nothing. I hope this position paper will stimulate the critical debate and dialogue we must have as a community. These demographic trends are a global phenomenon, but the solutions must be right for Bermuda before they have an irreversible impact on our economic sustainability and the cost of living for ordinary working people and retirees.

Mr. Speaker, we look for the right balance and to protect Bermudians. This Government is committed to remaining strategic and deliberate to ensure economic sustainability is secured and can be enjoyed by all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Education.

Minister.

BERMUDA COLLEGE
AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2022/23

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, listening public.

Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise before this Honourable House to lay the 2022/23 Audited Financial Statements for the Bermuda College, and the Bermuda College's Annual Report for 2022/23, as stipulated by the Bermuda College Act 1974 [the Act].

Mr. Speaker, under this Act, its Board of Governors provides the college general management and administrative leadership. The President and staff of the Bermuda College are responsible for bringing the goals, direction and approved policies for the board into action. These undertakings are reflected in the annual report and will be supported by the audited financial statements which were tabled today.

Mr. Speaker, I remind Honourable Members and the listening public that in July 2022 the Act was amended to make provision for the Bermuda College to appoint its own auditor. Under those provisions, the College appointed KPMG Audit Limited to audit the 2022/23 statements. I am pleased to share that the Bermuda College is current with its annual audits.

Mr. Speaker, the 2022/23 audited financial statements were unqualified. Therefore, in the opinion of the Auditor General, the statements present fairly the financial position of Bermuda College, the results of its operations and changes in its net assets and cash flows in accordance with public sector accounting standards for governments and not-for-profit organisations, generally accepted in Bermuda and Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the 2022/23 financial statements indicate that Bermuda College has total assets worth $25.3 million and total liabilities of $19.9 million. And the Bermuda College has no long-term debt. However, cash and cash equivalents decreased by 20 per cent in 2023 to $3.6 million, reflecting an impact of capital investment delivered in the period.

Mr. Speaker, during the year revenue earned from student fees decreased by 12 per cent to $2.5 million, and the Government grant decreased by 1 per cent. Overall revenue was unchanged in percentage terms due to increased revenue from other sources amounting to $20.5 million. However, total expenses for the college increased by 4 per cent to $20.8 million, driven by an increase in the amortisation of capital assets. As a result, the college ended the year with a deficit of $323,924.

BERMUDA COLLEGE
ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I now turn my attention to the Bermuda College Annual Report of 2022/23. The report clearly shows that the college is committed to its responsibility for developing and growing citizens of all backgrounds and age groups. Mr.

Speaker, student success underpins the college's mission and focus for its initiatives as many students begin or continue to pursue higher education.

The academic year 2022/23 started with a hybrid format with some classes in-person and most online. The year ended with a complete in-person environment with 583 students (240 male and 343 female students), a marginal increase from 747 *[sic]* students in 2021. By gender, the male population increased to 41 per cent, the highest in a decade. There were 440 traditional students (75 per cent of the student body), compared to 455, or 79 per cent, recorded in 2021. In light of the falling youth population, part of Bermuda College's strategy is to increase the non-traditional population on campus. There were 150 new students joining in August 2022, and in January 2023 approximately 50 new students were welcomed to the spring intake. There were 89 graduates in 2022, down 24 per cent from 2021.

Mr. Speaker, the college continued to move forward with significant accomplishments of its 2018–2024 Strategic Plan and the work of the Institutional Effectiveness Task Force, including facilitating the transition of BII goals, and funding to the college and full-ride scholarship with ABIR companies for two Bermuda College students to attend St. John's University.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda College continued to establish partnerships with overseas institutions to ensure its graduates can seamlessly transfer into the third year of a four-year degree programme. During the reporting period there were 11 Bermudian students in St. George's University's Pre-Med and Pre-Vet programmes (in Grenada, West Indies). Thomas College (Maine, USA) signed two new Bermuda College students, Mount Allison University (in New Brunswick, Canada) had four Bermuda College students enrolled, and the University of Northampton (United Kingdom) Mental Nursing had four Bermuda College graduates.

Mr. Speaker, the college's 2022/23 Financial Support Services Report indicates the disbursement of $600,906 in awards, scholarships and needs-based funding in efforts to reduce barriers to accessing financial support by increasing awareness among key stakeholders. There were 241 unique students served, 460 awards disbursed—19 per cent in merit-based funding, and 81 per cent in needs-based funding.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda College Foundation continued to secure donations and funding for the college. During the reporting period, the foundation collaborated with the college to open the Athene Career Development Centre. The foundation also supported the following infrastructure projects:

- completed the LED lighting installation project for the safety of students;
- provided equipment for the new Aquaponics laboratory;
- assisted with the installation of solar panels in Hallett Hall and West Hall; and
- provided a $100,000 donation to Bermuda College for the purchase of electric and hybrid trainer cars for the Motor Vehicle Technology programme.

Mr. Speaker, through the $75,000 capital budget grant provided by the Government, Bermuda College addressed necessary student safety and IT projects. These include replacing the fire alarm in Brock Hall, modernising the elevators in the West Hall and Faculty Centre Building, and funding the Information Technology data backup system.

Mr. Speaker, a number of achievements reflect the performance of Bermuda College, including the following:

- discussions with the Canadian Consul regarding promoting Canadian schools at the college;
- collaboration with the US Consul to increase partnerships with US colleges and universities, resulting in agreement developments with Troy University and Arizona State University;
- establishment of the first MOU partnerships with two Bermuda private schools, Warwick Academy and Chatmore British International, during the 2022 school year;
- celebration of 10 years of providing nursing education to the residents of Bermuda. Five Nursing Education Awards were given in 2022, and the college recommenced overseas clinical experience for 13 senior nursing students who spent two weeks at Lahey Hospital and Medical Center in Burlington, Boston;
- Computer Information Systems students completed an eight-week global FinTech Education programme in collaboration with the Department of Economic Development and NEXT. During this programme the students networked with C-Suite members of local FinTech companies to discuss the many opportunities available in the local market in the FinTech field.

Mr. Speaker, the college launched a presidential search in December 2022 and wound up the year with the retirement of its President, Dr. Duranda Greene, in July 2023 after 16 years of dedicated service.

Mr. Speaker, looking forward, the College is working toward the following:

- developing a new Strategic Plan as the existing one expires this year;
- completion of the presidential search and the new president in place before the start of the 2024 school year;
- launch of 50th anniversary year-long celebrations; and
- completing infrastructural repairs throughout the campus.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to take this opportunity to thank the faculty and staff at Bermuda College for their continued commitment to their mission of setting Bermuda's students on their paths to success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

UPDATE ON THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMME AND SOCIAL WORK MONTH ACTIVITIES 2024

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning. Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to provide this Honourable House with an update on the Independent Living Programme, the first of its kind to be established in Bermuda, and to share the many activities that have been planned for Social Work Month, March 2024.

The Independent Living Programme

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, March 2, 2024, marked the first anniversary of the opening of the Independent Living Programme. We have much to celebrate! This programme provides a safety net for our young adults who have aged out of the care of the Director of Child and Family Services without a transition plan. As shared before with this Honourable House, the Children Act 1998 gives the Director parental authority over the care of children from birth to 18 years whose parents are unable or unwilling to safely care for them in their own homes. At the age of 18 years these children are legally adults, and the Director no longer has the authority to provide care or make decisions on behalf of these young persons. The Independent Living Programme thus provides a 24-hour secure dormitory-style housing facility that supports these young adults through the provision of services to transition and adapt to independent living and self-responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I will provide an update on the residents living at the Garrison View facility and the operational activity of the Independent Living Programme. Mr. Speaker, last quarter of the fiscal year the Level Up programme which was announced as a 2023 Throne Speech initiative was implemented to provide our young people who are 17.5 years old with the opportunity to gradually adjust to the realities of adulting as they approach their 18th birthday. The Level Up programme provides daily hands-on life skills with hurdle support from staff. These young people are coached around decision-making and given more flexibility and experiential learning around meal planning and preparation, money management and employability.

Mr. Speaker, during the past year there were ten referrals for the Independent Living Programme of which eight were approved and two were declined (as the young adults were deemed to be unsuitable for the programme). Of the eight young persons approved, there were two males and six females. This reflects near to full capacity. Although the Garrison View can accommodate 11 young persons, it has been reduced to 9, as one room is being used for administration services while awaiting the completion of the lower-level renovations by the Bermuda Housing Corporation which will add another bedroom.

Mr. Speaker, I will share a bit of detail about the progress of some of the Garrison View residents. The very first resident of Garrison View moved in just prior to its official opening in March 2023 at the age of 19 years, but later had to leave in June due to personal reasons. Nonetheless, while at Garrison View and with the support of the programme services, they were approved for financial assistance. They had previously completed the Nursing Aid Certification and enrolled with the Department of Workforce Development. They subsequently completed the requirements to be registered with the Department of Health as a nursing assistant.

Another female youth moved in on her 18th birthday in May 2023. She was involved with another support agency and graduated in June of 2023 from high school. This resident had a work placement which was extended until the end of the first quarter of 2024. She has taken self-responsibility and has been paying rent since August of 2023. Additionally, while at Garrison View she obtained her bike licence and was able to purchase a second-hand bike for transportation.

The first Level Up participant in the Independent Living Programme graduated from high school in June and moved in in August of 2023. She registered with Workforce Development in September of 2023 and obtained employment shortly thereafter. Immediately after her 18th birthday in October 2023, she obtained her bike licence and purchased a second-hand bike. She began paying rent in November of 2023.

In October 2023, another 19-year-old female resident moved into Garrison View. With the support of the programme, she enrolled with the Department of Workforce Development and attended some of their training classes. She was initially offered a part-time job with a security firm and more recently was approved to work in one of the apprenticeship programmes with the Department of Parks.

A male resident joined the Independent Living Programme in November 2023 at the age of 20. He is currently a Private with the Bermuda Regiment. With the programme's support, he enrolled with the Department of Workforce Development and began a three-month apprenticeship in January of 2024.

Each of these residents will continue to participate in the programme's life skills groups. Our young persons each have individual goals that are reviewed every three months to determine if the goals have been achieved and whether new ones need to be identified.

One resident recently identified a new goal and enrolled in an online approved childcare certification programme. Mr. Speaker, the residents of Garrison View are on a journey and are determined to reach a point of independent living through full-time permanent employment. The Independent Living Programme will provide them with the needed life skills to achieve this.

Mr. Speaker, let me now share about the operational activity of the Independent Living Programme, which offers more than just housing. Throughout 2023 there was collaboration with community partners to provide sessions on various life skill topics for the residents such as meal planning, grocery shopping, legal matters, utility bills, actions/consequences, frequent challenges that young adults face, security and safety, job sustainability and self-care. The goal of these sessions is to enhance as much as possible the life skills of the residents.

Mr. Speaker, budgeting tends to be a big challenge for the Garrison View residents, so the Independent Living Programme has partnered with Pocket Change which will provide money management sessions during the first quarter of 2024/25. Pocket Change is a business that provides financial education for youth with the goal of empowering future generations to be dream-builders and asset owners.

Mr. Speaker, staffing for the Independent Living Programme has been enhanced over the last year with progress and growth in several areas. The hiring of two support workers reduced the need for security services. As a result, there is no longer a need to have a security firm cover two security shifts. There is currently one security coverage provided from midnight to 8:00 am.

In February 2023 Ms. Charmaine Richardson, the assigned Coordinator to the Independent Living Programme, became certified as an Independent Living Specialist which helped to give the programme a solid start when it opened in March 2023. Also, the Assistant to the Coordinator, Ms. Zina Francis, who was on-boarded to support the programme obtained her certification as an Independent Living Specialist. Subsequently, Ms. India Ford, who began working with the Independent Living Programme in November 2023, will complete her Independent Living Specialist certification during the second quarter of 2024.

The programme's coordinator has implemented training to include basic social work assessments during the intake phase. All residents at Garrison View complete a life skills assessment which is a tool that evaluates a young person's behaviours and proficiencies required to help them develop productive lives as they strive to achieve their long-term goals. To create individualised service plans, all residents must be assessed.

Mr. Speaker, the 35th National Independent Living Conference held by Daniel Kids [Daniel Memorial, Inc.] was held in Denver, Colorado, in August 2023. This conference is designed to help professionals, clients and their respective organisations establish and maintain effective Independent Living Programmes. The presenters are experts in the field of independent living who lead training sessions, workshops, panel discussions, and leadership and team-building activities dedicated to the needs of youth who are currently in care and about to transition. The conference offers innovative ideas on how youth can adapt to life's ever-changing situations and be properly guided to become competent, responsible, independent adults. It also provides networking and community-building opportunities. I am pleased that Mrs. Charmaine Richardson, the Independent Living Programme Coordinator, and Ms. Zina Francis, the Level Up resident, were able to experience this conference, participate in the training sessions, learn about other overseas programme offerings and engage in networking.

Mr. Speaker, as a part of the Performance Quality Improvement process (PQI), the Independent Living Programme conducted a year-in-review which included a satisfaction survey of the residents. Residents' feedback was encouraging. They expressed gratitude for the programme and appreciated staff respect and support. When asked how they felt about being residents at Garrison View, they responded that *it felt like home*. Residents also commented that they are thankful that the programme opened, as they literally had nowhere else to go and that it has made the transition to independence a lot easier.

Mr. Speaker, without the Independent Living Programme, all of the residents would have been homeless and would have experienced a sense of hopelessness. They have limited to no family support. Two are orphaned, having lost both parents; one has lost one parent; and the others have no connection with either parent. They have described the programme as a saving grace that has provided them the opportunity to have a stable home environment and support as they navigate the challenges and demands of adulting.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank the Department of Child and Family Services, the staff of the Independent Living Programme, the community partners and all who have played a part in the success of the first anniversary of the Independent Living Programme.

Social Work Month

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I now turn to Social Work Month recognised each year during the month of March. The National Association of Social Workers' [NASW's] theme for 2024 is *Empowering Social Workers! Inspiring Action, Leading Change*—a fitting theme that describes what social workers across the Island do daily.

Mr. Speaker, let me highlight the activities that have been scheduled in recognition of Social Work Month 2024. The Department of Child and Family Services will be hosting training and development

opportunities for social workers in the department, social workers across the Island and community stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Thursday, March 14, the Department of Child and Family Services celebrated its social workers with an appreciation luncheon. The theme for the luncheon is *Social Workers . . . We See you; We Celebrate you; We Salute you!* A thank-you for all of the tireless work that they do caring for and protecting children so that the future of Bermuda's most precious resources remains bright.

Next week Monday, March 18, through Friday, March 22, the Department of Child and Family Services will be hosting training for staff conducted by Dr. Eboni Webb, who is a highly rated international certified trainer in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). Dr. Webb earned her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Minnesota School of Professional Psychology. She began her clinical work as assistant clinical director and programme director at Mental Health Systems, one of the largest providers of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy in the United States. Dr. Webb has developed two specialised Dialectical Behaviour Therapy treatment programmes for clients with developmental disabilities and borderline intellectual functioning.

On Wednesday, March 27, Dr. Vaughn Gay, a licensed professional counsellor and renowned mental health practitioner who provides comprehensive psychological and mental health services, education and advocacy for underserved communities and underrepresented populations in Metro Atlanta, will conduct workshops for DCFS staff. The next day Thursday, March 28, in recognition that ongoing community advocacy, collaboration and partnership are absolutely essential for social workers, DCFS is gifting the opportunity for all of its stakeholders and community partners to attend an informative and dynamic workshop facilitated by Dr. Gay. This workshop will conclude the celebration of Social Work Month.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage my honourable colleagues, along with all of the citizens of Bermuda, to salute our social workers as they continue to Inspire Action and Lead Change. We must highlight the significance of social workers and their collective contributions to helping and advocating on behalf of all of those whom they serve. Please join me in wishing all social workers a happy Social Work Month!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers this morning.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: You know what? I forget it is you, Minister Furbert. Minister Furbert, you do have yours, yes? I ticked you off that time as being completed.

Sorry, Members. We have the second Minister Furbert who has a Statement this morning.

Minister Furbert.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good morning to residents and citizens, and of course good morning to Members of Parliament in this Honourable House.

PUBLIC SERVICE VEHICLE REFORM

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I would like to present an update on the ongoing initiatives concerning the Public Service Vehicle Reform, commonly referred to as the Modernisation and Harmonisation of the Public Vehicle Service Industry.

Mr. Speaker, understanding the background of this endeavour is crucial to appreciate the current status and the path that has led us to this point today. Mr. Speaker, in 2019 the Government introduced the Transport Green Paper serving as a consultative document designed to present options and generate discussions for input into policy formulation. Following extensive consultations and background, the discussions initiated in the Green Paper have evolved into recommendations outlining the Government's policy or proposed policy on specific issues potentially leading to legislative changes. Our aim is to propel progress in this direction.

During the consultation process, a comprehensive study was conducted involving consultations with 137 stakeholders from key business groups. These stakeholders represent a diverse array of organisations and entities involved in transportation reform in Bermuda. Industry associations including the Bermuda Taxi Association and Bermuda Hotel Association demonstrated a vested interest in transportation reforms. The study also encompassed local businesses, tourism-related organisations like the Bermuda Tourism Authority, cruise lines including Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Lines, educational institutions such as Bermuda College and the Ministry of Education, along with community groups and municipalities which were also a part of the study.

Mr. Speaker, the Transport Green Paper outlined the top 25 desired outcomes for consideration. Notably, it was recognised the availability of transport during specific periods, specifically during the afternoons, evenings, and on weekends and holidays, consistently had gaps. Therefore, the Transport Green Paper drove the modernisation and harmonisation of the public service vehicle [PSV] industry which has multifaceted approaches. The key principles are as follows:

1. customer focus;
2. standardisation in fees and requirements;
3. optimal use of technology; and

4. increase in ride capacity.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share that the Cabinet has approved increases to the taxi industry rates, and [changes] will be implemented effective April 1, 2024. Mr. Speaker, following are the approved increases in rates and charges for the taxi Industry:

1. An increase in rate 1 and 2 of 15 per cent:
    i. Rate 1 mileage initial charge will increase from $5.15 to $5.93, and for each subsequent one-fifth of a mile or part thereof will increase from $0.55 to $0.64;
    ii. Rate 2, waiting time. First five minutes before commencement of journey will remain free of charge, and each subsequent period of three minutes will increase from $1.60 to $1.84;
2. A change in the hours that Rate 3 is applicable:
    i. Rate 3 at 25 per cent surcharge, which currently occurs between the hours of midnight and 6:00 am, and the taxi carries up to four passengers, will change to 10:00 pm and 6:00 am;
    ii. Rate 3 at 25 per cent surcharge, which currently occurs between the hours of 6:00 am and midnight, and the taxi carries five to seven passengers, will change to 6:00 am and 10:00 pm;
    iii. Rate 3 at a 50 per cent surcharge, which currently occurs between the hours of midnight and 6:00 am or occurs on a public holiday, and the taxi carries five to seven passengers, will change to 10:00 pm and 6:00 am.
3. Tour rates for sightseeing will increase as follows:
    i. 4-seater taxi, one to four passengers, currently at $50 will increase to $60;
    ii. 7-seater taxi:
        - one to four passengers, $50 will increase to $60;
        - five to seven passengers, currently at $70 will increase to $85;
4. The Motor Taxi Regulations 1952 section 6, Maximum number of passengers, section 6(3) states, "For the purpose of this regulation, a child in arms shall not be counted as a passenger, and two children under the age of twelve years shall count as one passenger." [The words] "age of twelve" will be revised to "under the age of five years." This change will allow the charges related to passenger count to be more equitable for the vehicle space used by two persons.

Mr. Speaker, in conjunction with the increase in rates, the Cabinet has approved the Ministry of Transport to launch a pilot ridesharing programme that will increase the current capacity of transportation for our residents and visitors during peak times. By way of background, the rideshare industry has experienced global growth and evolution in recent years, transforming the way people commute and travel. Ridesharing, also known as ride-hailing or transportation network services, refers to the on-demand service that connects passengers with operators through mobile applications in their private vehicles.

This innovative concept has gained popularity worldwide due to its convenience, cost-effectiveness and user-friendly interface. These advancements have made it possible for passengers to seamlessly request a ride at their convenience, track the operator's arrival and make cashless payments.

Mr. Speaker, as part of this initiative the Cabinet has authorised the grant of a maximum of 150 new permits to be known as *rideshare permits*. This permit granted to the holder of a Public Service Vehicle licence will come with a nominal fee of $1,000. The rideshare permit will be easily identifiable through a designated logo affixed to the vehicle's windscreen signifying compliance with established guidelines.

Moreover, as the purpose of this change is to ensure additional transportation capacity during peak times, a rideshare-permitted vehicle will be permitted to operate daily from the 1st of April through the 30th of September. During the rest of the year, rideshare vehicles will be permitted only on weekends, starting Friday, and public holidays. One crucial condition of the rideshare permit is that permit-holders are only allowed to be dispatched through an online [platform], ensuring a controlled and orderly ridesharing service. It is our intention, Mr. Speaker, to put this programme in place for a one-year pilot period so that adjustments can be made to ensure that we enhance the transportation.

Mr. Speaker, this new initiative will be under the oversight of the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board. Legislation will be revised to officially recognise and regulate ridesharing as a legitimate mode of transportation, aligning it seamlessly with existing regulations governing public service vehicles. The proposed expansion of the Act encompasses regulations for the ridesharing industry, guaranteeing a safe, reliable and efficient service for both drivers and passengers.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, modernisation is necessary if we are to be a successful tourism jurisdiction and is pivotal for advancing transportation infrastructure and systems. By embracing modern technologies and practices, we can enhance efficiency, safety and sustainability across all modes of transportation.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a conclusion of Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers. We will now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: Members, there are no written questions. Based on Statements this morning there are questions that Members would like to put to Ministers in reference to those Statements. The first this morning is to the Minister of Economy and Labour from the Opposition Whip.

Opposition Whip, would you like to put your question now?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Good morning, colleagues.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: RETAINING THE LOCAL WORKFORCE

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: And thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. On page 5, the Minister mentioned about a Global Research study that was done some time ago, maybe a year or so ago. And further on down in that particular paragraph, the Ministry of Economy and Labour said "based on the results, will develop policies to reduce the drivers of forced migration . . ." Good news to hear this morning from the Minister. However, I know he has been doing this for some time. So my question is, What does he believe might be some of those drivers of forced migration for Bermudians?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, according to Standing Orders, that question is out of order. As a result it is asking me for my opinion and not a matter of fact.

The Speaker: The Minister has indicated, and the guidelines do indicate that we keep to questions that are factually based rather than opinion based. And it would be inappropriate to give an opinion rather than a factual response. Yes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that guidance [from you], and from the Minister.

Have there been any surveys that have already been done that point to some of those drivers of forced migration for Bermudians?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am aware of surveys that have been done by different research authorities within Bermuda. The surveys would indicate that persons leave for a number of reasons; not specific reasons but it would be general economic reasons. The other areas in the survey would be for better opportunities, educational purposes and being unable to find a job. But what we want to do is where you say that persons are leaving for economic reasons, really break down what those economic reasons are, identify them and try to mitigate against a further trend of persons moving overseas.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Second question?

The Speaker: Second question.

QUESTION 2: RETAINING THE LOCAL WORKFORCE

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. In the middle of the paragraph it says, "To gain a full understanding of whether such emigration is happening and why . . ." Is the Minister aware of any survey that has been done that points to the fact that emigration is happening, as he said earlier in his Statement, and put us in a position of being on a cliff's edge?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am aware of surveys that have been done that state that emigration is happening. The Ministry of Economy and Labour did associate ourselves with the Global Research survey in December, which household members of that survey indicated that emigration was taking place. We are not questioning whether or not emigration is taking place. What we need to identify is the degree to which emigration is taking place outside of a small survey.

The cliff edge that we are talking about is not a result of emigration. The cliff edge that we are talking about is primarily a result of our ageing population and our low birth rates. Emigration simply adds to that problem that currently exists within our society.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: I think we have got a bug in the House.

Yes.

Supplementary? All questions are complete?

Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Member, for your questions. We now move on.

The next Statement that has generated questions this morning is the Statement from the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Minister, MP—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

MP Jackson, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: UPDATE ON THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMME & SOCIAL MONTH ACTIVITIES 2024

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to congratulate the Minister and the Ministry for the first anniversary of the Independent Transitional Living Programme at Garrison House. I think that is a wonderful, wonderful accomplishment. I just have a couple of questions.

My first question to the Minister is, I am just curious whether the Ministry has a road-map or is monitoring the influx of new candidates or new applicants for transitional living. And my reason for asking is just to be able to monitor or expect, have an expectation for the numbers of young adults who may wish to apply to live at the Independent Living Centre.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. We are following the potential persons who would age out and would be in need of the use of the Independent Living Programme. Please keep in mind that this is a voluntary option. So our young people may choose another route. But, yes, we are monitoring.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I have one other question.

The Speaker: Second question?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

QUESTION 2: UPDATE ON THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMME & SOCIAL MONTH ACTIVITIES 2024

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Just a quick question. Is there a particular length, a maximum length of time that young adults can stay at the Garrison House?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, we take young persons again between the ages of 17.5 up until the age of 24. So that time period can vary depending on how quickly they go through the different programmes. But that is the time period. So they come in at 17.5. They can stay until the age of 24.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No. Thank you very much. Thank you to the Minister.

The Speaker: That completes your questions.

Minister, that completes the questions for you on that Statement this morning.

Members, the last Statement that has questions today is the Statement by the Minister of Transport.

Minister, MP Jackson would like to put questions to you.

MP Jackson.

QUESTION 1: PUBLIC SERVICE VEHICLE REFORM

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, my first question: The Minister mentioned that with the rideshare there would be the use of an app. And I was just curious what app that would be?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Every single one of the specialty companies, there are four of them, each have that particular app. But the specialty companies currently exist.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes.

Would the Minister name those, please?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I do not remember all of the names. But I know the Bermuda Taxi Association, Hitch, the BIU has an app. And then there is one more which I cannot recall.

The Speaker: Supplementary or any additional questions?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I have a supplementary on the rideshare.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Were the taxi drivers consulted on this rideshare decision?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, they were.

The Speaker: Supplementary? I mean, that is your second supp. Do you have a second question?

QUESTION 2: PUBLIC SERVICE VEHICLE REFORM

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes. And with the rideshare again, is this going to be something that is either seasonal, or are there designated areas around the Island where the rideshare will be available versus Island-wide?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Statement said seasonal.

The Speaker: Any further questions?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No further questions.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members, that brings us to a close of the Question Period for this morning. We will now move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to—

Madam Attorney General, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Kathy Lynn Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to extend this morning, Mr. Speaker, birthday greetings to the one and only MP Ianthia Simmons-Wade, who is celebrating her 90th birthday today!

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Which one?

Hon. Kathy Lynn Simmons: If looks could kill, I am sure I would be dead, Mr. Speaker. Notwithstanding my joy that she has reached a milestone birthday—every day is a milestone—I would love to [say that] I am so proud of her because not only is she a seniors advocate, she lives what she preaches. She has continued to provide advice and assistance to our seniors throughout the Island. In constituency 25, she not only talks, she practices everything that she preaches.

And I can say on behalf of my constituents in 36 whom she has assisted, *Thank you, thank you and thank you.* She is the epitome of ageing well, and I wish her all of the joy and best wishes and blessings that she rightfully deserves on her special day.

And before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, I would like to personally extend my congratulations to our new Clerk, whom I have worked with as a Parliamentary Counsel, as the Permanent Secretary, as a Member of the Senate and now as a Member of this House. He is beyond compare in terms of discharging the responsibilities of his post. He brings a calm; he brings vast institution of knowledge. And we are all in safe hands.

Congratulations, Mr. Somner!

I will associate everyone.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other—

MP De Silva.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to be associated with the congratulations for our fellow MP, Ms. Ianthia Simmons-Wade, who just happens to be a constituent of mine. But also for—I believe the Attorney General said *her 19th birthday,* which is—

[Inaudible interjections]

Some Hon. Members: It is nine-zero. Nine-zero.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And, Mr. Speaker, if I may, with your indulgence I would like to do something—the brain-child of my brother and colleague, Mr. Christopher Famous—do something that is unprecedented, I believe the first time in the history in this House. I would like to present the Honourable MP with a card that has been signed by all Members present. So with your indulgence, I would like to skip across the floor, hand this to her, and give her a big, wet kiss.

The Speaker: You can do it after you complete your remarks. Your remarks are finished? Yes? Okay.

Anyone else?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will stick with the congratulatory tone before I move to something a little bit more sombre. But I would ask this Honourable House to please send a letter of congratulations to the Rotary Clubs of Bermuda, who celebrate their centennial anniversary of their establishment in Bermuda today! So maybe they have not been around as long as MP Simmons-Wade, but you know . . .

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: But, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I joined their District Governor, Reverend Dr. Russell, who was visiting the Island and planted a tree on Camden Grounds to commemorate the occasion. I would like to certainly associate all Honourable Members with

this, as I know that all persons know the impact that Rotary has had around the world. There are 218 placed around the world, but significant in Bermuda, [with] a number of interactions with young persons, a number of scholarships for young persons, a number of community service efforts.

But I would also certainly like to recognise the Government Whip, Honourable Member from constituency number 26, MP Neville Tyrrell, who is a past President of one of the Rotary Clubs of Bermuda and is someone who has been involved in a lot of various organisations, but certainly this one. And I wanted to make sure I especially recognised him during this particular time, Mr. Speaker.

Moving on, I would of course love to be associated with the remarks that were given to one of our own, and I wish MP Simmons-Wade a wonderful, wonderful day.

On a sad note, Mr. Speaker, one of the stalwarts in my constituency unfortunately passed away. And I wanted to rise and ask this Honourable House to send condolences to the family of the late Charles "Buster" Trott, who sadly passed away last week. Mr. Speaker. On Monday I was able to visit with his wife Frances at their home in Sunset Pass. And certainly I want to send condolences to his children, his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren, who are the same age as Nia and Ed. And certainly, I remember when I first came to the constituency he was one of those people who would have that PLP sign up on his house. His wife was telling me that he painted his house green so no one would come knocking on his door, and they would know what it was. And wherever he was, he would have the signs. Any mail that was sent would be proudly affixed to his door.

He was someone who loved cricket, loved life. And without question, Mr. Speaker, he will be missed. And I would ask the Honourable House to send a letter of condolences to his family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Any other—

MP Lister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning to the listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, on a sad note I would like to start by sending condolences—and I declare my interest, it is my aunt—to the Showers family on the loss of Louisa Barry-Showers, wife of my uncle Lavalle. And I would like to associate MP . . . I will associate the whole House, Mr. Speaker. It is always sad when you lose a family member, Mr. Speaker. So again, if we would send condolences to the family.

I would also like to associate myself, Mr. Speaker, with the comments made to celebrate the birthday of MP Simmons-Wade, on her 90th birthday.

And also to Mr. Somner for his promotion to be the full-time Clerk. In my short time in this House, Mr. Speaker, whenever I needed assistance I reached out to Mr. Somner. He has always been able to assist me, and even serving on the PAC [Public Accounts Committee] and the (I cannot remember the other board I served on), that he also was the clerk, and he served his role dutifully in that time, Mr. Speaker. So congratulations to Mr. Somner.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to declare my interest. My brother, Randall Lister, completed his first book called *On the Field for Jesus*. And I would like to again send congratulations to him. Perseverance, Mr. Speaker. He speaks about perseverance in his book. But again for him in his own experience, as he said he had the idea in 2015 and it took him some time. He started writing it actually in 2020, so over a four-year period. So again it shows that perseverance pays off. So again I would like to congratulate my brother, Mr. Speaker, Randall Lister, for writing his first book.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister Furbert, you have the floor.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to send condolences to the family of Margaret Hill[-Brown], a great lady who literally grew up a stone's throw away from my house in Hamilton Parish. And I am proud to say that she was my cousin and the Honourable Attorney General's cousin. (I did not know you were related. But good work. We will talk about that.)

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Margaret Hill[-Brown], we grew up in Hamilton Parish. We said we swam on the rocks. We hardly went to the beach in Shelly Bay Beach, but we swam just a bit of my house with the rocks. And she was a very gorgeous young lady. She won the most photogenic at the Miss World Contest of 1970. Everybody, or at least around my age, recognised this beautiful lady in Hamilton Parish. So again I bring condolences to the family. Her funeral is next Friday. And yours truly, her cousin, will be singing at her funeral. So all Hamilton Parish again will be out.

I bring another congratulations to another well-established Bermudian in Hamilton Parish, a gentleman, that is, Mr. Somner (we have already congratulated him) who has reached the stunning position as

the Clerk. We all remember Mr. Somner when he first entered politics many years ago being with this Honourable House. And I have seen him grow in himself.

Again I want be associated with Iantha (the Honourable Member), who has, as the Attorney General said—at least what the Attorney General said and I believe what the Attorney General said is true, which is that now we cannot give birthdays.

[[Inaudible interjections] and laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But she does not look it. She looks only 16. Only looks 16. So again I would like to be associated with those remarks.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

MP Caesar, you have your three minutes.

Ms. Crystal Caesar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also add my congratulations to Rotary International. I know of the great works that they have done. And in supporting young people, traveling overseas of which I was one of the recipients some years ago. (I will not say the year; I would be ageing myself.) But I was one of the first students to actually attend what was the Soviet Union then as a Rotary student. It changed my life—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Ms. Crystal Caesar: It changed my life immeasurably and happened to give me insight into all that we have in Bermuda and gave me an appreciation for that.

I also would like to say congratulations to my very first cousin, Khano Smith. As you all know, he recently brought his football club to Bermuda to train. And he will be having his inaugural match this coming week. And I just wanted to send congratulations to him.

Sadly, however, I now move to bringing condolences for [the family of] Mr. Gladwyn Erroll Zuill, one of my constituents. He was born up there on Hope Bay Level in Sandys, but he served many years at BELCO. In fact, at his homegoing service on Tuesday there was an impressive 44 years of service that he gave to BELCO as a linesman. He was well remembered by many of his colleagues who attended his homegoing service. He leaves to mourn his daughter Sasha and son-in-law Blake, honorary grandson Taylor Lambert and his grand-dog Brian. But he was quite handy, had such a green thumb. He was also brother to my godfather, Tawky Zuill, as well.

So I sadly remember him. But again he was a quiet soul, but a very pivotal one to all who knew and loved him. And thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Caesar.

MP Simmons, Jahmal Simmons, you have the floor.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is quite a few of us. There are quite a few Simmonses in this House.

I would like to be joined and associated with all of the comments by the previous speakers, and specifically join in the birthday celebrations and greetings for our honourable colleague, the Honourable Ianthia Simmons-Wade. I will not make any jokes about age because she is from the generation that can still give me licks. So I am going to leave her alone.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: But I am really on my feet to join in the congratulations to young Randall Lister on his book. I have got to say that this is a young man I had the pleasure of first meeting when I first became elected in 2014. And what I have admired about him is there is a level of creativity and innovation that he holds within him, from conducting tours for tourists up and down Railway Trail, writing has always been a part of his passion. And even when he was caterer at Cambridge Beaches, service, community and giving back are a part of who he is. And I am very proud to see the way that this young man has progressed. And I look forward to getting—buying—a paid, signed copy of his book.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Simmons.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Minister Weeks, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off on a sad note. I have had the loss of a few of my constituents. One, Ms. Gloria Carey, the mother of former Permanent Secretary, Wayne Carey. She lived a long life, and my condolences go out to her [family].

Mr. Speaker, another one of my constituents, Ms. Iona Roach. Those who are sports buffs would probably know that she was a softball icon, Mr. Speaker, Big Blue Machine and social club Jets back in the day before many of us knew ourselves. She was an icon in the softball arena. So my condolences go out to her family, and may she rest in peace.

Mr. Speaker, on a happier note I would like to be associated with the comments for birthday greetings and wishes for MP Simmons-Wade. I will make no jokes. I think she is what has been heralded already. I just want to say *Happy Birthday* to her and wish her a happy day.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to be associated with the comments for our new Clerk, Mr. Clark Somner. For as long as I have been here, I think he has been around the House and has always been willing to help whenever we needed him.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, I want to be associated with the remarks for Khano Smith. A Dandy Town boy, he came through, he has done well. And he turned professional from our football farm out there in Dandy Town, and now he is a football coach. I wish him well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Weeks.

MP Famous.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I would like to start with some good news. Today, this week marks the 10th anniversary of the Sargasso Sea Commission, which has put Bermuda on the map as a leader in ocean conservation.

Mr. Speaker, more directly to the House of Lister, I read in detail the article by your son Randall. And he kind of put all of the blame on his brother for saying, *You talk too much! Go ahead and write a book.*

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: So congratulations for his persuasiveness, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give some condolences for a former employee of BELCO, Mr. Arthur Durrant. He was a loyal employee, maybe 30 or 40 years. Mr. Leon Robinson of Happy Valley. I want to associate with Ms. Carey, who is one of the matriarchs of Frizzle Hill. Also Ms. Hortense Warthen, who is the aunt of our Government Whip, MP Tyrrell. And someone I have to call *Uncle,* the father of Nicky [Clarance] Saunders, Mr. Leon Saunders of the Saunders and Francis clan, a genuine pond dog.

Mr. Speaker, this week also marks the eighth anniversary of what can easily, undoubtedly be called the greatest gathering of people power in my generation. Mr. Speaker, it was not your House at the time, but thousands of Bermudians gathered at the House just across the road to stand up against the OBA's plan to give away status. Mr. Speaker, it was persons of all ages, all races, all creeds. The message that they gave to the then-Government was that *This is our country, and you cannot legislate giving away our birth right.* So I want to applaud those thousands of persons who came out, some of whom have gone on to glory. And I want to remind Bermudians that the mindset still exists. And this Government will stand up for you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: First I want to congratulate you on having two *good* sons and an MP.

[Laughter]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: I know Randall wrote that book, and I know he had good assistance from my cousin, Russell. So we want to congratulate Randall on doing something . . . I am sure he will write some more. I am sure that this has to make his parents proud.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to be associated with the remarks concerning Clerk Clark Somner. As you know, he is from the great Parish of Hamilton down there in Bailey's Bay area. He is the choice, the ideal choice. Very competent, very cool, calm and collected. He is the person. They should have him in every parliament in the world, he is that good. And I am proud to know that he is from the parish that I stay in, Hamilton Parish. And Zane said he went to school with him. But Clark looks much, much younger than Zane.

[Laughter]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: But again we want to congratulate Randall and my cousin Clark. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Does any other Member?

MP Wade . . . MP Ming.

Mrs. Renee Ming: You are renaming me this morning, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Renamed you that time.

Mrs. Renee Ming: It has got to be a St. George's name, though.

The Speaker: All right. I know you already down in St. George's, anyhow. So that is fine.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

On a sad note, Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring condolences and prayers of the House to the Douglas family. I stood here not too long ago and mentioned Mary Basden. And her brother, Archibald Douglas, has now passed. So we definitely want to keep that family in our thoughts and prayers at this time. Associating MP Foggo with this.

I would also like to be associated with the comment for Mr. Somner. Congratulations! I have worked with him since my time from the Senate to the House of

Assembly. And he has always made the job a little easier, and we thank you for that.

Also the comments for Randall Lister. Well done! Well done, Mr. Speaker. Well done, Mr. Lister.

And I would also like to congratulate a young lady, Mr. Speaker. She is a Bermudian, but she is living in the UK at this time. And she is named LaShanda Seaman. She will be the daughter of Dorothy-ann Seaman. She recently has taken up a job in Esters UK as the Associate Director. LaShanda has a skill set, Mr. Speaker, that I hope is one that we as a country could benefit from. If you could allow me to just read.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Because it says, "She brings a wealth of experience in delivery of public dialogue, citizen juries and assemblies and training in methods of DNI. Lashanda is passionate about incorporating innovative digital methodology, engaging under-represented audiences, as well as chatting in EDNI to her research designer methodology." And that is a skill set, Mr. Speaker, that you do not see often. She is, I am sure, right now gaining valuable experience while she is in the UK. But I do hope that we as Bermuda benefit from what she learns and how far she goes in a very short space of time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Ming.

MP Foggo.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes. I think it would be remiss of me not to stand and congratulate our Clerk, Clark Somner, who has acquitted himself in his duties first as Deputy Clerk and second as Acting Clerk and now, no doubt, as the official Clerk. He has been excellent in his role as Clerk, always helping, superb when it came to the rules. (He may have made a mistake here and there, I am sure.)

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Oh, no. He is not perfect.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: But he has been superb. And a gentleman second to none. So I want to thank him for all of the expertise that he has brought to this portfolio.

And I would like to be associated as was done with the comments from the Member for constituency 1 regarding the passing of Mr. Archibald [Douglas], who was formerly one of my constituents, and I will say a very colourful character. He will be missed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Foggo.

MP Simmons-Wade.

Mrs. Ianthia Simmons-Wade: Yes. Mr. Speaker, first I would like to say—

The Speaker: Would you require a little extra time to respond to all of these comments?

Mrs. Ianthia Simmons-Wade: Probably, probably.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mrs. Ianthia Simmons-Wade: I will say, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much to my colleagues within the House. I am between the age of 60 and 90. I will not specify what it is.

[Laughter]

Mrs. Ianthia Simmons-Wade: Do I need extra time? I may take a bit of extra time.

First of all I would like to congratulate all of the individuals who have turned 65. One of my colleagues, the Premier—the *Premier—*

The Speaker: Did you turn 65 too?

Mrs. Ianthia Simmons-Wade: No.

The Speaker: Oh, okay. I was just checking.

Mrs. Ianthia Simmons-Wade: The Premier, in speaking to me earlier mentioned that since the last election 100 of his constituents have turned 65. We have an ageing population. I am going to take this opportunity to wish birthday wishes to some of my constituents. As you can see, the numbers are great for over 65. One, two, three, four, five people have turned 65 in the last week. Kevin Montlin, whom we all know; Karen Wolffe; Kevin "Sonny" Astwood; Richard Lindow. French Mulch turned 88. Cynthia Ben-Leman turned 75; Randolph Trott turned 75; and Delia Henderson turned 87.

So I take this opportunity to share with all of the seniors sitting in this House, all of the listening audience who are [listening to] this House, to let them know that we as a Government on both sides of this House will be here to work in the best interests of all of our seniors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Simmons-Wade.

Would any other Member like to make a contribution at this time?

None other.

I would just like to add a couple of comments on the back of that. MP Simmons-Wade, I am glad you clarified that. It is somewhere between 60 and 90 and not 90, because I can remember being in high school with you even though you were a few years ahead of me.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: So I wanted to make sure I had not lost track of my age! So thank you for clearing that up. And I wish you well on your birthday today.

With that said, on behalf of my son I would like to thank you for the congratulations that were offered to him. I know that he will greatly appreciate your remarks.

And on a sad note I would like to be associated with the condolences that were expressed on the passing of Mr. Durrant and Mr. Zuill both from the West End. I have known them both most of my life. And both were employed at BELCO for quite some time. So I am sure their loss has been felt in many different areas.

And I would also like to be associated with the remarks to the family on the loss of Ms. Roach. And someone said it may have been before our time, but I do slightly remember the Big Blue Machine. And I knew that she was one of those who was very effective in the softball area in that realm.

And, Minister Furbert, you mentioned your cousin. I remember the Miss Bermuda era from the 1970s. And I was sad to see that she has passed.

I would just like to add my remarks to those comments. With that, we will move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Speaker: There is one Bill to be introduced this morning. And Minister Furbert will introduce it on behalf of the Minister of Health.

BILL

FIRST READING

BERMUDA HEALTH COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I am introducing this Bill on behalf of the Honourable Kim Wilson, Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting: the Bermuda Health Council Amendment Act 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There is actually a Notice of Motion in the name of the Minister of Cabinet Office.

Minister, would you like to present your Notice of Motion?

MOTION

ESTABLISHMENT OF A PARLIAMENTARY JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE AND REVIEW MATTERS SURROUNDING THE CYBERATTACK ON GOVERNMENT IT SYSTEMS SEPTEMBER 2023

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that at the next day of meeting I will move that the following resolution be approved:

WHEREAS the Government has undertaken in the 2023 Throne Speech to "strike a Joint Select Committee of both Houses to inquire into and make recommendations arising from September's cyberattack";

BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House approves the establishment of a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee to examine and review matters surrounding the cyberattack on government IT systems in September 2023, and to report to this House its findings and recommendations in due course."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

No other motions. We will move on.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: Members, when we concluded business on Monday, the Committee had risen to report progress and sought leave to sit again to conclude the matters of the budget that had been discussed the previous couple of weeks. And we are now going to resume into Committee so that the conclusion of that matter can be conducted this morning.

I am going to call on the Premier to move us into Committee. And again for the listening audience, once we go into Committee the Speaker will be out of the House and the House will be in the hands of the Panel of Chairs. And one of the members of the panel will sit in the chair to lead us. I believe it is MP Foggo who will lead us once we get in.

Premier, would you do the necessary?

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resolve itself into Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2024/25.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

MP Foggo, will you assume the chair.

House in Committee at 11:48 am

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024/25

The Chairman: We are now in Committee of Supply for consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25.

I call on the Minister of Finance and Premier. Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, noting that the heads have been approved during the debate, I move that the Current Account Estimates, the Capital Development Estimates and the Capital Acquisition Estimates be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Current Account Estimates, the Capital Development Estimates and the Capital Acquisition Estimates be approved.

Any objections?

There being none.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

I move that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2024/25 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2024/25 be approved.

Any objections?

There being none.

[Motion carried: The Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2024/25 were considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed.]

The Chairman: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that the approval of the Estimates be reported to the House.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the approval of the Estimates be reported to the House.

Any objections?

There being none, so approved.

I call on the Speaker.

[Pause]

The Chairman: It has been approved as printed. (Sorry.)

House resumed at 11:50 am

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/25

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the [Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25] being reported to the House as printed?

There are none.

Thank you, Members.

We will now move on to the next item on the Order Paper this morning.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Oh, that is right. Yes, yes, yes, Premier. Go right ahead.

BILL

FIRST READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing a Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2024 with the Governor's recommendation signified.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move in accordance with Standing Order 28(5)(1) that under the provisions of Standing Orders 41, 12 and 42 the remaining stages of the Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2024 be taken forthwith.

The Speaker: Any objection?

There are none.

BILL

SECOND READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2024 be now read the second time in the House.

The Speaker: Any objections?

None.

[Motion carried: the Appropriation Act 2024 was read a second time.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move clauses 1 to 6, inclusive, together with Schedules A, B and C as printed be approved.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to those clauses being approved?

There are none.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 6 together with Schedules A, B and C passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Speaker: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

BILL

THIRD READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2024, which is the passage of the country's Budget, be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections to that Bill being read a third time by its title only?

There are none.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the said Bill do now pass, and we will ask for Members to stand for a roll call vote.

The Speaker: Well, I was about to say it is approved in there.

The Bill has been read for the third time by its title only. As part of the approval [process] signifying that it has passed the House, the Premier has asked for a roll call for Members in their support [of], or objection to its being read the third time and approved.

Is that what you are asking for, Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Members, a roll call has been called. It should signify the approval or non-approval. And we will give the necessary time to make sure all Members are in their seats for a roll call.

Sergeant, could you confirm the time so that all Members are? There is a two-minute timeline for Members to join us in the Chamber. If [they] are not in the Chamber at the end of that two-minute period . . . better start the clock right away for that two-minute period.

[Pause]

The Speaker: For the benefit of the listening audience, whenever there is a call for a vote in the House, we have the traditional *Aye* or *Nay* as a signification of how that vote is taken, supported or not supported. But there is also the option for three Members to rise to be able to call for a name count on any vote. That is what is taking place right now. It is a process. That processes has been exercised where they like to record names on this particular vote. And once that is done, there is a two-minute period to allow Members to be seated for that roll call. Once the two-minute period is up, if a Member is not present, they cannot enter and participate during that period. So we are almost at that stage where we will start the roll count for this particular vote.

[Pause]

The Speaker: There are 20 seconds left on the clock.

Ten seconds.

The Sergeant-at-Arms will confirm that any Member who comes now will not be allowed to participate in this particular vote.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: The clock is done.

Mr. Clerk, you can start the roll call.

The Clerk:

DIVISION

[Third reading of the Appropriation Act 2024]

Ayes: 27 **Nays: 0**

Mr. Jache Adams
Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch
Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.
Hon. E. David Burt
Ms. Crystal Caesar
Hon. Vance Campbell
Mr. L. Craig Cannonier
Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva
Hon. Michael H. Dunkley
Mr. Christopher Famous
Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo
Hon. Tinee Furbert
Hon. Wayne L. Furbert
Hon. Jason Hayward
Ms. Susan E. Jackson
Mrs. Renee Ming
Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain
Mr. Anthony Richardson
Hon. Jarion Richardson
Hon. Walter H. Roban
Mr. W. Lawrence Scott
Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons
Hon. Kathy Lynn Simmons
Mrs. Ianthia Simmons-Wade
Mr. Ben Smith
Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell
Hon. Michael A. Weeks

Absent: 8

Mr. Wayne Caines
Mr. Curtis L. Dickinson
Mr. Dennis Lister III
Mr. Scott Pearman
Mr. Scott Simmons
Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan
Mr. Jason Wade
Hon. Kim N. Wilson

The Speaker: Members, the result of the vote this morning was 27 in favour and none opposed.

[Motion carried unanimously on division: the Appropriation Act 2024 was read a third time and passed.]

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Members, that brings us to a conclusion of that matter. We will now move on to the next matter this morning.

The Clerk: No, no. He has got to do his message.

The Speaker: Yes, yes. Yes, that is right. Yes.

Premier, finish off your reading, Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely, especially when the President of the Senate is here.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: My apologies, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to our wonderful Clerk.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the following message be sent to the Senate:

MESSAGE TO THE SENATE

APPROPRIATION ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: To the Honourable President and Members of the Senate:

The House of Assembly has the honour to forward herewith the undernoted Bill for the concurrence of your House: The Appropriation Act 2024. Copies of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2024/25 are also forwarded for the information of your House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That now brings that matter to a closure. And we will now move on to the next item.

The next item this morning is the consideration of the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Regulations 2024 in the name of the Minister of Transport.

Minister, would you like to proceed with your item?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the draft Regulations entitled the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024 proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for maritime administration in the exercise of the power conferred by section 250 of the Merchant Shipping Act 2002.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

Proceed.

DRAFT REGULATIONS

MERCHANT SHIPPING (FEES) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2024

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, the Regulations for consideration before the House today are the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024. These Regulations amend the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Regulations 2023 to implement a new set of fees for the Bermuda Seafarers Medical Examination Programme (SMEP) provided by the Bermuda Shipping and Maritime Authority [BSMA], and to approve and recognise the seafarer training and education courses that may be provided by companies operating and managing ships registered in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, which entered into force in 2016, it is mandator for all seafarers to undergo a medical examination to improve and safeguard crew members' personal health and safety. In 2018 the BSMA established a Seafarers Medical Examination Programme to allow company-appointed, approved doctors [ADs] to conduct medical examinations to seafarers and issue Bermuda seafarers medical examination certificates for seafarers working on Bermuda-registered ships. Currently two Carnival brands, Princess Cruises and Carnival UK, are enrolled in the programme as approved companies operating separately.

ADs are selected in areas where there are large numbers of seafarers from different localities with no approved doctors available. Therefore, approved companies use the BSMA to fill those needs to get seafarers' medical examinations conducted at a high standard and issued in a timely manner. It is the discretion of the BSMA to offer this programme to a company, and it is a requirement for the company to have chief medical officers to oversee the programme and personal staff to administer the programme.

Mr. Speaker, during the ensuing years since [2018], the programme has evolved and expanded to 33 medical facilities with each required to be audited once in a five-year period. This has resulted in an increasing amount of administrative tasks and oversight by the BSMA that are required to monitor the programme and ensure good governance and ensure that the programme is working satisfactorily. The BSMA will soon be implementing a mechanism whereby all seafarers' medical certificates are issued through their Enterprise platform, the Bermuda Online Shipping Services, [BOSS]as the medical certificates are currently being issued by the approved companies. This will be a significant milestone in addition to the revenue generated by the issuance of seafarers' medical certificates. It will provide an online solution to the current challenge of tracking certificates across 33 issuing medical facilities, eradicate the potential fraudulent issue of certificates and ensure that no fee dodging is possible.

Utilising BOSS for the programme also provides a scalability to enable BSMA to expand the programme to include other interested companies and ensures that they may remain in control of programme output, namely, the medical certificate.

Mr. Speaker, currently there are no fees charged via the BSMA for their administrative services associated with the programme other than for the annual audits normally carried out in conjunction with other scheduled statutory audits. Therefore, following consultation with Princess Cruise Line and Carnival UK, the BSMA is seeking to implement the fees for specific services.

Mr. Speaker, the approach to maritime training is continuously evolving, and in recent years some shipping companies have been proactive by introducing and opening their own training facilities to provide the required training and supportive career development for their employees. As a result, BSMA has identified the need to support specific clients with their respective company mandate, to provide and deliver training and certificates for seafarers employed by their company. Their overarching objective is to provide well-trained seafarers and officers who will operate and manage their vessel, in addition to capacity-building and retention of certified personnel.

Mr. Speaker, employed with the BSMA are individuals who have the appropriate qualifications, technical knowledge and experience to audit and assess specific maritime training facilities for the purpose of approving the facility and training, and who can ensure training facilities meet the relevant training standard in accordance with the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers [STCS] Convention.

Mr. Speaker, to cover the cost of human resources and to administer the programmes, we have also introduced a fee for the approval and recognition of seafarers' training and education courses that may be requested by companies operating and managing ships registered in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, changes to the Regulations include in Part 1 of the Schedule, which provides for the ability to charge for the approval or recommendation of seafarers' training and education courses and any subsequent audits for the purpose of seeing whether or not the statutory requirements have been complied with. In Part 3 of the Schedule, new fees for the issue of a seafarer's medical certificate, an initial fee for approval of an Approved Seafarer Medical Examination Programme and an annual fee for administration of the SMEP have been included.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Would any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP Jackson, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is not much to say because this is a good and a safe move for us. Certainly it improves our accountability and understanding of exactly what is going on out there in the world when it comes to seafarers and their health and their medical stability, as well as the training and the safety. So not much to argue about there.

But I certainly have just a few questions for the Minister. And then one of them is around the medical certification. So if Bermuda is providing the certification through the administration of the certificates, does any liability come with that? So if something does go wrong, do we face any form of liability because we issued the medical certificate?

Then the other is just that the training involved, as I understand, is around the basic firefighting, first aid, personal survival, et cetera, which is always a very good thing. But there are so many seafarers out there, especially when we get involved with the cruise ships, so many. And just making sure that we are able to maintain that standard so that we keep an honourable level of training available for seafarers since they are representing under the Bermuda flag.

But with that, Mr. Speaker, I do not have any further questions.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other.

Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, MP Jackson.

The training is the responsibility of the companies. And that is one of the reasons why we actually do audits, to ensure that they are compliant with the necessary regulations. In regard to any liability, no. There is really no liability, provided that the company itself follows the rules and conventions that we set forward.

The Speaker: We go into committee, right? Regulations . . . Regulations, yes. That is right.

Having no further speakers, okay.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I move that the said draft Regulations be approved and a suitable message be sent to Her Excellency the Governor.

The Speaker: The Minister has asked that it be approved.

Any objections?

There are none.

The appropriate message will be sent to the Governor.

[Motion carried: The Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024 were approved.]

The Speaker: Thank you, Members, for your participation. We will now move on to the next item.

The next item is a second reading of the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 in the name of the Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs.

Minister.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the listening public, and thank you to colleagues of this House.

I move that the Bill entitled the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 be now read a second time.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Continue, Minister.

BILL

SECOND READING

VOLUNTARY REGISTRATION OF VITAL DOCUMENTS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) ACT 2024

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce the Bill entitled the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024. The Bill seeks to amend the Registrar-General (Recording of Documents) Act 1955, the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949, the Marriage Act 1944 and the Domestic Partnership Act 2018 to allow for registration of vital events that occur outside of the jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, currently under the relevant legislation—i.e., the 1944 Act, the 1949 Act, the 1955 Act and the 2018 Act—the Registrar General is empowered and required to record every birth, death, marriage, domestic partnership and name change that occurs in Bermuda. The information gathered provides continuous data on these vital events that are captured locally. The registers that are maintained for each relevant vital event contain a wealth of data that are important for national surveillance, research, directing public health, prevention and intervention strategies in Bermuda.

However, Mr. Speaker, when a birth, death, marriage, domestic partnership or name change happens outside of the country, this information is not recorded locally. For example, when a person born in Bermuda migrates overseas and later dies the data regarding their death is not returned to Bermuda. Therefore, the opportunity to utilise data which could contribute to public health prevention and intervention strategies is also lost.

Mr. Speaker, although a very small jurisdiction, Bermuda is arguably quite a valuable contributor to the world's population. And the voluntary registration of vital events or documentation for persons who possess Bermudian status, naturalised persons and their spouses and dependents represents an invaluable opportunity to extend and/or return each person's footprint back home. The voluntary registration of these documents will allow the Registry General to advance its records of vital registration by allowing opportunities for generations to not only record vital events that occur outside of Bermuda, but will also provide opportunity for the research of vital events of generations past.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill seeks to empower the Registrar General to collect, record and make available for public search or inspection, or make copy of, upon payment of prescribed fee, any documents of vital events or persons who possess Bermudian status, naturalised persons or their spouses and dependents that occur outside of the jurisdiction by amending the [1944] Act, the 1949 Act, the 1955 Act and the 2018 Act and supporting regulations such as the Government Fee Regulations 1976.

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of a voluntary registration system would allow for the return of valuable data to Bermuda and will also provide opportunity to generate revenue for the department of certified copies of births, marriages, domestic partnerships, name changes and death records that have occurred outside of Bermuda. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, once the relevant amendments come into effect, registration of any vital event that occurs outside of Bermuda will be done solely on a voluntary basis. And any persons who possess Bermudian status, naturalised persons and their spouses or dependents who reside overseas will not have to register these events if they choose not to.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 is our commitment to improve upon the vital registration service provided by introducing a robust registration system that is inclusive of and maintains records for vital events of all of Bermuda's citizens, whether they have occurred locally or in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, I now move that the Bill entitled Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 be read for a second time.

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to speak?

Opposition Whip, you have the floor.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. I guess with some of the challenges that we are having in trying to understand how many Bermudians are away. What is going on with them away? As I read through the Bill, I was still trying to figure out, exactly what are we after here. Is it just fees? Because it is voluntary. So with its being voluntary, we do not know if folks are going to take it up or not. So one of the important things is that some of this information would be vital to us as far as understanding how many people are away and the likes, being able to verify whether or not folks who are claiming on certain things . . . I do not know.

I guess one of the questions I have is, Has this come about because of complications? Where people are saying, *Well, you know. Such-and-such has passed away and we are having difficulty verifying that.* And maybe they are seeking ownership of properties that were owned by this person or not. I have no clue.

So when it says "voluntary," I was like, *Well, we should be making sure that they actually do this.* Anyone who has any form of status in Bermuda, it is vital for us to know whether or not a Bermudian is away and has had a baby who is married to a spouse who is from maybe Spain or something like that. Because we know that there could be complications, family complications if someone passes or someone is born. Who has a right to what? To even land in Bermuda.

So no real issues. It does seem to be a tightening of the net, per se, of information that quite frankly we should have of our nationals travelling abroad, living abroad and the likes. But just curious as to whether or not some of this will ever result in complications due to any number of things when properties have to be settled and the like.

The Minister did say fees. So it is obvious that this is an opportunity to gain more money for the coffers of government, which is a good thing in and of itself. I mean, the fees are not extraordinary, so it does make sense. But again just trying to understand where the Minister is going. Maybe there is a long-term goal here as far as gathering this information. It would be important to know whether or not the Minister has any thoughts about long-term as to whether or not this particular Bill is after a specific type of information or involving the population of Bermuda and the movement of ourselves.

So with that in mind, I will sit down. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time? Any other?

There are none.

Minister.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I actually thank you for the contribution of the Honourable Member of the Opposition. And I am not looking to be facetious in any way. In many ways the Honourable Member's submission answered many of the questions. And I am not, again, trying to be in any way disparaging, but for all of the reasons that he raised questions is exactly why this is being done.

This is not a fee-generation exercise. This is a data exercise. And yes, there—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Speaker, I have complimented the Honourable Member on his submission. He has the answers for all of the reasons that he raised questions about and exactly why this legislation is being brought.

The experience that successive administrations had with the registration and recording of vital information about our population has been a very paper-based and a very straightforward requirement. But the world around us has changed. Our people who are resident here are in themselves moving. And this by law has only been an exercise that the law could empower to be done on-Island. There was no power to extract this information from or collect it or receive it from our citizens outside of the jurisdiction. The law does not have that capacity. We are creating that capacity for all of the very reasons and questions that the Honourable Member raised.

And I know under his voice he said, *Well, it wasn't said.* Well, I am saying it now, because his submissions actually raised all of the important questions. We do need to have these data. It does help in a variety of ways because the data collected by the registry are being used for many more things. Our society has become more complicated, has become more advanced. And some of the issues that we dealt with compared to years ago are different.

You know, fundamentally, the process of recording births, deaths, marriages and other vital events was very simple. And even though at one point people just used to . . . like when their baby was born, they just walked and went to the Registrar and recorded it, you know. It was just a very straightforward process.

But as we know, the needs for information around our citizenry have become a lot more important than just recording. It is used to having better understandings of our conditions, of our trends, of our habits and pertaining as was said in my brief around health policy, government policy. It is certainly data that are shared with the Department of Statistics, which is under my other honourable colleague, Minister Hayward, to have a good, solid picture of who we are, what is going on with us and where we are going.

So for all of the Bermudians, residents and [those] who are all part of those combinations of relationships that I have mentioned, many of them because of the ease of travel and the ease of migration find themselves being born here and living somewhere else. And things happen in their lives. But these are all a part of the larger Bermudian tapestry. Because what happens with them will allow us to better understand the trends, the habits and the patterns of our community. And this is important in a modern world. We live in a global community.

And this is nothing uncommon from what other jurisdictions do. As we well know, even in other jurisdictions they perhaps do, but they have a greater capacity than we do. And they perhaps have laws that have an extra-territorial reach and do require a level of recording by their citizens abroad, particularly to do other things other than just record births, deaths and marriages. But that information is required for other types of activity which are not related to the law that I am bringing here today.

And as we advance as a community, we are finding clearly that information about our citizens and those who are connected with our citizens abroad, for the purposes of recording is important. And this particular piece of legislation will give the capacity. I cannot speak to how this might evolve in the immediate, and I will discuss with the Registrar and my technical officer what will be done as to how we will ensure that information that has been recorded in the past is actually extracted. Maybe we will have to find a way to perhaps reach out to other registrars around the world in areas particularly where we find that Bermudians have settled to see if we can extract information that can help close some gaps.

Also, as the Honourable Member said, often issues of property and ownership and these things do occur. And I can speak to circumstances, and I am sure we all can in this House, where we have registered property, in particular constituencies where perhaps it is like derelict and no one knows where the descendants of the actual last recorded owner are. We *hear* that they are overseas. And even the best efforts to find them just do not actually pan out. And then you find a property that just sits derelict, and then you have to go through a legal process to settle the estate or the affairs of that property. I have seen this in my own district, and I am sure other Members have seen it as well, Mr. Speaker.

So, yes, this will help in the long term and with now digitisation. But I can tell you that the Registrar is going through a process of digitising more of their systems. This will allow over time, I believe, for those persons who move abroad to actually do these types of things digitally. They can go online and carry out the proper registration and not have to be burdened with trying to write out paper and send it back to Bermuda. So this is moving forward to accommodate a vital need not only of the Registrar, but also of our own people to record the events of their lives, their vital events so that they can be relevant back here in Bermuda for any relevant business they might have with their family who live in Bermuda and for themselves.

So, Mr. Speaker, I do believe I have covered all the bases of all of the questions and concerns that were raised. So I do move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The Minister has moved that the Bill be committed.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Deputy Speaker.

House in Committee at 12:27 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

VOLUNTARY REGISTRATION OF VITAL DOCUMENTS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) ACT 2024

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of the whole for further consideration of the Bill entitled the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024.

Minister and Deputy Premier Roban, you have the floor.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I know the time is close. I am prepared to move all of these clauses, there are only 10 clauses, it is not that much. With your guidance, I can move forward and then we can finish out this debate so we can resume after lunch. Or would you prefer that we adjourn right now and then do it after lunch? I will take your guidance, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: It seems like no objections. Continue.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you very much for your guidance, Mr. Chairman.

I wish to move clauses 1 through 10.

The Chairman: Continue, Minister.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Chairman, the Bill makes provision for amendments to the requisite Acts, the Marriage Act 1944, the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949, the Registrar-General (Recording of Documents) Act 1955 and the Domestic Partnership Act 2018 to allow for the voluntary registration of births, deaths, marriages and domestic partnerships of persons that occur outside of Bermuda.

Clause 1 provides the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 29 of the Marriage Act 1944 to provide for the voluntary registration of a marriage of a person that occurred in another jurisdiction.

Clause 3 amends section 3 of the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949 to provide for a new voluntary register in which a live or still birth or the death of a person, both of which occurred outside of Bermuda, may be voluntarily recorded.

Clause 4 amends section 8 of the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949 to make provision for the Registrar-General, upon application, to voluntarily record and register the birth of a child born alive outside of Bermuda.

Clause 5 amends section 11 of the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949 to authorise, upon application, the Registrar-General to voluntarily record and register the death of a person who dies in another jurisdiction.

Mr. Chairman, I do propose to make an amendment to clause 6.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Although I did seek to move all clauses, I now realise there is an amendment. So I will stop here so that we can consider this one amendment by itself. I do not want to confuse anyone.

The Chairman: Well, let us just speak to the clauses 1 through 5 first.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes.

The Chairman: Any speakers to clauses 1 through 5?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Deputy.

Just one question under the clause 1 that provides the citation for the Bill. Basically, it is called the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents . . . Is the process for this all digitised? So people can do it easily abroad online?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I will get more information on that. That is the process that is being created as a result of the digitisation programme of the Ministry and the department. I cannot speak right now if that has been completed. But that is the part of the process that is actively being done right now for all of the Registrar's activities.

The Chairman: Any further comments?

Do you want to move clauses 1 through 5, Minister?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I do move that clauses 1 through 5 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 5 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

Approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 5 passed.]

The Chairman: Now you can do the amendment.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to discuss the amendment to clause 6.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Chairman, I propose to make an amendment to clause 6.

Clause 6 inserts a new section 13A and 13B in the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949. Section 13A provides for a voluntary registration of the birth of a child born to a person outside of Bermuda, and section 13B provides for the voluntary notification of the death of a person who died outside of Bermuda.

AMENDMENT TO CLAUSE 6

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Chairman, in order to provide the best clarification on who will be entitled to voluntary registration of births and deaths that take place outside of Bermuda, with the Members' indulgence I propose that the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 is amended as follows:

In clause 6, insert in the heading before the words "13A and 13B," the word "13AA." That is two capital As before the clause 13A. And insert in the Interpretation part of the Bill, "13AA A person for the purposes of this part means a person who—

a) possesses Bermudian status under the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956;
b) is a British Overseas Territories Citizen by virtue of the grant to him by the Governor of a certificate of naturalisation;
c) is the spouse of a person under paragraph (a) or (b); or
d) is the child, stepchild or adopted child under the age of eighteen years of a person under paragraph (a) or (b).

So this is an interpretation reclarification or like amendment solely. That is all it is. It is just making sure that the Interpretation part of the legislation is clear.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Any further speakers?

There appear to be none.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: So, Mr. Chairman, I move that the amendment to clause 6 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the amendment to clause 6 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

No objections.

[Motion carried: Clause 6 passed as amended.]

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Chairman, I know a copy of the amendment had been circulated to the Clerk for the Members. I apologise to Members if you did not receive it, but it had been circulated.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: With that approval, I would like to now move clauses 7 through 10, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Clause 7 amends section 10 of the Registrar-General (Recording of Documents) Act 1955 to provide for the authorisation of the Registrar-General to voluntarily record and register any birth, death, marriage, domestic partnership and name change of a person that occurs in another jurisdiction.

Clause 8 amends section 21 of the Domestic Partnership Act 2018 to provide for the voluntary registration of a domestic partnership of a person that occurred in another jurisdiction.

Clause 9 provides for consequential amendments to the Government Fees Regulations 1976 so as to allow for the issuance of fees related to the provisions in this Bill.

Clause 10 provides for commencement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Any speakers to clauses 7 to 10?

There appear to be none.

Minister.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I do move that clauses 7 through 10 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 7 through 10 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

Approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 7 through 10 passed.]

Hon. Walter H. Roban: With that, Mr. Chairman, I do not believe there are any related Schedules. So I wish to move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

The preamble is approved.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Chairman, I do move now that the Bill be reported to the House as amended.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as amended.

Any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

The Bill will be reported to the House as amended.

Mr. Speaker.

House resumed at 12:36 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

VOLUNTARY REGISTRATION OF VITAL DOCUMENTS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) ACT 2024

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill being reported to the House as amended?

There are none.

The Bill has been reported.

Members, considering the time on the clock, I am going to call on the Deputy Premier.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do move that we do adjourn for lunch until 2:06.

The Speaker: Two o'clock. We will be back at two. We will be back at two.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: All right. I did not want to steal any minutes since I was given the obligation of extra few minutes.

The Speaker: Yes, we will be back at two, back at two.

Members, the House stands adjourned until 2:00 pm.

Proceedings suspended at 12:37 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:01 pm

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now back in session.

Members, we concluded before lunch with the completion of the second matter, the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024.

We now move on to the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024. Members, the item that we are going to take up now would be the second reading of the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024. And I believe Minister Furbert is leading this.

Minister Furbert.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation I move that the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024 be now read for the second time.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024. This Bill will make amendments to the Payroll Tax Act 1995 [the Act] by extending the relief under both the new hire relief provisions of 2018 and 2020 from April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2026. The Bill will also update the baseline date of April 1, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will play an important part in the continued growth in our economy. The 2018 and 2020 reliefs have been successful in adding to the Bermuda workforce, and it is anticipated that this extension will continue the trends for the Island. The modifications are as follows:

- The extended period for the payroll tax relief will commence April 1, 2024, and are due to expire March 31, 2026.
- The base year will be amended to 2022 for the purpose of determining matters in relation to payroll tax relief for new hires.
- The relief will be applicable to all businesses with annual remuneration of $500,000 or more.
- A qualifying employer is entitled to the new hire relief for each of the tax periods commencing April 1, 2024, and ending March 31, 2026, in respect of qualifying employees, which will generally include all new hires.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the relief provided, a qualifying employer will not be liable to pay the employer portion of payroll tax otherwise payable under this Act in respect of the employees . . .

[Interruption]

The Speaker: Members, I do not know if Minister Furbert is singing, but I have never known him to be part of a choir.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: So we do not need a choir for him today.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I have sung in the choir, by the way. Taking the lead role, by the way.

The Speaker: Okay. Minister Furbert.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: However, a qualifying employer will not be entitled to new hire relief if the employer is in arrears with payment of payroll tax.

I will repeat again: In accordance with the relief provided, a qualifying employer will not be liable to pay the employer portion of payroll tax otherwise payable under this Act in respect of the employees who fall within scope. However, a qualifying employer will not be entitled to new hire relief if the employer is in arrears with payment of payroll tax. Further, there is no entitlement to this relief for an applicable tax period unless the total number of full-time employees is maintained throughout the tax period.

Mr. Speaker, during the period in which this programme has been in force, [there] have been continually increased new hire relief applications particularly with the international business sector. Over 3,200 applications have been received to date from both the 2018 and the 2020 new hire relief initiatives, with 77 per cent of these being from the international business sector. It is notable that since 2020 the international business sector became Bermuda's largest employer, growing an average of 5.1 per cent annually. Further, the sector's level of employment is now at the highest level that has ever been recorded, surpassing the 2008 pre-financial crisis [level]. Between 2019 and 2023 the number of jobs in this sector has increased 22.1 per cent.

However, we would also note that this relief is also available as a benefit to companies in the domestic sector. And as are noted in the figures previously provided there are domestic companies who have been able to take advantage of this relief. Mr. Speaker, extending this programme at this time is important to provide continuous incentives to businesses to add to their employment pool. This helps to create additional employment opportunities for Bermudians and moves the country forward in expanding the workforce, which is critical to future economic stability and sustainability. Therefore, it provides benefit to both the business community and the Bermuda community at large.

Changing the base date is also important as there are some new businesses which have been operating in or from Bermuda which have started since 2018 and have not paid any employer tax, shifting the burden disproportionately to our older, more established businesses. It is anticipated that this change is actually going to contribute $30 million to our revenue, which is a positive development. The $30 million estimate is due to the replacement of the 2018 and 2020 initiatives with this new updated relief. We are pleased that employers have benefited from this employer portion relief; however, with the improvement in the economy the Government can now realise revenue in this area.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, I would again like to highlight the continued positive changes that this Government has made to the payroll tax regime since we have come into office. There has not only been continued growth in revenue despite the pandemic, but this has also benefited both the business community and their employees, and the country at large.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a comment at this time?

Opposition Leader, you have the floor, sir.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister.

In regard to the payroll tax changes, in the Reply to the Budget Statement we actually laid out that the idea itself makes sense. But we want to be very clear that it should be limited and focused on creating new jobs and businesses versus inadvertently creating a churn of fake companies. It is very easy . . . or rather I should say that the manipulation of the tax code is not unheard of, and that is concerning to us because these benefits can quite easily be shifted from one existing business to another.

So we are thankful for the controls that we see in the legislation. To that end we do have some questions around perpetuity, that meaning the ongoing nature of this. There are some time limits in this legislation; I will not go into details. But what this means is . . . does the Government intend to keep rolling forward this new-hire payroll tax relief? What are the plans in the future relating to it? Because it does have a fixed period.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, I said before and as we said in the Reply to the Budget Statement, this is sensible. It should be limited. And to that end, what are the Government's plans going forward?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP De Silva, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for bringing this, for extending this tax [relief] period. I do not know what the Opposition Leader meant by "fake companies," because you will know, Mr. Speaker, that this is for *new* employees. And even if . . . I do not understand how you can get fake companies out of this because if you have someone who wants to go through the process of forming a company . . . and I think some of us in this room, if not all of us, know what it takes to form a company. If someone is going to go to that extent just to get a relief on the employment portion, I think that is a bit far-fetched to say the least.

But with regard to this extension, and again the Opposition Leader's question as to how long it will go on. Mr. Speaker, as an employer, a large employer in this country and of several different companies, as long as it continues to employ our people who are in desperate need of jobs, may it continue! I got it. I got it that the

Opposition Leader says, *Listen. We want to create new jobs*, and maybe this is not quick enough for the Opposition Leader. I got that, too. But whilst we are going through this period and over the last several years, as the statistics will show you, there has been a very large, significant increase in employment especially during the COVID-19 period and thereafter.

So, Minister, thank you for extending this. I am sure that there are others who are listening and will be very, very happy, other business owners who are going to be very, very happy with this. And I can tell you, and I will declare my interest. I have certainly been one to take advantage of this tax break. And it does come into play when one sits down and does an interview. And I am sure that, like I said, others in this room may have taken advantage of it as well. I certainly, when I am talking to someone and interviewing . . . I can tell you I hired a new employee yesterday. And it did not escape me that, you know, not only am I giving this young man a job, but I will get a benefit from it.

So it does. You know, employers I am sure do think about it. I think about it, continue to think about it and I will continue to think about it as long as this is in place. So with that, with the growth that we have seen in this country in terms of employment, I would think that this has been a very big piece of that, Mr. Speaker. And I would think that will be a very big piece of it going forward.

So, thank you, Minister. We look forward to everyone in this room supporting this extension.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister Hayward, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, the Payroll Tax Amendment made sense when it was first introduced, and it makes sense to continue it now. We know that the factors that contribute to greater levels of economic development and economic growth include one's ability to hire the critical staff that a company needs to carry out its operations in an efficient and effective manner. The payroll tax relief supports the growth and development of companies within Bermuda. And so companies are not left with a larger tax burden on the basis that they are expanding their employment levels in Bermuda, and that is a positive thing.

But you have to gauge the policy in relation to the time we are in. So it is wise for any legislation of this sort to have close-ended dates because it allows for a period of reassessment. Obviously, as it pertains to extending this one and then cutting the benefit off for companies who have historically benefited for a number of excess years, what we are actually doing is embracing two separate things. Number one, we have provided relief, and that relief was to assist companies with hiring. Now that they are mature in terms of their hiring, they now move off of the policies. But companies who are continually growing now can still benefit from the policy. And that is why this change will enable government to get revenue, but also support the economic growth and development.

When we talk about growth in international business, it is something that is commendable and something that actually should be celebrated. We have seen this sector grow to the largest sector in our economy, representing over 28 per cent of all economic activity, but now moving to a place where it represents 15 per cent of the jobs in the economy as well as a direct employer. That is positive all around.

Certainly we would like to see greater levels of diversification. But where we see levels of growth, we should also celebrate those levels of growth, because that has not been always the case. And the expansion of that sector, supported by this particular Bill that we have in place, serves as a good formula to continue the momentum of positive performance as it pertains to increased number of jobs and increased productivity in that particular sector.

And just to highlight that in 2017 there were 4,000 employees in international business. Today we are up to 4,909. That is an increase of 909 employees over a seven-year period. That is significant. And if that growth is continued and maintained, we will continue to work toward creating more jobs, which will allow us to reach our target of having more workers in our working population.

I put out a paper some time ago regarding the challenges we are having with our ageing population. We talked about having more workers in our workforce. But in order to have more workers in our workforce, we have to support economic activity and we have to support economic growth and development. That will ultimately create jobs, and that is what we actually see with the statistics as it pertains to the growth in international business. And then we can fill those jobs with able-bodied Bermudians and guest workers where needed.

Mr. Speaker, international business as articulated now represents 15 per cent of all jobs in Bermuda. And it is policies like this that actually support that particular growth. It has worked its way up to just under 5,000 jobs. But as articulated by the Minister who presented the Bill, this is the highest level of employment in international business in our history. And so that is significant. We have a sector which employs competent staff with appropriate levels of compensation, and I think these are the areas in which we want to see growth. Having international business being a cornerstone means it eases up the pressure and allows us now pivot and focus on growth and development in other areas of the economy.

And that is what the Economic Development Strategy sets out to do, Mr. Speaker. The Economic Development Strategy actually sets out to look at other areas within the economy outside of international business and see how we can support growth and development in those particular areas. But having a strong cornerstone and a strong foundation allows us to steady that ship in terms of revenue. It also allows us to steady the ship in terms of adjusting our resources so that we can prioritise on diversification.

So I am pleased that this Bill is in front of us today. Like I said, Mr. Speaker, it made sense when it was first introduced. The amendments to it make sense now. And we are moving the goal posts a bit so that we can also collect the necessary revenue from companies who are a little bit more mature in their hiring.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member?

MP Dunkley, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to you and colleagues and to the listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I will direct my comments in two areas. And I understand that Government must always be prudent in making sure that when they enact legislation and they bring it to this Parliament for debate and passage that they can collect all of the revenue that they are due. But at certain times you also have to make sure that you can try to stimulate the economy. And I think a Bill like this has the potential to help us at this time perhaps more than at any other time before. And why do I say that?

I talked about the two distinct areas that I am going to talk about. The first is international business. The Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour mentioned the growth in international business over the past seven years. I believe he said that it increased by 900 personnel. And certainly that is good news. But against the backdrop of some of the challenges and changes we have within the tax code worldwide, it is important that we do all we can to give international business more reasons to come to Bermuda, more reasons to bring a larger footprint to Bermuda. We know that like every business they have to make difficult decisions on an ongoing basis. And certainly I do not think anybody will argue with me that at this time the cost of doing business and the cost of living in Bermuda is high. And we need to try to address those.

And while we try to address those, it is also important that we try to alleviate some of the concerns that individuals in businesses might have. And this legislation could give international business the impetus to say, *Okay, look. We need to increase our footprint here. The Government is listening to us. We're starting to see more reasons to have a footprint in Bermuda.* Because over the coming months as the corporate income tax comes into effect, people will be weighing back and forth the positive and the negative of every jurisdiction. So it is in our best interest to try to protect international business as it has become the driver of our economy.

And the Opposition has always been fully supportive of the Government in any initiative to move it forward. We understand the critical nature of international business. We understand the changing footprint of international business. And we also understand the pull from other jurisdictions to try to attract business, some of that new business, some of that [is] our business. And we understand that even as some of those competing jurisdictions are our friends in trade and in working on issues throughout the world, even your friends will take your business if they need to.

That is not the first time I have said this in the House. Your friends will take your business if they need revenue coming in the door, and we need to do all we can to protect it. So the Opposition believes that there is merit in this Bill if there are the right guidelines to make sure that Government protects its revenue going forward.

The second part, Mr. Speaker, is in regard to local business. Local businesses probably face the cost of living and the cost of doing business increases more than other businesses do. And I think local business is to some extent different from international business in that international business has seen the potential for growth over the past few years. Local businesses have not seen that potential for growth in many aspects because of COVID-19 and some of the other changes in our economy. So my view is that there are a significant number of local businesses who face a lack of confidence. And this legislation could be something for them to build confidence again in our community and to get them to hire people.

Certainly as we head to the summer season where with local business typically you have your off-season and then you have the summer season. Whether you are in the tourism industry or not, your workforce can change based on that. So in the past couple of years coming out of COVID-19, it is my belief that a lot of local businesses have been somewhat hesitant to get back up to full hiring because the simple fact is that they do not know what the future brings. They lack of the confidence.

Most of the time in life, whether it is just your personal direction or your business direction, if you have confidence, if you have confidence in the way you believe you might be going, you will take an opportunity. You will take a risk. So maybe this legislation will start to build some confidence again in local businesses as they try to rebound from a very difficult period, Mr. Speaker.

So having said that, with guarded optimism I see there is potential in this, and I support the Opposition Leader in that we need to make sure that our guard rails are here to ensure that Government continues to collect their revenue. Because we have seen over the

past number of years, as it has gotten more difficult for businesses and individuals, that they do all they can to pay taxes at a later stage or try to avoid paying taxes until they ultimately have to. And we know from some of the initiatives that the Government has brought and the Premier has talked about on revenue collection that there is still a lot of revenue that is out there to be collected.

So I make these comments against the backdrop that it is heading in the right direction, but we still have to be very careful in how we do it to make sure that we protect the public purse and to bring confidence back to the country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Member?

MP Anthony Richardson, you have the floor.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, colleagues and those in the listening audience.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: I want to try to help the headlines for tomorrow, which is simply to say, *The Entire House Supports This Payroll Tax Amendment.*

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Why? Because, Mr. Speaker, depending upon the number of staff and your payroll tax bill, this represents a 10 per cent savings to your operations. Again, once you do your calculations and it does . . . yes it does! Yes it does. So, when you do your calculation, the payroll tax for the company could be as high as 10 per cent, this means you do not have to pay it. So this actually is to the previous speaker, MP Dunkley. This is actually a tremendous boost to any company that hires a new employee.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Anthony Richardson: The calculator I used is the calculator called *payroll tax: understanding-what-I'm-doing* calculator. Mr. Speaker, obviously trying to be polite . . .

One of the things I am excited about is that (I have said it before) when I come here and I am able to participate in making changes that actually do affect the every-day person, as a professional, Mr. Speaker, I do have reason in my professional life to do this work. And I do know for sure that depending upon your total payroll bill, your employer payroll tax could be as high as 10 per cent. So this is a tremendous benefit.

I do take the point that MP Dunkley wants to couch in certain language. But I think ultimately he will agree that if he talks to his CFO, that yes this is actually a tremendous benefit. So this does add to the confidence of those persons who are doing the business of Bermuda.

There were some comments also in terms of international business versus the local companies. I want to make sure that everyone in the listening audience does understand that this is not limited to the international business. It impacts every one of us as we go forward and hire employees. It is also possible, even though some of us do not do this, to hire an employee and contact the Tax Commissioner or the Payroll Tax Department and ensure that your new employees are on an approved training programme. That also adds additional relief to your payroll tax bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will say it one more time: For the headlines tomorrow, the House does support this Payroll Tax Amendment because it realises and recognises that it is a benefit to all employers if they are a qualified employer.

The other point I want to make real quick which is tied to this, Mr. Speaker, is that sometimes when the Chamber of Commerce provides information, it is interpreted as if it is contrary to what the Government is doing. And that is not the case. This legislation, again, is one of those items whereby I believe if we are objective the Chamber of Commerce should come out in support also. Because the Chamber of Commerce as a representative of local businesses would recognise that its members will benefit from this legislation.

So I will say one more time, headlines tomorrow: *The House Endorses This Legislation* because it is a benefit to all of those businesses that qualify and represents in many cases a 10 per cent savings to the employers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, sir.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None?

Oh. Looking straight ahead that time.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: MP Adams.

Mr. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be long with this one simply because I pretty much echo the sentiments of all of the speakers who spoke before me. I think the Minister who presented this Bill did a great job in speaking to the history of how we got here. The only thing that I wanted to acknowledge was the Government's approach to this Amendment. Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, this was included in our pre-budget report, or highlighted in our pre-budget report as something that the Government was considering. And so we then met with a number of stakeholders and invited the

public to provide their feedback in relation to this amendment.

So ultimately, this is this Government using a consultative approach and obviously coming and bringing this to fruition. So ultimately I believe that this should not be a surprise to anyone. Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that we emphasise that this is not a new tax, nor is it an increased tax. All we are doing is essentially modifying who qualifies for the relief so that it meets its original intent.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that as a result of this amendment, some companies will end up paying more. And I know no business enjoys paying more. But the new hire relief was always intended to be a temporary relief because after all it is only for so long someone can be considered a new hire. But nonetheless, this will certainly assist the Government in reaching its balanced budget while maintaining the original intent, which is to further encourage the expansion of our workforce.

So again, with those brief comments, Mr. Speaker, I support the Minister who brought this Bill forward and would like to thank him and his team on their efforts to seeing this through. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member?

Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister Wayne Furbert for carrying this Bill on behalf of the Ministry of Finance. As you know, Mr. Speaker, he was the former Junior Minister of Finance. But what you may not know and which Members may forget is that the new hire relief was his particular brainchild while he was Junior Minister of Finance. It was something that was done during our first budget cycle during consultation. And it was something that he made sure to put in place and to work out the various kinks during his time certainly as Junior Minister of Finance to make sure that we could eliminate any of the gamesmanship that may be played and other things to make sure that this is something that is incredibly successful.

The Minister of Economy and Labour stated very clearly the growth of which we have seen in international business since this was put in place in 2018. He gave figures from 2017, but we know we have seen growth in international business of at least 700 jobs during that time. It is important to note that this Government also extended it. It is not just for exempted companies; it is also for large local employers. For the large local employers who are growing and expanding their staffs, this is there for them as well. And also, Mr. Speaker, it is also important to note that in 2020 it was extended from just large local employers to employers who had payrolls of $500,000 or more. So it started taking some mid-size companies as well.

This is a policy that was put forward which was conceived with consultation that has been successful. And as we have seen, it has grown revenues. This is an important point to note, as has been stated. If businesses add more staff, it does not mean that the government is not getting any more money. We are getting money from the employee payroll tax. It is just that the employer has time in order to make sure that they can build up to start to meet those particular commitments.

And it builds on a long list of tax relief that we have given not only to business—as people say *big business*—but we have to talk about small business as well. Remember it was in the same first budget in 2018, Mr. Speaker, that we eliminated taxes for new businesses for the first year, something that we pledged to do in our election manifesto and something that we have done. And we have continued to support that with the reduction of taxes.

So, Mr. Speaker, we see a tax policy that is rooted in fairness, that is rooted in reducing the burden of those who can least afford to pay while increasing it at a higher level. At the same point in time, where policies that are balanced toward growth, it is working, Mr. Speaker. It is working and we see the evidence of success over the years where we are seeing revenue from payroll tax at record levels despite the fact that we have extended significant relief and reduced the tax burden for 86 per cent of businesses in this country and 86 per cent of the workers in this country.

That is the Progressive Labour Party economic policy, Mr. Speaker, and it is working and delivering for the people of this country. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other.

Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all of the colleagues for their contributions.

And, Mr. Speaker, it does make a difference that the Finance Minister of the Progressive Labour Party was at that time, and still is, the Honourable David Burt. He had faith that we can make this thing work at that time in 2018. It has proven itself that it worked. But it is about thinking outside of the box. What can we give with the basis of eventually getting something even better?

So what has happened? Minister Hayward has said it increased by 900 employees at that time who have benefited from this particular policy that we put forward. MP Dunkley said that *it could.* No, the proof is that it *has* worked, and it will work, continue to work in the future, because at the end of the day . . . just think about it, Mr. Speaker.

So that people will be clear on how it works, the base year now will be 2022, March 31, 2022. So if

someone has 100, 50, 20 employees, it could be 10 whose payroll tax or salary expense is $500,000 or more, it could be one company, one person—there are people out there, consults, who are probably making $250,000—or two people. But if they add one more person to their payroll tax, to their company, the employer will not pay any payroll tax on that individual. The employee will pay something. So that is where the benefits are. We have got additional. By encouraging people to come here working for companies or taking on more staff, the employee paid, but the employer did not.

But this time with the adjustment, the government will get an additional roughly $30 million because the base year has changed. But on top of that, we are encouraging more people to come here. And you are right. With the change in what we see going forward regarding the minimum tax, there are a lot of people. If a new company sets up, then that company does not pay payroll tax at all for the employer. The employee portion is paid, up to 2026. So there are companies in Bermuda right now that came here between 2018 and 2022, and we can think of some.

If you recall, it was under this Government that encouraged those new law firms here. I am not sure many of you realise that. But we had the idea of how to get additional law firms . . . And one of these days I will tell you how it worked, but there are new employees, new law firms that came here. They have not paid a payroll tax on the employer [side] for the whole period. But now they will pay part of that $30 million going forward.

And you have got a new little law firm (and I will say X law firm) who takes on additional lawyers as time goes on. And if you add 100 . . . let us go 50, because 100 is kind of hard for some of those. Let us say 50. At the time of your filing, you can file for an additional one or two or whatever it is. But if you are below 50 as of 2022, let us say 48, you cannot claim for the additional staff. Your base year is also based on the number of employees you have at that time. I hope that makes it clear for everyone.

So, thank you, Premier/Minister of Finance for (at that time, 2018) seeing the vision that we could make some things happen. And going forward, I think it will benefit us even greater because we expect new business with the work that is being done by Minister Hayward and other things that are being done within the community. I see greater growth in Bermuda going forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I will move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

[Pause]

House in Committee at 2:40 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2024

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of the whole for further consideration of the Bill entitled the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024.

Minister Furbert, you have the floor.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me just say if there is no issue, I will move all clauses, 1 through 3.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 repeals and replaces section 9C of the Payroll Tax Act 1995 to change the applicable dates for the new hire waiver from 2018 to 2022.

Clause 3 repeals section 9CA of the Payroll Tax Act 1995.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Any further speakers?

There appear to be none.

Minister, do you want to move the clauses?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I move the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: Move the clauses first.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Oh, sorry.

I move clauses 1 through 3.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 3 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

Approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 3 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

The preamble is approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

The Bill will be reported to the House as printed.

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

The Chairman: Mr. Speaker.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Mr. Speaker.

House resumed at 2:43 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2024

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none.

Thank you, Members.

We now move on to the next item, which is the second reading of the Government Loans Amendment Act 2024 in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation I move that the Bill entitled the Government Loans Amendment Act 2024 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Any objections?

None.

Continue, Premier.

BILL

SECOND READING

GOVERNMENT LOANS AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to read for the second time the Bill entitled the Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, which I will refer to as the Bill. This Bill amends section 12A of the Government Loans Act 1978 by repealing and replacing subsection (1B) so that monies in the excess Sinking Fund can be transferred to other public funds if such monies, in the opinion of the Minister of Finance, are not required to fund deficits.

Now, that is the overall premise. And I will take some time, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that Members who may not have been in the House when some of these things were put into place can get an understanding of why we are where we are, why we are bringing this Bill and then go into the discussions about what other things we plan to do with this amended law.

Mr. Speaker, as this Honourable House unanimously passed the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure earlier today, there should be no question that this Honourable House agrees with the estimates that have been approved. And those estimates state that at the end of this fiscal year we will have a small budget surplus. But, Mr. Speaker, as we are debating the Government Loans Amendment Act and changing around these, making changes here, it is important that this Honourable House and the public remember the extraordinary circumstances that actually brought us to this point.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge to governments around the world and deeply affected not only our public health, but also our economy. In 2020 amidst the peak of the pandemic, the Government, like every other government around the world, made the necessary decision to borrow funds to ensure that the government could continue to function. In Bermuda those funds were used to support struggling Bermudian families who found themselves out of work due to no fault of their own. Those funds were also used to support businesses to ensure that they could survive through and after the pandemic. They were used to support our emergency services and our health care services to make sure that we could protect the people of this country. Those were the important measures for which those funds were used.

It is also important to note, Mr. Speaker, that during that time the Government developed Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan which was debated and passed without objection in this Honourable House. The Economic Recovery Plan projected that the Government would incur a combined $408 million deficit before returning to a balanced budget.

Now, I want to make sure we are clear. So we came into a pandemic. And the estimates and the Economic Recovery Plan, which were done in consultation with a renowned private sector consulting firm with the Ministry of Finance and with stakeholders . . . remember we had a stakeholder body which consisted of persons from international business, local business, lots of persons. The projection was that in order for the Government to return back to a balanced budget, we would incur $408 million of deficit spending until we returned to balance.

However, Mr. Speaker, prudent financial management and robust economic growth due to the

policies and successful execution of the Economic Recovery Plan and the continued confidence that investors have in the Bermuda economy saw that those deficits did not total $408 million before returning to balance. And they have totalled $322 million over four years. This means that the funds that were borrowed to pre-fund deficits . . . there are funds which are left over or sitting in what is called the excess borrowing account.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is why I want to go into a little bit of history because it is important that Members opposite and also new Members to the Chamber may not understand the history of the excess borrowing account, excess borrowing fund. How is this different from the Sinking Fund? What does this mean?

So, Mr. Speaker, typically what the Government did on a year-to-year basis prior to 2013 was that the Government would borrow money on an annual basis and would refinance some of that money after a while. So sometimes this was done via local banks. (Most of the time it was done via local banks.) They would get money. They would take out a line, fund it via local banks, and then would go to the capital markets and raise a whole lot of money to pay off those funds. Because when you go to the capital markets, you want to have a larger size offering, and the annual offerings were not affected. So those were done via local banks typically. And then we went to refinance those by large bond offerings.

This was changed in 2013 with the amendment to the Government Loans Act which created the excess borrowing fund. And it is important to note the Sinking Fund exists as a fund. But the amendments in 2013 brought in by the former Government and the former Minister of Finance, Minister Bob Richards, said, *I'm going to borrow $800 million, which will last us throughout our term in office. And we're going to put this money in the excess borrowing fund used to fund deficits.*

Now, we all know, Mr. Speaker, they ran out of that $800 million in three years, not five years. But that is a story for another day.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The fact is that that was when the excess borrowing fund was created.

Now, here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. I hear interpolations from the other side. And the Honourable former Premier said, *Tell them why.* Here is the thing. He borrowed . . . the former Government under his leadership borrowed $800 million. This was after they had been in Government for a while. They laid out their projections that they would be able to make it there in five years, and they went back to the market in three. Well, I do not know what he is talking about, *Tell them why.* Maybe they were not able to do the sums. Remember back then it was *fuzzy math* and all of those other types of things of which we were dealing with.

But here is the difference and the contrast: The contrast is that when we went to the markets to borrow the funds, we said that we would incur $408 million in deficits over time. And guess what? We came under that amount. So there is a wonderful contrast there, Mr. Speaker, between sound economic management, sound economic planning and the record of the party prior.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: But let me digress. And if he wants me to continue around that road, he can interpolate as much as he wants and I will happily educate that Honourable House, that side of the House and the listening public.

So now, Mr. Speaker, the Sinking Fund in the Ministry of Finance is managed by the traditional Sinking Fund which existed prior to the amendments in 2013 and the excess borrowing fund. So what this enabled was for the Government, instead of borrowing or taking out a line of credit at a bank on an annual basis to fund deficits and then going behind that to borrow monies to repay those, we could go to the international markets, which are typically cheaper than the local markets, to borrow that debt and place it into the account which is used to fund deficits. And while those monies are sitting in that account, those funds can be used and invested.

The Act itself specifies the measures of which the two different amounts can be used. In the traditional fund, it can be used to purchase and repay debt and can be used to pay interest on debt. In the excess borrowing fund, the funds can only be used to fund future deficits. So that is the reason why there is a distinction. Even though it is all in the Government Loans Act, even though it is all classified as a sinking fund, the monies that are borrowed for a certain purpose are only able to be used for a certain purpose. And that is why it is important for the distinction.

So with that history lesson, Mr. Speaker, I want to move on because this is where we get to. This speaks to the value of reaching a balanced budget, which—I have to repeat, Mr. Speaker—was unanimously supported by this House by a roll call vote earlier today, noting that we are going to achieve the estimates which were set out. And as current projections show, the Government will no longer depend on the funds which are in the excess borrowing account to cover future deficits.

So the question then happens, How do we best utilise these funds? Do we horde them away for a rainy day? There is an argument for that. Or considering the challenges that are faced, do we invest them in the well-being of our citizens?

In this case, the Government has chosen to do both. Yes. You do need to ensure that there are reserves in place in case something unexpected happens. We know what happened two years ago. Came

here with a budget, and then there was a war in Ukraine and you know the Aircraft Registry disappeared and different things like that. Things can always happen. So we must be prepared for those.

However, Mr. Speaker, we firmly also believe in the latter, that there is a moral imperative to ensure that we do whatever we can with the resources that we have to use these funds to further assist the people of this country, particularly in areas where they are needed most.

Now, Mr. Speaker, rather than merely celebrating the achievements of coming in ahead of our budget targets, we recognise the ongoing needs of citizens, not only residents but also businesses in this country. And despite the calls to leave those funds only for a rainy day, our Government prioritised addressing immediate concerns where we can, especially when those matters are related to the cost of living. So, Mr. Speaker, the proposal is to amend the Government Loans Act to allow transfers to other public funds so that they can be used if there is a need to do so.

Now, this is important, Mr. Speaker, when we are speaking about "other public funds," because there are a number of public funds that are established. There is the Consolidated Fund, there is the Sinking Fund, there is the Mutual Insurance Fund, the Government Health Insurance Fund, there is the Unemployment Insurance Fund. There are a number of different funds that exist. But this law is only to allow the transfer to another fund. It is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that every single fund in government of course has to be audited and reports done. So in this case, the amendments are to amend it so that they can be transferred to another fund.

So it is one thing, Mr. Speaker, to say, *Okay. The House is giving the Government the power to make these transfers.* But the natural question would be, *If given the power, what are you going to do with this power?* And that I think is important. And in the Budget Statement we say . . . and if you will allow me to quote, Mr. Speaker:

"Mr Speaker, the Government's actuaries have advised the Ministry of Health that in order to keep up with health insurance claims, which continue to escalate due to our ageing population, the Government will need to increase its Health Insurance Rates by $45 a month. This Government cannot and will not allow that to happen. Therefore, we intend to transfer $30 million from the excess borrowing fund to the Mutual Reinsurance Fund to ensure that our health funds are able to pay claims without asking every resident in Bermuda to pay an extra $540 a year. What does this mean? It means that for the third year in a row, this Government will freeze the Standard Premium Rate that all persons in Bermuda with health insurance must pay. This will shield residents and employers from a government mandated premium increase this year."

Now, that, Mr. Speaker, is important, because this is not just about individuals, although it affects individuals. It is also about making sure that we can continue to protect our economic recovery. And this, as stated, Mr. Speaker, is not the first time the Government is doing this, because we have held health insurance rates at the government level. The last time there was an increase was 2021. But in 2022, no increase. In 2023, no increase. And in 2024 due to our enhanced performance and with this law change today, we are able to transfer those funds from the excess borrowing fund over to the Mutual Reinsurance Fund so that the Mutual Reinsurance Fund can continue to pay claims without receiving extra money from premiums.

Now, here is what is important, Mr. Speaker. The Mutual Reinsurance Fund does not get money from the Consolidated Fund. A key point. Because I know there will be an argument, *Oh, the Government is just moving here and there.* The Mutual Reinsurance Fund gets money from every person in this country who pays health insurance. That is where that money comes from. That is where it comes from. So the only options are to find a way to get money into the Mutual Reinsurance Fund. And the only way that has been done in the past is to increase health insurance rates.

So it is very simple. The choice is support this or support an increase in health insurance rates for $45 per policyholder for everyone in this country, $540 a year, burdening residents and businesses. That is the choice before this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Now, Mr. Speaker, I will get to the health care a little bit more. I see the Honourable former Premier has stopped his interpolations. So I appreciate that. You know, you will have your time.

But, Mr. Speaker, as you will be aware, health care is just one part of the puzzle. There is also a need for additional investments in more affordable housing in our community. The acute housing shortage impacts Bermudians across the Island. And by allocating additional funds toward affordable housing initiatives, we can provide much-needed relief for those in need to create a pathway to stability and prosperity. And, Mr. Speaker, we already know that this Government has committed $15 million to affordable housing. We have already seen 67 housing units being delivered, more and more being done, businesses working, preparing the expansion of the private sector rental scheme.

The Minister of Public Works has been busy making sure that we address these challenges. But it is important to note, Mr. Speaker, that challenges related to housing are due to the fact that our economy is growing. And to support continued economic growth, in one space and instance you need to make sure that you try your best to keep business costs low. That is what we are doing on the side of the matter of freezing health insurance rates. You want to make sure people are not getting money taken out of their pocket. That is how you do it, by reducing taxes for workers and making sure

that they do not have to pay more money in government mandated health insurance. And also, Mr. Speaker, you make sure that you invest in housing to make sure that as the number of jobs increases and therefore the working population grows when the number of persons in [jobs] increases, there are spaces for these persons to live.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are some who will question why we are touching it at all. The fact is, I think I have already explained it that we have to have a balanced approach. You cannot just stand by and say, *Well, we have always done it this way. When the mutual reinsurance fund needs more money, we're just going to raise health insurance rates for everyone in the country so that the mutual reinsurance fund can have more money.* No, Mr. Speaker, not when there are options. And that is what the Government of Bermuda is doing today.

So, Mr. Speaker, here we go. Some may seek to score political points by criticising our policies and then voting for them. But we remain focused on reducing the financial burden for all Bermudians. Once again, Mr. Speaker, actions speak louder than words. And this amendment is a testament to our commitment for putting the needs of Bermuda's residents and small businesses first.

But while we are talking about health care, Mr. Speaker, and I have to because as you know the Honourable Minister of Health is not present. It is a disappointment yet unsurprising for the Opposition to . . . And maybe we will hear from them today because, I mean, this was a portion of the Budget Statement. There were a whole lot of things in the Budget Statement, and we did not hear much about this particular plan inside of the Reply that was delivered by the Honourable Opposition Leader. But it is surprising that the Opposition gave the Government no sense of its appraisal for initiatives that would prevent an increase in the cost of health insurance for Bermudians. This issue was largely missing from their Budget Reply.

I wonder and ask the question if the Opposition believes that the people of this country have forgotten about their proposal to introduce a tax on health care in last year's Reply, which would have driven up the cost of health care. Mr. Speaker, that was withdrawn quickly. But it seems as if they are on a pattern. Because this year, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition advocated for the reintroduction of a fee-for-service model at the hospital, which completely disregards the recommendation of health economists who recognise that a fee-for-service model is a surefire way to increase health care costs. Unquestioned, Mr. Speaker!

So let us contrast, Mr. Speaker. This Government has frozen government-mandated health insurance costs for the third year in a row, while in two consecutive years the Opposition has put forward policies that would increase the cost of health insurance and health care in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Moving on to housing. The Opposition said that they will support any and all initiatives to increase Bermuda's affordable housing. Allow me to emphasise their words, Mr. Speaker, *any and all*. So, I am baffled as to why it is so difficult for them to simply endorse the innovative way that this Government is seeking to channel more investment to the Bermuda Housing Corporation, which will have a significant impact on so many Bermudian families.

Before I close, Mr. Speaker, because I know that this may be something that will come up. The fact is that the amendment here only allows a transfer to other government funds. Now, the Explanatory Memorandum does say "quango." (And I am getting it to the place of Committee, but I want to make sure that the debate is fine.) That should be removed, and it will not be a part of my brief.

The Government Loan Act as it exists allows money in the excess borrowing fund to be invested under the Public Funds Act. And that is the way that the $10 million will be invested into the Bermuda Housing Corporation. So, it will not be a transfer from the . . . wait. Transfer of funds will not be $10 million taken from here to go here. It will be by way of investment underneath the Public Funds Act, and all of the things as to where it can be invested are clearly stated there. So, I just wanted to make sure that we did not go down that road in debate, because I know that could be a point of confusion.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing I look forward to unanimous support in this House, as we did earlier, on this particular matter because it is the right thing to do. As I said during the Budget [Statement], this country has had to endure shared sacrifice. And it is important that as we are coming to a space of a balanced budget and the benefits of better financial performance than expected, those benefits are shared with every person in this country, Mr. Speaker. This transfer of these funds will benefit every insured person in this country, Mr. Speaker. They will benefit every business in this country, Mr. Speaker.

And I would like to thank the technical officers within the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health and the Attorney General's Chambers for ensuring that we reach this place to get to this Bill today. And I sincerely hope that we seize this opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of our fellow Bermudians. With those brief remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will wait and be happy to answer any questions in the preparatory debate before the Bill is committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Opposition Leader, you have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Premier for that presentation.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about or start where the Honourable Premier had finished on the sacrifices and the circumstances arising that he believes requires this specific [action]. I totally acknowledge that Bermuda has been through an incredibly tough period and a lot of people are suffering. So, to that end, we have to be actually quite prudent in our use of taxpayers' money, obviously including fees and whatnot.

But to this end, the Honourable Premier introduced the argument that this is in fact the only way to undertake this method of relief. And that is where we will push back because we think the devil is in the details in his presentation. I will start right at the beginning, Mr. Speaker.

Sinking funds . . . for those who do not know, sinking funds have been around in Western financial management and politics really since the 14th century, allowing for the accumulation of certain assets or a certain amount of funds to pay down deficits and debts. This was used especially in the 18th century in the United Kingdom when they were dealing with (I want to say) the Seven Years War.

So, a sinking fund is nothing new and has in fact been used again for a lot of different governments all over the world for the express purpose again of paying down debt. That is what our Sinking Fund is for in fact right now.

Now, what this Bill will do is it will allow the Sinking Fund to be used for something other than the paying down of the debt. And there has been quite a lot of information provided by the Premier as to why he thinks that is the case, and we will be speaking to that in the Opposition debate as to why we do not think it is the only way to undertake what he would like to do.

One of the things when we go into the devil-is-in-the-details is I would like to point out that the reference to excess that the Honourable Premier is speaking to is not identical to the definition of the Sinking Fund. This Bill in fact will allow the Government to access the entirety of what is in the Sinking Fund.

Hon. E. David Burt: That's not true.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order? I will take a point of order on it, and we can get some clarification on that. And the Honourable Premier has technical people here as well, so we can get some clarity on that.

One of the questions I would like to raise, Mr. Speaker, to the Honourable Premier is, in the 15 December Ministerial Statement and the Pre-Budget Report, he maintained the position that he would like to retain $100 million in the Sinking Fund. And by our reading of the estimates, there is in fact next fiscal period the Sinking Fund would be beneath $100 million. So, our question relates to, Why are we going to draw down on the Sinking Fund in this process when [the Honourable Premier] had already made an earlier commitment to stay at $100 million? So that is one point I would like to bring up here in this debate.

Also, I think we have spoken to the purpose. Perhaps I could speak at length. But I do have Honourable Members who will be standing up. I do want to reemphasise the purpose of the Sinking Fund. And what this proposes to do is fundamentally change that purpose, making it into something of a slush fund. And the Premier's purpose of changing the Sinking Fund into a government far-more-widely-accessible slush fund . . . we are going to offer some alternatives to that approach.

Most especially, Mr. Speaker, the Government in a number of other cases does have grants and contributions that they use to fund other areas of their work. I am mindful, by the way, Mr. Speaker, if the Government were to use the grants and contributions' ability to fund this premium increase or to ensure that the premium increase does not in fact impact users, he would not in fact have the ability to say politically that he has balanced the budget.

Our entire point is that the devil is in the details on this one. So, what we are going to do is we are going to amend the Sinking Fund.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The mutual reinsurance fund does not and has never received any money from the Consolidated Fund. So, the argument he is trying to make has no basis in fact.

The Speaker: We note your point of order.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. I thank the Honourable Premier for that.

He has often said that just because something has not happened in the past there is no reason it cannot happen in the future, spoken to innovation and new ideas. So, I take the point that something has never happened in the past.

Where I am going with this, though, is really that what we are concerned about is repurposing—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I believe earlier the Member misled the House with the usage of the term "slush fund." That is a term I am not familiar with. So, it took me time to go to the dictionary and read the

definition of "slush fund." And it is "an amount of money that is kept for dishonest or illegal activities in politics or business." There is no place for use of that term in this House. It must be withdrawn.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Honourable Member, based on the definition that was given that really speaks to what a slush fund or how a slush fund is referred to, I do not think it is fitting in this debate.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sure. Of course. That is a great point. I certainly did not intend for it to be used as a nefarious—

Some Hon. Members: Withdraw it! Withdraw it!

The Speaker: I think he is getting there, Members. He is getting there. I expect him to withdraw it. He is getting there.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the space to explain.

There was no intent to imply any kind of negativity. So therefore, I withdraw the use of "slush fund" and would replace it with, perhaps, "a fund of indeterminate guardrails" in use. I do not know.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Certainly "a fund that exists for unspecified purposes that anyone can use at any point" maybe? So. No. Thank you. I thank the Honourable Minister for looking up in the dictionary a slush fund.

So, the point I am making still stands, that we are in fact going to change the nature of the Sinking Fund. And by virtue of doing that, we will in fact wind up incurring all kinds of obligations and liabilities—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

I would have thought he would have listened to the brief. There is a Sinking Fund, and there is another portion which is the excess borrowing fund. The excess borrowing fund is very specifically for uses to invest monies and to cover deficits. It was not like the traditional sinking fund which is there to repay debt. It is very clear, spelled out inside of the Government Loans Act. I know that the Honourable Member has the ability to look at these things and understand what they are.

The Speaker: Honourable Member.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you. The Honourable Premier seems to be talking about section 2(5) [of the Government Loans Act 1978] of the excess borrowing as it relates to the Sinking Fund. And this Bill is amending section 12A. So, when we go into Committee maybe he can speak to why it is amending section 12A instead of section 2(5).

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: But . . . I will take the point of clarification, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the sections of which he refers to as the establishment of the excess borrowing fund . . . section 12A speaks to how those funds can be used, the application of the funds. So, it is very specific that in one section it says the Sinking Fund, the regular Sinking Fund can be used pay interest or to repurchase and pay debt.

In the matters underneath the excess borrowing fund right now currently, it means to either be invested under the Public Funds Act or to fund deficits. We are now changing that to add another line that if in the opinion of the Minister of Finance there are no deficits, which is clearly the opinion of this House as we have passed the budget, then those funds can be transferred to other public funds.

So, the section which he is speaking about speaks specifically to how those monies can be used. It is one thing to establish a fund, and then it is a question of how those funds can be used. And there are specific guardrails around what the particular funds are. And with his saying there are no guardrails . . . the guardrails are there.

The Speaker: Honourable Member.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. I thank the Honourable Premier. I look forward to this coming up in Committee when we will speak to the specific clauses.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, as we move forward we have made it quite clear that there are other ways of undertaking this work within the parliamentary and government mechanisms. We think that introducing such an amendment is a very dangerous precedent because it does set up, unfortunately . . . we are well aware from my earlier question that the Sinking Fund is currently going down in number incredibly fast. In fact, two years ago, two fiscal periods ago it was over $200 million. Now it is $117 million. And in the next fiscal period it will be $82 million. And this in the face of the Premier's commitment to make sure it retains a

balance of $100 million. So, we are definitely seeing this going down quite quickly.

The Sinking Fund's original purpose is to keep debt away from future generations, and that account is going down. So, with that being said, Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to the Honourable Minister/Honourable Premier speaking at length to this in Committee.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP De Silva, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Why would he know that?

Mr. Speaker, I stand in full support of this amendment. And as Members opposite said, *Why?* Well, I think it is quite clear. Quite clear, Mr. Speaker, that this country has been through a lot over the last several years. We all know that when COVID-19 hit us it absolutely devastated our tourism industry. It crippled many businesses, closed some businesses, left a lot of people unemployed. This Government, however, you will remember outside of all of the other support, one of the most significant things we did do was employees were paid $500 per week for a period of time. And I think that just goes to show where this Government's head was then and is now.

As the Premier said, we expect that these funds will be given to our people and our businesses. And I have to emphasise that because after listening to the Opposition Leader, and if I could quote, he said that *We don't know where this money is going. We don't know where it's going.* And he said, *Well, there have to be other ways of doing this.* Well, I did not hear too many other ways.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I waited with bated breath when he said, *Look. There are other ways.*

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

I think the Honourable Member may be inadvertently misleading the House. So, the other ways were, I spoke to grants and contributions as one example of other ways, and equally I do not recall saying, *We don't know . . .* In fact, I recall at the beginning of my statement saying that I thank the Premier for speaking about why and what is going to happen with these funds. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, he did.

The Speaker: Member, you can continue.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And I will quote, Mr. Speaker. But you know I write when people talk. And the Honourable Member said, and I quote, *This is not the only way.* Not the only way. Now, and he went on to say there are other ways. So, the Honourable Member gave one way, but I would expect . . . I think when I went to school, when you add an "s" to something, it means more than one. So, Mr. Speaker, I was not at all impressed with the single way, other way of which the Honourable [Opposition] Leader spoke.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague, Minister Jason Hayward, because when the Honourable Member mentioned slush fund, and I could fairly turn my page around of notes, you will see where I have here "slush fund" because I was certainly going to let Members know that this was not an appropriate word. But that was a word that has been used a lot by the former OBA, and I hope it is not going to be one that this former [Opposition] Leader uses anymore in this House. Because that is what they do! That is what they do.

And speaking of what they do, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that, you know, there may be some on the other side who will criticise this amendment. But, Mr. Speaker, on February 26, and I will table for the House on the front page of the *Royal Gazette,* here is the headline. This is by Douglas De Couto *[sic]*, but this is the headline: "OBA: Government 'rolling the dice' on corporate tax." Now, that was on the front page, February 26.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will also table [from] the same newspaper [25 February 2024], Mr. Speaker, and I will confirm on page 6 at the *bottom* of the page, and this is the headline: "Business groups give blessing to government budget."

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You did not hear that? Okay. Let us repeat that, Mr. Speaker, for those who may not have heard. On February 26, on the front page of the *Royal Gazette*—

The Speaker: When you refer to the writer, just remember you cannot refer to the role that the person plays in another place.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, yes, yes. I will do that. I will correct that right now, Mr. Speaker.

"OBA:" (and I quote) "government 'rolling the dice' on corporate tax." An article by a Member who sits in another place.

The Speaker: Good.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, on that same day the same newspaper on page 6 at the *bottom*—and I say "bottom" because I clipped it out so that you can see it is at the bottom of that page—there is a headline, "Business groups give blessing to government budget." Now, Mr. Speaker, what do you think the headline would have been if these business groups disagreed with this Government's budget?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: How can you point-of-order that?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Just seeking some clarity. The debate is about the amendment to the Sinking Fund [as laid out in the Act], not about what is on the front page of the paper. So can we stick . . . because we are wandering a little bit in the debate. At one point we were talking about housing.

[Inaudible interjections and general uproar]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Can we . . .

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, that is very interesting.

The Speaker: The point is a valid point, you know. Whenever you address, you try and keep it to today's topic.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You are right, Mr. Speaker. It is a very valid point.

But you know, when the Honourable Member talked about slush fund, I did not interfere. That was not a valid point, and it certainly was not appropriate for this House. I did not say a dickey-bird.

The Speaker: Well, your colleague cleared it up for us. Your colleague cleared it up.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But, Mr. Speaker, the reason I mentioned this, Mr. Speaker, is because there was inference that this money, once transferred, will not be appropriately allocated. Okay? Saying that this Government, as they do through back-door comments, is not qualified to run this country. And we hear that day in and day out by the combined Opposition.

But what this article did tell us, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. There certainly was no inference whatsoever to the sentiment that he has just referred to in this House of Assembly. You want to talk about it somewhere else, then fine. We have nothing to do with blogs and the like.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: But there was no inference in this House to that sentiment, none whatsoever.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Be mindful of his comment. Be mindful of his comment. He adjusted you.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member Cannonier, former Premier, who just took his seat should be the last one in this House to talk about blogs after paying someone $350,000 to do so!

Some Hon. Members: Ooh! Ooh!

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Member! Member! Member!

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

If we are going to head down . . .

[Pause]

The Speaker: Make your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. He is misleading the House. That is not a fact at all! Not a fact at all! I mean, if we want to look at facts, we can look in the newspaper to see where he has been. Come on now!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's the wrong thing to tell me.

The Speaker: Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Both Members take your seats.

We have been here for a few hours today. And we have got a few hours ahead of us. This is a very serious debate. We are very serious about the future of this country, and we are talking about the finances of this country. If you can speak to finance, we will not have a problem. But if we are going to go down

personal roads, I am going to tell *anyone* who goes down that road, *Get out!* from here on in, because we are not going to let this debate go that way.

Does everyone understand that?

There is enough factual information when we come to talk about the funds of this country that people can talk to the factual issues. This is a very important document that sits in front of each of us. It is enough to make a full debate if you intend to debate this matter.

If you do not have enough, or if you cannot stick to what is before you, do not participate. Because we are not going to have this sideshow.

Continue on.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly did not bring up blogs, and I will not do, Mr. Speaker. All I was doing was responding to the comment about blogs.

Mr. Speaker, this newspaper article is not a blog. This is factual information. And Members will know in this House, when I stand up and talk, Mr. Speaker, I bring evidence. I bring facts. And yes, it is very important that we are talking about the finances of this country. And it is very important to know that this Government has done a fantastic job in running the finances of this country, which is why we have the support of the business community in this country. Not any blog, nobody writing this for us. We are not paying anybody to write it. They came out with a joint statement, Mr. Speaker, on February 26. It is just unfortunate, unfortunate that it did not make the front page, Mr. Speaker, which is exactly where it should be.

Because as I said, Mr. Speaker, had this Government not run this country and not minded the public purse like we have done, I can assure you that would have been on the front page.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all I want to say . . . I will finish on this note. The people of this country over the last several years during that COVID-19 period, they were stressed. People lost their jobs. Businesses were struggling. People were hurt. There was an increase of the mental health [issues] of many in our country. But we pressed on. We have done a lot for the people of this country; the record will show that. This particular amendment, once it is passed today, and forgetting all of the banter that just took place, I am sure that the Opposition will support. Because what this will do is . . . our Premier will do what he has done for the last six years. This money will go to the people and businesses in this country to help them move forward in the most positive, positive way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Any other Member?

Minister Burch.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Just a few words on $10 million. Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we have been working on increasing the housing stock since we returned to Government. And for a significant portion of that time, there was a period of austerity where most requests for funding for housing and many other things were not able to be approved. So, three years ago, Mr. Speaker, when there was a request for funding for housing, there were actually supposed to be two requests. One was for the $15 million to address the rental market and primarily our own units. And the other that was to follow but did not was for additional funding to support the private sector rental programme.

Mr. Speaker, the private sector rental programme is designed for private landlords who have units that are not presently occupied primarily because they are in need of some repair. And so, the Corporation has had for a very long time an opportunity to provide assistance to those private sector landlords by renovating their units and then incorporating them into the housing stock for a period of time until we got back the investment.

Mr. Speaker, this has helped both the Corporation, the people of Bermuda and the landowners, since which we have expanded that process so that the Housing Corporation will take away all of the drama, all of the activity that goes on in a rental property, will take that responsibility on so that the landowner does not have to engage with tenants. That is a significant part of the reason why many, particularly the senior residents of Bermuda and homeowners, have taken their properties off of the market. They do not want the drama. They do not want to have to deal with late rent, damage to their property, noise, disrespect, all of the negatives.

So, this programme provides those landowners with the opportunity to not have to deal with any of those issues. The Corporation will take it on. The Corporation will be the tenant. The Corporation will ensure that the rent is paid on time monthly. The only caveat to that is that we will not pay market rates. So, the trade-off for taking on all of this responsibility from the landlord and giving them a peaceful existence is that we will pay slightly less than market rates.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that three years ago when the $15 million was provided for rental accommodation, we did a fair amount of that work in terms of reaching out to people in the community. And about 27 people, I think, or groups of entities had reached out. And we have identified 15 of them, 8 of whom produce 15 units at a cost of $1.2 million. And so, we will start immediately with them. There are a number of other people as a result of the regular reports on the progress of housing and the continual drumbeating of private sector rental programmes who have recently reached out to the Corporation and me to offer up their units. It is the age-old challenge in this job, Mr. Speaker. No

matter how many times you speak it, you have to speak it 10 times before a lot of people hear it the first time.

So, a lot of people were not aware of the programme. I suspect after today's debate and tomorrow's reporting that more will become aware. And we invite them to reach out to the corporation and indicate what they wish to do. We will go out and assess the project. I do want to say that we will not at this stage of the game with this programme deal with completely derelict properties. Because then you are talking about a complete rebuild. This is very much for renovation and repair of units so that they can come online as quickly as we can.

I am very encouraged, Mr. Speaker, by not only the funding that we have, but the interest that is occurring in the community of people who have taken their units off of the market because of the stress of dealing with tenants, and looking at having the corporation do it, and assisting us in providing additional units for the Bermudian population.

Mr. Speaker, we are not done yet.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: There are a number of other items that are bubbling on the back burner that currently there is no funding for. That is not a criticism or a complaint; that is a giving of notice that once we get through the funding and projects that we currently have in place, we will have others that we will bring to the fore, particularly to address the purchasing market. There are a number of units that we have and property that we have that have plans for them. And as soon as funding is available, we will make every effort to produce them.

The other thing that is encouraging about this in terms of addressing the housing challenges that we face is that the Government cannot do it alone. So, the efforts that are being made to encourage the private sector to not only develop residential units in the city and in the economic empowerment zones will go some ways to addressing the challenges that we face with housing. The future is very optimistic. The 137 units that the $15 million would have been spent on, you have already heard from the Honourable Premier that 67 of those are in train. There is a regular production of units being completed and starting. So, throughout this year there will be regular reports of progress in this space.

Mr. Speaker, every person deserves a house over their head and a home. And we are committed to providing that in some way, shape or form, either through the rooming houses that we currently manage and run, as well as through individual units. I heard a story, Mr. Speaker, from Senator Lindsay Simmons, who had been talking to . . . She came to me about a lady who has for the last five years lived in rent-geared-to-income housing. And she has honoured the commitment of paying a quarter of her salary, her household income, in rent, and the 10 per cent savings. And she now has saved $30,000 and is excited about the prospects that she has with that money to do something for herself and her family.

That is the aim of the exercise, Mr. Speaker. I said it before, most Black families, a lot of Black families (I will say) do not have it in their nature or their being or their culture to save. And so, I am not averse to supporting a programme that forces people to do that. And I certainly was around when rent-geared-to-income was introduced. And there was much resistance from people who said, *You cannot tell me how to do that.* I said, *If you want to be in involved in this programme, then you have to do it.* And in every single case where people have been able to save and not been able to spend it on a new car or a new dress or a trip to Disney World, once they have seen the money build up, they are encouraged to not only continue saving but also to make every effort to be able to stand on their own two feet. That is called giving people a hand-up and empowering them to be able to be responsible adults and citizens in this country, Mr. Speaker.

So, we will continue in this vein. And I shall give regular reports on the progress that we have and the new ventures that come on board. Because I have no doubt that we will have no challenge in allocating all $10 million of those dollars on providing housing to the people of this country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

Minister Furbert.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to stand to my feet in regard to the amendment to this legislation today. And the reason I do is because I get *a lot* of questions as it relates to health care and housing.

What this Government has been able to do, Mr. Speaker, is to do things differently. And we have capabilities to be able to think outside of the box so that we are able to serve our people in many ways and in different capacities. So, what we are presenting today only makes sense because if the alternative, particularly in health care, was to raise the increase of the SPR [standard premium rate] to an additional $45 that would have not been good particularly for seniors who are on fixed incomes who already are having to choose between their regular needs and other needs, right? So, it just would not have been the right thing to do.

So, with the foresight of this Government to be able to think outside of the box and do something a little bit differently so that the Premier says, *Reduce the financial burden,* I would say to *prevent financial burden.*

Being closely connected with our seniors in the community, one thing that they do specifically talk about is health care and the cost of health care. It would not have been in our best interests as a country to increase the SPR another $45. That $45 could go toward something else. So, we have found a way to not have

to do that. In one of the most recent town halls that we have, the National Seniors Strategy, that was definitely one of the issues that they did not want. And one of the concerns as far as health care that they surely advocated against was that we do not create an additional financial burden.

So, we are a Government who listens to that. And actually, quite frankly, they were very adamant in regard to what we should do to assist our seniors when the corporate income tax structure comes about.

And speaking to the corporate income tax structure, I remember reading an article, Mr. Speaker, where it spoke to those countries that will be successful with the introduction of the corporate tax system must also pay attention to what they are doing as a country as it related to infrastructure. Housing being an element of infrastructure, it is also important that we are paying attention to those sorts of predictions as we are about to engage or implement corporate income tax.

Mr. Speaker, I get many, many phone calls in particular in regard to seniors who do not find their homes adequate enough anymore, where they cannot get outside of their house or get around their house. And so, what we are looking to do by helping our people with this $10 million can provide our seniors another opportunity to be able to make renovations to their homes and benefit from this housing solution.

We have been a Government that has been committed to making sure that we continue to address the issues of housing. We cannot continue to stand by and do absolutely nothing. So, this again, the amendment to this legislation, this Bill is showing our commitment to making sure that we are addressing the crisis of housing. There is nothing worse, Mr. Speaker, than hearing somebody's cry on the other end of the Island saying that they are about to be evicted and lose what they call their *humble abode* and they have nowhere to go. It is not a nice feeling to get that phone call. And they are desperately looking for options. And while this may not be a solution to everyone's burden, it will definitely help many, Mr. Speaker.

So, we make no excuse for being able to find alternative ways and methods to be able to help our people as it relates to health care and housing. And this is what we are set out to do today, Mr. Speaker. So, it is not a question, you know? It is not a question about not doing something. It is a question about doing something and doing the right thing and preventing, Mr. Speaker, the financial burden of our people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP Dunkley, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to make some comments on the Government Loans Amendment Act 2024 here this afternoon.

And, Mr. Speaker, what I have grown to enjoy about this Chamber and sometimes get frustrated about this Chamber is the fact that you place legislation in front of you or a take-note motion, or whatever, in front of you, and there are two sides of the House. And both sides can argue a different position quite eloquently at times, Mr. Speaker. And the public has to listen to that, and they have to figure out what is, in their opinion, the best way to go forward.

Well, at the end of the day, the Government will always have their way, as former Deputy Speaker Walter Lister used to say: *The Opposition will have its say and the Government will have its way.*

But that is why it is critical that the Opposition come and be prepared to speak on debates even though it might be contrary to some of the opinion within the House. Now, Mr. Speaker, as I wear my politician hat, it is very difficult for me to stand here this afternoon and in any way show that I do not support keeping health premiums down for the people we serve.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: It is very difficult for me, Mr. Speaker, because as a politician . . . And I hear all of this chirping in the background, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that those Members listen or get up and speak when they have a chance because this is serious. This is serious business. And I can chirp with the best of them. But there are some times to remain silent.

And here is why.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And here is why, Mr. Speaker: This country has significant challenges.

We know we have an ageing population. We know. One of the Honourable Members, when we wished her birthday wishes today, took some time to talk about the seniors in her constituency. And it was referenced that another Member of this Chamber had over 100 new seniors in their constituency. We know all of that.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that it is a fact that health care inflation has been greater than 10 per cent for a number of years now. So as people who care about the people we serve, as Members of Parliament on both sides, you know, we can argue about who cares more. But that is just a slippery slope, and the public start to wonder if we are wasting our time or if we are dealing with issues. But both sides care about the people whom we serve. So yes. It is an easy argument to support, *We're going to save the people we serve from a health care increase this year which would mean over $500 extra they would have to pay.* It is easy! It is an easy argument, right?

But here is the other side to that as well. And I support that, Mr. Speaker. I am well aware as an employer and as somebody who is insured myself, I am well aware of the cost of health insurance and the cost of health care. I study it religiously. But here is the other side of that. The PLP started talking about universal health care in 2012.

An Hon. Member: Uh-oh. Uh-oh.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Let us be real—2012. They have been back in power now since 2017. And we have heard a lot of talk.

And I have the greatest respect for Minister Wilson. She is a lady of integrity who cares about what she does. This is not criticism of Minister Wilson. This is criticism that we have not been able to make the decisions yet to put us in a better position seven years on. This is a shared challenge, Mr. Speaker. Because we do this. We use the excess borrowing money to help the people of Bermuda because we have not been able to find a better way.

And, you know, my honourable colleague talked about *that fund* when he had to withdraw it.

An Hon. Member: Do not say it.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I am not going to repeat it because the Speaker already ruled.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But if you look at what that is called, in the dictionary it also says other things, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Like what?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But, Mr. Speaker, that fund, the Sinking Fund with the excess borrowing in it *still has to be repaid*. Today? Not today. Tomorrow. We kick the can down the road. So, we stand here, we say, *How great thou art!* (And I am not close to singing, Wayne Furbert.) But we stand here and say, *How great thou art!* But the fact of the matter is, we burden future generations today by the decisions we make. And you know what? The sad reality of it, Mr. Speaker, is none of us will be here when [they] have to repay that money. None of us will be here when [they] have to repay that money.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am not saying it is not the best thing to do. But the right thing to do and the most appropriate thing to do now is to make some improvements on health care reform. We spent a lot of money. We spent a lot of money toward health care reform, but we have not seen any significant changes at this point in time. And so here is the rub. Here is the rub, Mr. Speaker. Health care inflation has increased, as I have said already, over 10 per cent for numerous years. I do not know if I can go back—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Numerous years. Yes, it has. It has. The Honourable Premier says *not here.* But go back and do the research. It has increased by double digits for numerous years. It is unlikely, Mr. Speaker, that—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. Health accounts are public, they are tabled here in the Honourable House. I do not have the things to get back to him. But it is not correct to say that health care inflation is running over 10 per cent in Bermuda. That is not correct.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will have to take a look at those accounts. I appreciate the interjection by the Honourable Premier, but my research shows something that is different.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But wait a second, Mr. Speaker. They are asking me to table it. But the Premier makes an interjection, and he does not table his document, Mr. Speaker. Now come on!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait, wait. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

Finish your point that you are making.

Hold your point.

What was your point? The Member was making a point. Finish your point.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes. The Honourable Members are getting exercised by the presentation that I am making, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the research that I have done, I see otherwise.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker!

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And I will bring some information to this Honourable House.

But let's not, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Sit down?

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Okay.

The Speaker: What is your point, Member?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is that the Honourable Member knows full well that in this House if you make a statement, *my research* and such, you have to table it! Mr. Speaker, I do it every time I speak. You have to table it. You cannot diss the Premier in that way and not have information to present.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Honourable Member. Do not stretch your points too far. He made an opinion on his research. We are not necessarily required to table every statement that we make. But I have asked most Members to be very cautious in how you extend yourself.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, getting to the point that I was making, Mr. Speaker, next year health care costs will continue to increase, in my view. So, what do we do next year, Mr. Speaker?

Now, the Honourable Premier also stated that the Consolidated Fund does not pay into the Mutual Reinsurance Fund. I accept that. However, Mr. Speaker, if you think that the model that we are currently using now is working in Bermuda, then just look at the facts about the number of people who do not have universal health care, the cost of health insurance and the cost of health care generally. Look at the facts also, Mr. Speaker. And I will come back to this legislation very quickly. But as the Premier spoke to it, I would like to make some comments on it.

Look at the facts, Mr. Speaker. For the last three fiscal years, the last three fiscal years the Government has budgeted at least $11 million less to the hospital than they have paid at the end of that fiscal year. So, in fiscal year 2021/22, the budget was $147.2 million; it ended at $158.3 million, $11.1 increase, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am so grateful that the Honourable Member has brought this topic up because when he debated this in the Budget Debate I was at an engagement with my son, and I was unable to be in the Chamber at that particular time. But I did hear him making these particular falsehoods. So, I must correct the record.

He is stating that the Government spent less than it budgeted for. And the important point to note is that it did not . . . it was additional funds that were budgeted previously that were not paid. That is the point. We went through a *pandemic.* We had a constrained economy. So, in the facts of which he is stating on those particular matters, we were in a pandemic phase. That is why those funds were less because we were constrained with the amount of funds of which we had. It is not accurate to say that the amounts, for instance on the subsidy, were not enough so we paid more.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, that was most confusing. First the Honourable Premier tried to say that the budgeted amount was what it was supposed to be (in my words). Then he said *we were constrained in what we could pay*.

What I see, Mr. Speaker, is in the Budget Book in 2021/22, the original budget, as I said, was $147.2 million. And the final budget was $158.3 million, and the extra was $11 million. The same happened the next financial year, $147.2 million. But the final budget was $162.3 million. Now, Mr. Speaker, I am not being critical of the hospital because I have every confidence in the care one gets down there. My aim is to make sure we fund it in an appropriate manner.

And then look what happened last financial year, 2023/24. The original budget was increased to $155.1 million. The final budget was $171.6 million. The increase was $16.5 million. Now, the Government did say last year that there was a mistake in paying the block grant, which I believe had something to do with this $16.5 million, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, all of this shows that our health care system, while continuing to try to provide the best health care for the people of Bermuda in the most efficient manner, has some cracks through it that we need to address. So, by giving our seniors and giving all of our people this benefit this year, which saves them $500, we are kicking the can down the road. It is time that we made sure that we tied the can down and did something about it, Mr. Speaker.

So that brings me specifically to this Bill, Mr. Speaker. Now, in regard to this Bill, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Welcome back.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Honourable Members—and I hear the chief *inchirpolator*, Mr. Speaker, say, *Welcome back.*

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Do not get sidetracked. Do not get sidetracked.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Well, I have not even pulled out the *Royal Gazette* yet. So, I am sure I can find a copy somewhere in somebody's desk to talk about, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Government says, *Well, show us another way.* Note, I have not said "other ways." *Show us another way.* Well, Mr. Speaker, if this Government did not pound their chests and act so happy that they have produced a surplus budget, there are other ways. There is one way I will talk about today, and there are other ways that people might talk about, Mr. Speaker. We could do it. We could do it funding through the government and have a deficit, Mr. Speaker. But it means a lot to this Government, it means a lot to any Government, to have a balanced budget or a surplus budget, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But all we are doing is we are doing creative accounting. I am not saying it is wrong.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: We aren't fuzzing the numbers.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Now, see the Honourable Member says, *fuzzing the numbers.* I never said that. The Honourable Member Zane De Silva says *fuzzing the numbers.* I never said that. I said *creative.* Because accountants can be creative in the right way that follows accounting principles. And I am not saying that this is wrong, Mr. Speaker, it is a change.

And the challenge that we on this side have, Mr. Speaker, specifically is, the Bill says . . . we are not in Committee, I am just going to refer to this one section. Well, the Explanatory Memorandum says that "replacing subsection (1B) so that excess moneys in the Sinking Fund can, additionally, be applied to a quango" (And the Premier said that this is going to be changed, that "quango" probably should not have been used there.) "or other public funds if such moneys, in the opinion of the Minister of Finance, are not required to fund any deficits."

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is the challenge that we have. Because that means, Mr. Speaker, . . . so we are taking these two approaches this year with the funding of the Health Insurance Premiums and the funding for the Bermuda Housing Corporation. Right? But this now allows the Finance Minister in future years to have this discretion and not report it to the House in real time. And I would have thought that it was more appropriate, no matter who the Government is, Mr. Speaker, to report it to the House in real time to let the House have some oversight, because the last I checked this House has the oversight of the public purse. That is why we spent 56 hours in debate.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Premier mentioned at least once that the Opposition supported the Appropriation Act today. And I wanted to touch base on that briefly because there are some people, even got back to me today and wondered why we supported it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And here is why, Mr. Speaker. Because I have been going through budgets for some years now, Mr. Speaker, and I have not seen any year where an Opposition has not had disagreements with a budget. Some of those disagreements have been voiced and debated quite vehemently. That's the case. That is the case quite frequently, Mr. Speaker, and we made our case here today. But myself and my colleagues, the Government must have the ability to take care of the people and the services that they deserve. And that is why we would not vote against the budget.

I watch the stuff that happens in our good neighbour to the west of us and all those debates on funding so that the Government does not close down. We are more mature than that. We can understand that we can have our debates in this Chamber and at the end of those debates, while there might be some differences, we need to make sure that this country continues to move forward and we will deal with those differences in budget at other times, Mr. Speaker. And that is why I mention that.

So, the Premier should not feel like it is the greatest thing in the world that the Opposition voted for it. I would never think of voting against it unless there was something that was so, so wrong that I couldn't sleep tonight. My public conscience would not let me sleep tonight, Mr. Speaker. We have differences all through this budget. We have a lot of support in this budget and that is why we took that tonight.

But one thing, Mr. Speaker, that I am curious about, and I hope the Honourable Premier, Minister of Finance, can deal with it when he stands up. Don't we have this process a little backwards today, Mr. Speaker? Because if this Bill does not go through today, and I realise the Bill is going to go through. You know, the 30 do not really care about the 6. We know from the Senior Minister who is shaking his head. He said it, I believe it was last year sometime around this time. The Honourable Member was very clear about that.

But if this Bill did not pass today for some reason, the budget would already be on tender hooks. Because the budget needs this Bill. The Premier, Minister of Finance, does not have permission to do what is listed in the budget until this Bill passes. So out of respect for this Honourable Chamber, I say, with all due respect, that this Bill should have been done before the Appropriation Act was passed. Because we are assuming this Bill is going to be passed without the debate.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think I have been very clear in what I have laid out. This Bill here not only has implications this year, but it has implications in future years which makes it very difficult for us to support it when we do not know what might transpire in the future years because excess money can be put to other use without even coming back to the House in real time, Mr. Speaker. And that has got to be a concern.

The Government has our support in the budget and doing what they have to do in housing and doing what they have to do to help in health care. We need to make decisions, so we do not have to keep borrowing money to do it. But, Mr. Speaker, the challenge with this Bill is not so much this year. It is the discretion to do in the future where any Minister of Finance under any Government could do it without real time reporting. And that is the oversight that Parliament must not have taken from them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to—MP Famous.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, I am going to be very brief. I need to remind the people of Bermuda that a few years ago when the PLP was returned to Government . . . and I will start talking about health care reform. There was a newly elected OBA MP whose reply was, *Health care reform? What do you all think this is? Socialism?*

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Mr. Christopher Famous: He went on to denigrate not even the mechanics of it but just the thought of health care reform. Calling us North Korea, all these sorts of places. So I took a moment to look it up and I [thought], *Hmm. Health care reform. Universal health care. Places such as Finland, Sweden, Norway, England—*

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: They had health care. The sort of thing we are trying to get toward. But this particular Member was vehemently (is that the right word?) against health care reform.

Then I did a little research. This thing called . . . what do they call it? Register of Interest. And I came to find out that this particular individual was a major shareholder in every insurance company in Bermuda.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Every insurance company that he didn't declare when he was vehemently against health care reform.

Mr. Speaker, that was a prelude to what happened next. One by one the health insurance companies launched a tirade against health care reform. And sooner or later some of the doctors, medical practitioners joined in the chorus. So, I say that when the Honourable Member who took his seat who agreed with the Appropriation Bill, when he says 12 years ago, 10 years ago, whatever period, the PLP said that in 2017, they came back and nothing has happened, what he left out is that one of his own Members is against it. What he left out is that the health care insurance companies in this country were against it.

You see, Mr. Speaker, it has not happened as of yet for lack of trying. We have faced roadblocks by those who have profited off of the health of the people in this country. I have yet to hear persons from that side of the aisle speak out against those who profit without . . . every year they declare a profit. And then they are sitting there and saying, *What are you all going to do? What are you all going to do?*

Mr. Speaker, let me move on. Last June I was appointed as Chairman of the Bermuda Housing Corporation when the Honourable Member Vance Campbell became . . . went into Cabinet. Mr. Speaker, for the last year and a half, 18 months approximately, almost every other month the Housing Corporation has been able to open up a newly renovated place and hand it to the people of Bermuda, persons in Bermuda. You see, Mr. Speaker, some people who might already have houses, it does not matter to them. But, as the Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert said, for those who have been living from bedpost to bedpost, pillow to post, finally having a roof over your head means a lot. And one of the things I want to say without equivocation (is that the word, equivocation?) is that in the time that the Progressive Labour Party has been in Government we have done nothing but build houses for our people. Loughlands Estate, Mr. Speaker, some people in Paget were against. Anchorage, down in St. George's, that some people in St. George's were against, houses on Butterfield Lane (for those who don't know that is off of White Hill, which is Sandys not Somerset). But Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. But the point is—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, Perimeter Lane.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, those same countries in Europe look out for their people by providing social housing. No one ever calls them Socialists or Communists. They say, *Wow! Such a caring country.*

So I want to close here, Mr. Speaker, finance is not my thing. I only went to your government school. But what I do know, Mr. Speaker, is if the PLP is going to take money and help the people of Bermuda put a roof over their head, or medicine in their body, I am all for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member—MP Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to follow on from where the Honourable Member just left off with regard to making available by appropriating monies for housing because I have lived long enough to see many a cycle of housing shortages in Bermuda.

I remember as a young man in 1983, Mr. Speaker, in the same year that I would have offered myself as a candidate, that housing was provided for me by a PLP candidate in one of his apartments. I am speaking of my dear friend, almost like my father, the late Lloyd James, on South Shore. And I remember the outcry that took place over the dearth of housing and the housing crisis that existed when people were celebrating balanced budgets, persons in this country were unable to find adequate housing. I was a newly married person at that particular time. And thank you to Lloyd who had tourist accommodation who made sure that accommodation was not used for tourists so that I was not out in the street.

I have lived long enough to see two people stand out in this country when it came to housing. And they come from two different political parties. One started off with the PLP but became UBP, and my friend, Quinton Edness, was associated with housing prior to the early 1980s. He built a lot of houses. And persons . . . what did Honourable Michael Dunkley say? *How great thou art?* Beat our chest as regard to the houses that Quinton would have shepherded through. But that did not stop the housing shortage because what we would have seen in this country during that time period were persons who moved away from those types of accommodations that would have existed up on the Gold Coast and moved toward turning their tourist accommodations into long-term rentals. Not for Bermudians, but for the increase of insurance companies that came into the country. Because there was a switch that happened. There was a fundamental psychological shift that took place in the country during that time period where the country moved away from tourism.

And there are many reasons why people hold many different philosophies as to why they changed. But I believe that a former Premier was at the forefront of that, and that would have been the late Sir David Gibbons. He would have been one who would have helped to move the country more toward international business. Others would claim it, that policies took place, but there . . . The other Minister who has built houses has been one of more recent . . . who in my opinion has surpassed that of my late and dear friend, QE, and that is the current Minister for Works, the Honourable Lt. Col. David Burch.

He has single-handedly in his portfolios during different administrations of PLP Governments done what I have always believed needed to happen in this country—housing available for Bermudians in different ways. Creative ways of financing, creative ways . . . Loughlands was geared to (you have heard about it) geared-to-income and the like. Not being afraid to realise what the difficulty was in this country. Putting together emergency housing. Don't forget the emergency housing that exists in the country in places that folks were at one time wanting to knock them all down. Remember when the base transitions came? Some people said, *Knock them all down.*

So, I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am very supportive. And I think that housing in this instance will be the benefactor and Bermudians will be the benefactor of us. And quality of life can only exist in a country where its persons and its citizenry can be adequately housed at a rate in which they can afford to live. There was a time when we said one week's wage equalled one month's rent. Right? Well, we know we are a long way away from that. But if you are ever going to achieve that it will be with this Government. It would only be with this PLP Government in this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I was going to ask if any other Member wanted to speak but I see two Members jumped, so I am assuming that is yes to my . . . is my answer.

Minister Hayward.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to provide intervention in this debate and make something abundantly clear. And I think it is important coming from another Member instead of the Minister of Finance in terms of the points which Mr. Dunkley raised. What we are talking about—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member Dunkley raised.

And what we are talking about is the excess fund, not the Sinking Fund. And the excess fund was specifically designed to pay down deficits. Not debt; deficits—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, if there are no deficits then how is the money utilised? Well, currently, the money can be invested but what greater investment can you have than investing in your people?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: And see, Mr. Speaker, I am glad for your intervention earlier where you prevented [us] from sometimes being the worst version of ourselves in this House. What we are doing with this fund is demonstrating the greater version of ourselves and that is putting money toward where the country would actually feel it. We are satisfying the basic levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. And that is housing, and that is safety and security as it pertains to health care.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: We do not want to see residents pay further amounts of money out their pocket as it pertains to health care costs. And so, we are doing something to prevent that. And we have a mechanism that allows us to do something with the passage of this Bill. And we are only able to use that money in this particular manner because we have been fiscally responsible. And I think that is important to note. That we put ourselves in a position where now we have excess funds that we can put toward the care of our people. And we will do it unapologetically.

All this notion in terms of no checks and balances, there are processes that take place in order to expend amounts of money that will be adhered to, number one. But number two, underneath that fund, that fund is audited on an annual basis and a report has to be made of all the money that . . . how that money is spent. And we will be accountable for the way in which that money is spent. And so, I do not want the public to believe that somehow somebody just has a credit card that they can use [at their] discretion.

Mr. Speaker, I think we should make it abundantly clear that what this Government is actually doing is prioritising the people of this country.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member . . . does any other Member . . . MP Jackson.

MP Jackson, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am going to give it a go.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am going to start out with *if it looks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, it's a duck.* It does not matter what the money in the excess . . . the borrowing fund that we are debating today is borrowed money that we are going to have to pay back.

An Hon. Member: Right.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: So regardless of everything else and all the wonderful things we are going to do this year with that money, we are going to have to pay that money back with interest.

I am not a financier. I would love to know how much per person it is going to still cost to pay that money back. But I have a couple of other questions. If we are going to use this excess money this year, what are we going to do next year? Because I figure if we use this money this year, and it is helping people who are paying for health care policies, fine, okay. But next year we are still going to have our health care premiums and we are still going to have to pay the money into this MRF [Mutual Reinsurance Fund] medical fund. So, what are we going to do then?

And I would imagine that even just the general cost of living it is probably going to be more than the $45 a month that we are saving this year, will probably be more next year anyway.

So I am just kind of putting all the pieces of the puzzle on the table, Mr. Speaker, because somehow this feels like it is not quite what it seems for the person. It might *feel real good right now*, but I am just curious about what it is going to look like tomorrow. Because at some point down the road we are going to have to face the reality. Now, I want to backtrack a little bit. Because I was quite impressed. Right? We, the Government, borrowed this money and we needed it. It was in the time of COVID-19. And it was helping the people and I remember, and it was heartwarming, people were not working, there was no money coming in, it was helping everybody. And we had to cover some serious costs, emergency services needed to be assisted. Lovely! Yes! That is why we borrowed this money. But Mr. Speaker, I am just going to lay it out on the line.

An Hon. Member: Oh no, no.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: People who are paying for medical insurance right now are probably working and earning money. But there are still thousands of people in Bermuda who do not have any medical insurance, any medical coverage. So this means nothing to them.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: It means nothing to them, Mr. Speaker. And they still have to pay that money back. They are going to have to pay it back. And any Customs duties they might run into or land taxes they may be scratching to get. Or maybe some car licence. They are just trying to get around Bermuda the best way they know how. They still have to pay all those taxes and they are going to have to pay that money back. And many of them do not have the medical insurance in the first place. So there is no savings here for them, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: And people think, *Oh, I'm getting inflammatory.* I am angry. You know, just walk around—

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: —the streets of Hamilton, Mr. Speaker, or get on the bus.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Get on the bus!

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Get on the bus! Get on the bus!

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of people out there who we helped, the Government helped, when we were in COVID-19, not working. Helping with emergency services. That is what these funds are for. If you want to use that money for excess . . . whatever you are calling it, then give it to the people who genuinely need it.

An Hon. Member: Who are they?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Help out the seniors who are living at home who are not eating. Who are sick! And they are not paying their medical insurance. They are not!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: They do not have that kind of money.

The Speaker: Point of order? Okay. Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House. That is exactly what the Premier explained in a very detailed manner what we are going to use the money for. The Honourable Member is indicating that the money is going to be . . . be . . . just spent on . . . what?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Whatever.

[Laughter]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Mr. Speaker, there are ways in which we could be providing money to the people who really, really need. And there a lot of them, Mr. Speaker.

Now I am going to go just one step further and then I will take my seat. I am just curious, if we are not . . . I'm just . . . this has just come into my head now. I am just curious, Mr. Speaker, if this money isn't being given into this MRF fund for health care because it needs the support, and then if there was anything else that we could use it for we would. But we can't because we have to help keep that hospital open and running. And if it wasn't for that, then maybe we could be giving this money to people who are *really* down and out, who cannot even afford to go to the doctor. I am just curious.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am just curious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution?

Premier, would you like to take us through?

Hon. E. David Burt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have heard some comments from other Members after the Honourable Member who just took her seat and they said, *It sounds like you are in the wrong party, because the stuff you are advocating for was very much a part of the budget that you voted for earlier today.* Whether or not you listen to what the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors gave in a Ministerial Statement, the same Minister who is responsible for financial assistance that has increased the table of allowable expenses, the Minister of Health who is here making sure that health care is adequately provisioned to seniors and funded inside of a budget that we passed. The same budget that the Honourable Opposition Leader says, *We need to reduce Government spending.*

How do you give more money to people in need and reduce Government spending at the same time? It is exactly what some of the Members said, *Pure political theatre.* No solutions. Nothing whatsoever point out a problem and give no solution for it. Gaslighting! That is what it is all the time.

Come on now, Mr. Speaker. Really? After 56 hours of debate and an Honourable Member gets up on her [feet] and says that we need to provide more money for seniors when this Government is the one who continues to increase seniors' pensions, and has increased the amount of money that is going to financial assistance for seniors? Really? Was she not here for the debates? Come on!

Mr. Speaker, you admonish Members to stick to the facts. And it is really hard when we are listening to debate that is devoid of fact. Everything in this brief that I provided at the beginning of this debate was factual, Mr. Speaker. But I will provide some more facts

because it is important that people know and understand.

We keep hearing all this thing about *what about next year? What about next year?* which represents a fundamental misunderstanding in the way that health insurance works in this country. But if Honourable Members will go back the Budget Statement, it said that universal health care will launch next year.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: So, should we increase people's health insurance rates this year and just get . . . no! That is the reason why we are doing this. But let's talk about that next year thing, Mr. Speaker. Let's go down memory lane. The Honourable Member who just took her seat was talking about the hospital and other things. Do you know what Minister Wayne Furbert and I had to do the first year we had to come up with a budget, Mr. Speaker? I will tell you what we had to do. Because the Honourable Member from constituency 10, who was the Premier at the time, and the former Minister of Finance, raided the Bermuda Hospitals Board $50 million to pay for the America's Cup.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: How much?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: [It was] $50 million. So, when we talk about, *What are you going to do next year?* Our first year in putting together a budget was to find the $50 million that they had cut from the hospital subsidy, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh no!

Hon. E. David Burt: So, if we want to talk about next year and all the rest, let's be clear. This Government is using its increased and better performance from a strongly performing economy to invest in affordable housing and to ensure that we freeze health insurance rates for the third year in a row. That Government used excesses at the hospital which is a result of everyone's health care rates being high due to health care inflation. When the Honourable Member talks about health care inflation with double digits, do you know the last time it was double digits? Under his administration—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: —under a fee-for-service model.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

An Hon. Member: Say it ain't so.

Hon. E. David Burt: There is no double-digit health care inflation now because we had the courage to change health insurance and the way it was funded in this country in 2018. And Members opposite opposed it!

So, we cannot come in here with all sound and fury and talk about all these different things without remembering what it is you actually did, and provide zero solutions whatsoever for the challenges of which you raised. Let's be clear. We provided the solutions. We have brought increased funding to this House. And we will continue to do it. And every single time Members opposite get up, and every time they go out on the street they say, *We are going to reduce government expenditure.* Well, I just have something . . . Honourable Member from constituency 20, you cannot reduce government expenditure and do all the things of which you just said. But guess what? This budget that you voted for earlier today did not decrease government expenditure, it increased it and funded the stuff of which you want.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Now, Mr. Speaker, I will go to the start, and I will say it was rich at the very beginning where the Opposition Leader started talking about financial responsibility. Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance is in absolutely no place whatsoever to lecture any government on matters related to fiscal responsibility. None.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: None. None whatsoever. Because Mr. Speaker, we know the only time that we were forced . . . sorry, the first time we were forced to increase the debt ceiling was not the year when we came into office and had to find $50 million because they took money to pay for the America's Cup from the hospital. That was not when we had to find the money. The first time we had to increase the budget deficit was when the project of which they campaigned on at Morgan's Point went into default. Understand—in default before we even came to office, Mr. Speaker, and had to repay those funds.

Here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. And so, when we are talking about fiscal responsibility and all those different things, you know, the only thing they want to throw up is $800,000. Well, what about $200 million? Two hundred million dollars! What we had to pay for . . . what we had to pay for.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Opposition Leader asked a question about $100 million in the Sinking Fund. And he now predicts that we are going to go down to 80 and all the rest. It was a choice. It was a decision that we made, and we stand by it because the choice could be. adhere to that and let people's health insurance rates go up, not provide additional

investment into the Bermuda Housing Corporation, which could use additional investment. That's it. It is a choice. It is a choice supported by this Cabinet and we shall see if it is supported by the House unanimously, as the budget was supported earlier today.

Then of course, Mr. Speaker, we hear this issue which the Honourable Minister of the Economy and Labour laid out very clearly—very, very clearly. All this talk about the Sinking Fund, raise the Sinking Fund, et cetera, and all the rest. To be perfectly clear, money that is inside of the excess borrowing fund under law right now can be used for two purposes only: investment and funding deficits. Nothing else. So a story saying, *Oh, it could be used to retire debt and pay down debt and we are taking money away from this stuff . . . and pay off . . .* are nonsense, Mr. Speaker. Because the law does not allow it. Those are the facts, Mr. Speaker.

So, with all of that, after all of that sound and fury, there was literally one question and I answered the one question and therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee 4:37 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

GOVERNMENT LOANS AMENDMENT ACT 2024

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of the whole [House] for further consideration of the Bill entitled the Government Loans Amendment Act 2024.

Premier and Finance Minister David Burt, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to move all of the clauses.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 12A of the Government Loans Act 1978 by repealing and replacing subsection (1B) so that excess moneys in the Sinking Fund can, additionally, be applied to other public funds if such monies, in the opinion of the Minister of Finance, are not required to fund any deficits.

The Chairman: Any further speakers to the Bill?

Hon. E. David Burt: No further speakers?

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: I'm sorry. Any further speakers to the Bill?

There appear to be none.

Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that clauses 1 and 2 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 and 2 be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

No objections at all.

Approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 and 2 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections to that?

There appear to be none.

Approved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that?

Hon. E. David Burt: I wish you to call the roll, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: It appears names . . . okay. We will have the names called for the approval of this Bill.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Yes, two minutes.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

[Pause]

The Chairman: Members, we are going to take a vote. A division has been called and the Assistant Clerk will read each Member's name and if you are in support with the Government your response should be Aye. And if you oppose, your response should be Nay. Or in

other words, yes for the Government and no if you are against it.

The Assistant Clerk: Okay. Starting with Mr. Adams.

DIVISION

[Government Loans Amendment Act 2024]

Ayes: 19
Mr. J. Adams
Lt. Col. Hon. D. Burch
Hon. E. D. Burt
Ms. C. Caesar
Mr. W. Caines
Hon. V. Campbell
Mr. Z. J. S. DeSilva
Mr. C. Famous
Hon. T. Furbert
Hon. W. L. Furbert
Hon. J. Hayward
Hon. D. V. S. Rabain
Hon. W. H. Roban
Mr. J. S. Simmons
Hon. K. L. Simmons
Mrs. I. Simmons-Wade
Mr. H. E. Swan
Mr. N. S. Tyrrell
Hon. M. A. Weeks

Nays: 4
Mr. C. Cannonier
Hon. M. H. Dunkley
Ms. S. E. Jackson
Hon. J. Richardson

Absent: 11
Hon. D. V. Burgess, Sr.
Mr. C. L. Dickinson
Mr. Lister III
Mrs. R. Ming
Mr. S. Pearman
Mr. A. Richardson
Mr. W. L. Scott
Mr. S. Simmons
Mr. B. Smith
Mr. J. Wade
Hon. K. N. Wilson

The Assistant Clerk: There are 19 ayes and 4 nays. The vote carries.

[Desk thumping]

[Motion carried by majority on division: The Government Loans Amendment Act 2024 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

The Chairman: Thank you, Members.

We call on the [Deputy] Speaker to resume the Chair.

House resumed at 4:48 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

GOVERNMENT LOANS AMENDMENT ACT 2024

The Deputy Speaker: Any objections to the Bill being approved?

There appear to be none.

The next order of business is the consideration of the Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) [for financial year 2023/24].

Finance Minister, you have the floor.

BILL

SECOND READING

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 1) 2023/24

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move that Standing Order 43(3) be suspended.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 43(5) I move that the Supplementary Estimate [No. 1] for financial year 2023/24 be now considered in Committee of Supply.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms. Foggo.

House in Committee at 4:49 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 1) 2023/24

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee [of Supply] for the Supplementary Estimates for the years 2023/24.

I call on the . . . I think it is the Ministry of Education.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Okay. Members, the Ministry of Finance and Premier is going to speak.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the Supplementary Estimate that is currently before the House is Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) for financial year 2023/24. What

is important to note is that all of these matters were covered in detail in the Budget Statement because all of those matters were reported as the adjustments to the current year, prior to the new year—

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: —and most persons did them. But as a matter of course, and to ensure that we are keeping in line with matters related to Financial Rules, we want to ensure that these particular items are debated.

And I am happy to move on to the first head, which is Head 10. And I would move Head 10 which is the . . . well, I'm not first. The Cabinet Office is first. So, I should let him go.

The Chairman: Yes. Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry. So, I am happy to defer to the Minister.

The Chairman: Thank you. And that is Head 43, and that is Minister Campbell.

CABINET OFFICE

HEAD 43—DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I rise today to provide a briefing on the supplemental budget increase for the Department of Information and Digital Technology, Head 43.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Information and Digital Technology received a supplemental budget allocation of $1,350,438.58 for the fiscal year 2023/24. The additional funding was to cover the cost incurred resulting from the cyberattack in September 2023.

Madam Chairman, to address the threat incident, external vendors were hired to conduct forensic audits to ascertain the root cause of the event. Additionally, they ensured that the perpetrators were no longer in the environment, and they assisted with the execution of remediation activities to allow services to be restored. These resources were also used to assist IDT staff with necessary upgrades to improve the security infrastructure to minimise risk for future threat activities.

Madam Chairman, I want to commend the officers of the Public Service, IDT and other departments who not only worked diligently and long hours to get us back up and running but also in the interim, while we were working on that, they found other creative ways of continuing to deliver services to the public.

Thank you very much. This completes the brief for the Department of Information and Digital Technology for fiscal year 2023/24.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: So, Minister, can you move that the head be taken under consideration?

Hon. Vance Campbell: Okay. Madam Chairman, I move that Head 43 be taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 43 be taken under consideration.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this head?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: I recognise . . . yes, Opposition . . .

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you.

I thank the Minister. Also, during the budget . . . during the other meeting of the Committee of Supply dealing with Head 10 on Finance Ministry, when questioned about the spend for cyber incident [2023]—

The Chairman: Member, could we speak to Head 43, please?—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I definitely want to.

The Chairman: —because we cannot consider other debates.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: No, I definitely want to. It is just that the Honourable Premier and Finance Minister said that his spend was for remediation to restore services. And this Cabinet Minister just said the same thing. So, I was just questioning, Did we spend twice for the same service? Or could he explain the difference between why we spent $1.3 million for IT head and then $3 million . . . just his. What was his spend for? Because the Premier has already said we spent for remediation or restore services.

The Chairman: So, you are talking about the Minister who has presented this head?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I am.

The Chairman: Minister, would you like to respond, please?

Hon. Vance Campbell: Madam Chairman, my brief was an explanation of what the funds were used for. Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this head?

There being none, I call on the Minister to move that this be approved.

Hon. Vance Campbell: Madam Chairman, I move that the supplemental for Head 43 in the amount of $1,350,438.58 for the fiscal year 2023/24 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 43 be approved for (I am going to round the figure off) for $1,350,439 be approved.

Any objections?

I am not going to do cents.

Are there any objections?

There being none.

Approved.

[Motion carried: Head 43 passed.]

The Chairman: Can we now move on?

Hon. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: You are welcome, sir.

We now move to the Ministry of Finance. I call on the Minister of Finance on Head 10.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Madam Chairman.

I will go right into the matters that are related to Head 10. And just as a note, I will also be doing the head for the Minister of Health—

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: —as well, as she is not in.

The Chairman: So, Premier, are you asking that you do them both in sequential order?

Hon. E. David Burt: No, no. no. I'm fine with the order.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am happy to move matters related at this point in time to Head 10.

The Chairman: Proceed.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

HEAD 10—MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I am here today to discuss the Supplemental Estimate for Ministry of Finance, Headquarters, totalling $7,392,100. This amount can be split down to two components. First, cost related to Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and, second, cost related to the cyberattack. These two matters have been addressed previously during Ministerial Statements and during the Committee of Supply, and for good order here as an overview of why a budget supplemental is being required.

Corporate Income Tax. Madam Chairman, in late 2023 the Government of Bermuda in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance passed the Corporate Income Tax Act 2023. This was a significant achievement representing strong and positive collaboration and consultation with industry and the public. The Genesis initiative in subsequent work was Pillar Two of a global agreement reached in 2021 under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development [OECD] and signed by more than 140 countries which requires a 15 per cent tax be levied on a jurisdictional basis to in scope entities and is commonly referred to as the Global Minimum Tax Agreement. The OECD has issued model rules as part of the framework for the implementation of the Global Minimum Tax and these rules were the foundation for the development of Bermuda's regime to be considered compliant with the requirements.

The Act imposed a 15 per cent corporate income statutory tax rate that will be applicable to all Bermuda businesses that are a part of multinational group with an annual revenue of [€]750,000 or more. To adhere to the OECD timeline of implementation, the Government has worked at pace to ensure the legislation is in place a full year before its implementation on the 1 January 2025 so that companies can make necessary accounting adjustments for this new tax accordingly.

The budget supplemental covers work which includes policy and legislative development, public consultations, tax revenue modelling and design work on the entity to administer the new tax.

Cyber Incident. Madam Chairman, Honourable Members are well aware that the Government was a target of malicious and deliberate cyberattack in September which severely crippled Government systems. Before I go any further, I would like to pay tribute to the dedication of public servants who worked diligently to not only repair the damage but also deliver public services under extremely trying conditions without the computer systems that would normally be used to deliver those services.

Over the past few years the Government had significantly increased capital spending to invest in its IT infrastructure; however, these increases were not enough to mitigate the attack. The Government acted fast to ensure that services were resumed quickly and enlisted the help of specialists across the world to support this goal.

The additional sum of $3,092,[1]00 represents the Ministry of Finance's contribution to support the remediation efforts in the wake of the cyberattack.

Madam Chairman, the supplementary estimate in the amount of $7.4 million is required for fiscal 2023/24 under Head 10.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier and Finance Minister.

The Head 10 has been put on the floor for consideration.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 10?

There being no other Members, I ask the Finance Minister and Premier to ask that the supplementary be approved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that Head 10 be approved and stand part of the Bill.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 10 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There being none; approved.

[Motion carried: Head 10 passed.]

The Chairman: That brings us to the next Ministry which is the Ministry of Education.

Would the Minister of Education like to stand and put his head for consideration to the floor?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

HEAD 16—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Education, Head 16, has a supplemental for the financial year 2023/24 for an unbudgeted sum of $4.897 million. This comprises an over expenditure of $431,000 for substitutes; $466,000 for paraprofessionals; and $4 million for negotiated pay awards.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry calculated the supplemental to be $5.56 million based on the Ministry's projections of salaries and wages overages of $4.66 million and the over-expenditures of substitutes and paraprofessionals. However, $660,000 was found within the current operating budget for the negotiated pay awards resulting in the projected $4 million for negotiated pay awards and the $4.8 million total projected overspend.

Madam Chairman, the original 2023/24 budget for substitutes was $3.64 million but the projected expenditure to year end is $4 million, reflecting the overage of $431,000. Schools are assigned allocated substitutes and on-call, also known as day-to-day substitute teachers. Substitute teachers ensure that each student receives quality instruction while their formal teacher is away or the teaching post is vacant. Teachers are absent for various reasons such as illness, personal leave, special leave, et cetera. The budget allocation for substitute teachers is estimated based on staffing levels, operational needs and the average needs in past years. In the past, overages for substitute spending was offset by funds from vacant funded posts.

Madam Chairman, $7.64 million was the original 2023/24 budget for paraprofessionals. The expenditure to year end is projected to reach $8.1 million reflecting an overage of $466,000. Paraprofessionals provide instructional, behavioural and other support to students in and outside the classroom. This includes providing adequate support for students with autism spectrum disorder and physical exceptionalities including those who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who are visually impaired. The budget allocation is based on known and estimated client needs. However, during the last year there was unforeseen increase in students in these categories.

Madam Chairman, the $4 million overspend for salaries and wages is due to the recently finalised union negotiated pay awards. The overage amount is substantial, but it is due to the large number of full-time equivalents in the Department of Education, nearly 1,100 staff, more than a quarter of the total employees for Government.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 16, supplemental?

Thank you. There being no other Members, I do call on the Minister to move his head.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, I move that Head 16 be considered.

The Chairman: Be approved.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 16 be approved.

There are no objections.

Thank you. Approved.

[Motion carried: Head 16 passed.]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Chairman: I now call on the Premier and Finance Minister who will be putting the Head 24 under Health for consideration.

Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I would like to move Head 24.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

HEAD 24—BERMUDA HOSPITALS BOARD

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Head 24, Bermuda Hospitals Board [BHB], supplementary current account BHB subsidy of $16,322,975. Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Hospitals Board is the largest health care provider in Bermuda. It provides care through the three main facilities: King Edward [VII] Memorial Hospital [KEMH], a general wing Acute [Care] Wing and Emergency Department; Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute providing mental health and intellectual disability service; and Lamb Foggo Urgent Care Centre. Additionally, the Bermuda Hospitals Board operates 26 group homes and administrative functions such as the medical concierge. Human resources and IT are located in the Craig Appin Building in Hamilton.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Hospitals Board was transitioned to a block grant from a fee-for-service funding model in June 2019 with an agreed total funding target of $330 million annually. This is underpinned by a government commitment to ensure $322 million of this funding is through a mixer of subsidy, grants and transfers from the Mutual Reinsurance Fund component of the Standard Premium Rate [SPR]. The remaining $8 million in revenue BHB would obtain through fee-for-service procedures not covered by the Standard Health Benefit such as services to non-residents. The purpose was to contain untenable SPR increases and cause the BHB to operate within a set budget and control its surpluses.

Madam Chairman, BHB funding through the Mutual Reinsurance Fund between 2019 and 2023 was lower than forecast due to an unrealised SPR increase and lower headcount. As a result, the committed funding of $322 million was unachieved when taking the four years of block grant funding model into consideration, the total shortfall in funds for BHB from 2019 through 2023 was $50,262,392. And that happens when you have a pandemic and a whole lot of people do not have work. Because those are the ones who are having to pay into health insurance.

Supplemental funding was provided in 2019/20 of $7.8 million; 2021/22 of $11.1 million; and 2022/23 of $50 million which reduced the committed funding shortfall to $60,322,975. In September 2023 the Government committed to paying the $16.3 million funding shortfall to the BHB which formed part of the Bermuda Hospitals Board fiscal year 2023/24 budget and cash flow forecast from October 2023 through March 2024. The supplemental funding provides BHB with a committed $322 million fixed budget modelled and implemented in 2019.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier and Finance Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 24?

I recognise Member Dunkley. You have the floor.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Madam Chairman. And I thank the Honourable Premier for the overview on the $16.3 million that had to be granted through a supplementary estimate. I appreciate the Premier, once again informing this House and the people of Bermuda that the . . . how the hospital is funded through the subsidy and also through the grant from the Mutual Reinsurance Fund. And then $8 million for fee-for-service.

So a couple of questions for the Honourable Minister. Through the last year we became aware that the grant was not paid in full and there was no explanation for why it fell through the cracks . . . sorry, it was not paid in full on time. And there was very little explanation of how and why it fell through the cracks. So, can the Honourable Minister . . . because the grant continues on for the next financial year, can the Honourable Minister please give this Honourable House an understanding of how the grant is supposed to be paid and what is put in place to make sure that the grant will be paid on time through the next financial year and going forward?

We obviously support the work done at the hospital and want the best of care for anyone who comes through their doors. And we want to make sure that they feel that they are adequately funded. So the Opposition's request is to get some comfort that this oversight will not happen again and a better understanding of when the grant is paid and who is responsible for the grant can help us get that oversight.

I am not going to get into the particulars of the $16.3 million. I have discussed it a number of times. We discussed it earlier in the debate and it is clear that it is here because it is a supplementary estimate, so funding was short of what was required. But what I would like to know from the Honourable Premier, Does the Honourable Premier, with the Minister of Finance hat on, think that next year we will be with the current subsidy and the current estimate for the Mutual Reinsurance Fund? Does the Honourable Premier think that we will not have the need for a subsidy in the next year?

And the second question to that, the Honourable Premier gave a commitment at the end of wrapping up the previous debate, which I am not going to reflect on, that universal health care would come into effect next year. So, does the Honourable Premier believe that for the next financial year the funding for the hospital will be as per the budget?

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 24?

There being none, I call on the Minister of Finance and Premier to . . .

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, so much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the answer to the first question is very simple. I can give a commitment that we in working with the Bermuda Hospitals Board and have a wonderful arrangement and agreement to make sure that funds are paid on time from all of the various government funds, making sure that we speed reimbursement from HID [Health Insurance Department] because there are multiple different things that these things take place. So, I can give the Honourable Member that particular comfort. And I can also give the Honourable Member the particular comfort that the amount that is budgeted in the budget will be adequate and there is no expectation of any supplementaries from this year's budget.

The other thing that I will say in regard to matters related to universal health care, it was stated very clearly inside of the Budget Statement around the timing related to the core benefits package. The core benefits package is what forms the core package of health care. Right now, of course, that core benefits package is called the Standard Premium Rate which covers just hospital care and diagnostic imaging. It will be a wider package to make sure that those things can happen. And the funding model to make sure that it can make sure it encompasses everyone. And so, from that perspective I know the Minister of Health is continuing to work through those particular matters and this particular budget (of which had unanimous support in this House) funds the implementation of those particular regimes.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 24?

I recognise Member Dunkley. Thank you.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I am not going to push this issue any further, but for the sake of clarity, I asked the question in regard to, When the grant is paid, is it paid in one time or is it paid over a period of time? And how [did] it manage not to be paid in the appropriate time? Because I would have thought, Madam Chairman, that somebody within government would be making sure it was paid, but certainly somebody in the hospital when they are doing their financials, they are looking at cash flow, would make sure it is being paid.

So, is the Premier in a position to give an understanding of how it slipped through the cracks? That is all I am asking for. I am not trying to score any political points. I am just getting an understanding.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 24?

There being none, I recognise the Premier and Finance Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Given that the Honourable Member wants to play politics, I will happily oblige him in playing politics because the Honourable Member has been around for a while, and he understands the way things work.

This has nothing to do with a grant. There is a fixed funding model that is made up from subsidy that comes from the Government and made up from the portion of the MRF that goes to the Bermuda Hospitals Board which comes from the Standard Premium Rate. When we had a pandemic less people were on health insurance which means that the BHB did not reach their $330 million. And given that they did not reach that $330 million, there was a shortfall which the Government pledged to fill to make sure that the hospital can operate.

That is what this is about. This is not regarding anything else. It is the expectation that with the continued increase in jobs, 500 last year, 1,000 more jobs added this year, we know about the matters which we cover in the Budget Statement about additional employment, that is the reason why I have confidence to the Honourable Member that there will not be additional funding that is needed. These $60 million is for funds from during the pandemic times and they . . . I made the commitment upon returning to the Ministry of Finance that we would find the money to ensure they were given to the hospital so that the hospital can come out of the overdraft and other various positions that they were in due to the cashflow because they budget based upon that $330 [million] and if that $330 [million] is not coming in from the sources due to the fact that there were less persons with health insurance paying into that body, we need to make it up. And it is also very important to note that they did have to do a lot during COVID-19.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 24?

There being none, I call on the Minister of Finance to ask that this head be approved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you so much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that Head 24 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 24 be approved.

No objections; approved.

[Motion carried: Head 24 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, if I could just say one thing . . . if I could just prior to us moving to the next head while we are here in Committee of Supply?

The Chairman: Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Clearly, we have covered the various matters related to the current account estimates. The note that as per the [Standing Orders], I just want to say that the criteria for determining debatable supplementary estimates require that all items on current account be debated if the current account spend of the Ministry shows an increase of greater than 10 per cent or $250,000 when compared to the original estimate and the other reminder that all matters that are capital items are debatable.

The Chairman: Thank you, Finance Minister. I think everyone heard.

I now call on the Minister of Works and Engineering to put—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: The paper says *Works and Engineering.*

The Minister of Public Works to put Head 65 on the table for consideration.

Minister.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS

HEAD 65—CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT QUARRY REFURBISHMENT

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Madam Chairman, I move that Head 65, Capital Development for the Quarry Refurbishment of $2,960,000 be approved.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Public Works undertook the purchase of a new asphalt plant and paving equipment in the amount of $6,197,470. Due to the estimated total spend, a technical supplement is required to increase the total authorised figure from the current $14 million to $16,960,000.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Public Works request that the technical supplement of $2.96 million is approved to capital cost centre 75264, Quarry Refurbishment.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Head 65?

There being no other Members who wish to speak to Head 65, I ask the Minister to move his head for approval.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Madam Chairman, I move that technical supplement for Head 65, Capital Development of $2,960,000 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 65, Capital Development Quarry Refurbishment be approved.

Any objections?

There being none; approved.

[Motion carried: Head 65 passed.]

The Chairman: I now . . . yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm good. Thank you, very much, Madam Chairman.

Now noting that all matters of heads that are in the Supplementary Estimate have been approved by the Committee of Supply, I move that Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) for financial year 2023/24 be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It is moved that Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) [for financial year 2023/24] be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections?

There being none.

Thank you.

[Motion carried: Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) for financial year 2023/24 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 5:19 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 1) 2023/24

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members.

Are there any objections to the Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) [for financial year 2023/24] being reported to the House as printed?

No objections.

They have been reported as printed.

Now, Members, that brings us to a close of the items on the Order Paper today. So now we go and do the third readings for those items. The first would be . . . Deputy? Did you have a third reading?

[No audible response]

The Speaker: Okay.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024 now be read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
There are none.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and has now passed.
Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024 was read a third time and passed.]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Go ahead.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
There are none. Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

VOLUNTARY REGISTRATION OF VITAL DOCUMENTS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) ACT 2024

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I move that Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and has now passed.
Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Premier.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.
Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Government Loans Amendment Act 2024 be now read for the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
There are none.
Continue, Premier.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

GOVERNMENT LOANS AMENDMENT ACT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and has now passed.
Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Government Loans Amendment Act 2024 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 14

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 14 be suspended.

The Speaker: Members, I seek the indulgence of the House for the suspension of Standing Order 14 for the Member to introduce a matter.
Yes.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE (NO. 3) FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2022/23

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the powers confirmed by section 96 of the Constitution I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Supplementary Estimate (No. 3) for financial year 2022/23, which is just the tidying up of matters that are related to the audit which was tabled earlier today. So, it is just basically making sure that the audit numbers match and it is a final cleanup for those particular matters. And I know that those matters have been sent to the House and have been put online for Members to see them and we will debate them in May.

The Speaker: Yes. It will sit on the Order Paper until we return to the House.

Thank you.

Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: I almost forgot the date, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, at this point in time I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until a date known as Friday, 3 May 2024.

I note that there are Members who are set to speak.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MP . . . Premier . . . MP Dunkley.

MP ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM PARLIAMENT

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise this evening to inform this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda of a very difficult decision that I have made. Effective 31 March of this year I will retire as a Member of Parliament representing the people of Smith's North and the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, this certainly has not been an easy decision for me. And I have thought through it for a long time. And it is not easy for two main reasons: I love the country and I love my family.

Mr. Speaker, serving the people of Smith's North, Devonshire East (and Devonshire South before the change in the boundaries) over the years has been an honour and a privilege that I will always treasure. I have enjoyed working for the people of Bermuda. And certainly I have enjoyed working to try to make Bermuda a better place. All of us know as politicians that when you represent a constituency, they can become your extended family. Smith's North has become my extended family, and I will certainly, Mr. Speaker, miss being on the doorstep and will miss those relationships. I have been blessed to serve for many years and I am honoured to have been the 12th Premier of Bermuda.

While representing our people overseas, whether it be for the America's Cup announcement in 2017, ringing the bell on Wall Street, or RIMS [Risk and Insurance Management Society], I always wore this flag with great pride, and represented the country as the best place in the world to try to spread the word about this treasure out here in the middle of the Atlantic.

Mr. Speaker, as I reflect on politics, it might seem strange to some that I will also miss this Chamber. While at times the behaviour can be suspect (and I will leave it there) on both sides, Mr. Speaker. I certainly have developed an affinity for this place and the important debates through the years. And I can speak for a long time about the debates, but I remember early in my career that your time was not your time when we had the debate on capital punishment, Mr. Speaker. That went on well into the night, well into the next day, and there were various Members who had gone home, rested, had a shower and changed and came back fresh to speak.

It has always been an honour, Mr. Speaker, that I will treasure in being entrusted with speaking on behalf of the constituencies that I have served for Bermuda. Mr. Speaker, I have certainly appreciated the value of always being prepared and the importance of speaking even if that message might be contrary to what many in the Chamber might want to hear. Mr. Speaker, that is important and that is the strength of a healthy democracy. And thus, my difficult decision.

In those 27 years, in some aspects public service can be a toll on one's family. And I am sure we can all reflect on that. A real toll on one's family. Many families hide it because they support their loved one. So I am grateful to my families: my family at Dunkley's [Dairy] for their understanding my commitment to public service and covering me in my absence, especially my brother, Stephen. He has been the biggest supporter I have other than my wife, and he has worked hard to cover me. There are some people at work who think I don't do anything, but they will find out in the near future what I do.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I remember the time, Mr. Speaker, and I won't tell a lot of stories. But my brother means a lot to me. And I remember the time that I was threatened, and I think the Honourable Premier can reflect on how that can get you for a moment. Well, it was

a busy day, and I got a call from my brother. And he said, *Hey, mate. You all right?*

And I said, *Yes, yes, I am cool. What happened?*

And he said, *Well, if you need any help, just let me know. I got your back.*

That's my brother. All the time. Did not want to talk the issues but he supported me, and he never questioned when I was gone.

But Mr. Speaker, most importantly, my wife. You know, our spouses sometimes take a hands-off approach in politics. And my wife never raised politics unless she knew I needed to get something off my chest. My mother, my biggest critic and a good supporter, and certainly my family for their enduring support and advice they have given me. It is not easy for those people. But I am blessed, and I am grateful that I always had their support. And to my wife, Pamela, the true angel, now on Friday nights she has to deal with me.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, when I first mooted that I wanted to get involved in politics, I remember asking my wife, and at that time our children were young. And she said, *Well, you know, our children are young. Just starting out in school. And perhaps now is not the right time.* She let that sink in for a moment. And then she said, *It's your decision. And whichever way you go I will support you 100 per cent.* The rest is history, Mr. Speaker. Today we have two beautiful daughters. They are both married. I have two grandchildren and another one, thankfully, on the way. And that is the best part of any day, Mr. Speaker. I am blessed to live next to my daughter and when I drive home if the car is in the yard, I am late for my wife, but I see my grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank my branch in Smith's North for their support and assistance through the years, and all my branches. And every Member of this Chamber I am sure appreciates the value of a good branch because you cannot get elected without it, Mr. Speaker. And I have been blessed through the years to have great branches, great people to support me all the way through the process.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues in the OBA, past and present, for their commitment and work. I know it is not easy. I know that oftentimes we think we would rather be somewhere else. But the people of Bermuda count on us for the work we do. So thank you for my colleagues for your support.

And one final group that I want to thank, because I can't thank everybody, but there is a group that calls various Members of Parliament and they are the *Friday Prayer Warriors,* Mr. Speaker. You know, Bermuda is rich in our religious values and traditions. And I was blessed to get to know these Prayer Warriors early in my time in Parliament and they pray for you every Friday and then call you and notify you of their prayer. That support has been a tremendous boost and a source of comfort, and I really appreciate the faith that they have shown.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a difficult decision because time waits for nobody. And in listening to a senior Member of the US Senate some weeks ago, he said, *Father Time is undefeated.* And I can't say that I ever looked at it that way, but it confirmed, Mr. Speaker, my very tough decision to retire because I am not about to test Father Time. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to spending more time with my grandchildren and my family and other things in life that I certainly have responsibilities for.

Like many, I have worked tirelessly in service, and I am proud of that service, Mr. Speaker. While I have a few regrets along the way, I did my best. I gave it all and I endeavoured to serve with honesty and integrity to help make this Island home the best place it can be.

Mr. Speaker, there is never a good time to retire. Bermuda today, for all the good that we have done and all the progress that we have made, still has significant challenges. If we fail to tackle them head on, we fail to build that better future for our people and the coming generations. If we fail to work together or consistently take partisan positions, we will fail our people and the coming generations.

Mr. Speaker, in my time, sadly I have seen less reaching across the aisle and more time spent in making sure one gets re-elected. In my time, I have seen more time and effort on bashing the other side than working on what is best for Bermuda. In my time, I have seen more importance placed on party than the importance of Bermuda. This cannot continue, on both sides, Mr. Speaker. I know we can do better. I have faith in this Chamber. I have faith in the people who are in this Chamber because they were sent by the people of Bermuda.

But it obvious and clear to me, Mr. Speaker, that people are tired of the partisan politics as we live in difficult times with many of our islanders struggling or emigrating. We must change and we must do better. This Government certainly does not like to hear this. But the reality is, and they have admitted, that there are struggling people. More people emigrating than ever before. And there is a concern about the future and a lack of confidence in the future. Yes, international business and the associated businesses with that are doing well and that foundation helps the Island greatly. And we must never forget their importance. But we must also remember that we have people struggling in our community.

Mr. Speaker, I will always remain available to assist in any way that I can in support of the people of Bermuda. I love this country like everyone does in this Chamber. I will no longer be a Member of Parliament as of 31 March, but my desire to make Bermuda a better place for future generations will not wane. I will remain available to help when requested. After all, we are always available to help this beautiful Island.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you and colleagues for affording me this opportunity to say what

I have said tonight. And may the good Lord continue to bless and to guide this Chamber and our Island home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member. And we all thank you for your service and wish you well in your retirement.

Minister Rabain.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I begin my comments of what I wanted to speak about, I just want to wish the Member from constituency 10, who happens to border . . . we share a boundary on Loyal Hill well wishes in his retirement.

Thank you for your service to the people of Bermuda.

I am sure all of us who have been in this House recognise how difficult it is to get here and the sacrifices that you have obviously made in the last 27 years. And I was a colleague with you in the Senate and then in the House. I often say I have been an Opposition Senator, a Government Senator, Opposition Member of Parliament and a Government Member of Parliament. So I have seen it all. But I do remember the sparring in the Senate and again, I just wish you well.

USE OF MIND-ALTERING DRUGS

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: But Mr. Speaker, what I did want to speak about today is a serious issue that is gripping our Island. I urge colleagues here and I urge persons listening in the audience to just please take heed about what I want to talk about.

Mr. Speaker, it has become more of the norm to turn a blind eye to the use of mind-altering drugs here in our Island. Mr. Speaker, we may have seen a headline just last week. A student at Delwood had consumed an edible and was rushed to the hospital based on that. This is something that is occurring more and more within our schools. Sometimes reported sometimes not reported. We recently did a security sweep at one of our schools and confiscated quite a number of vaping devices, Mr. Speaker, and this is something that I think a couple of months ago there was a story about vape pipes being found at a primary school.

I am not here to pass judgment on what adults do with their time legally, Mr. Speaker. But I want to serve a warning to those adults who are giving these devices, these edibles, these gummies and all of these other things to our children. They are doing a grave disservice to our community. We have children . . . as I said, vapes found in primary schools. The age of primary school goes up to 10 and 11, Mr. Speaker. That is not a place we should be finding these types of devices or children playing with them. We had, as I said, a young student from Dellwood that would be between the ages of 11 and 14 consume an edible that was passed to him by someone and as a result he is now . . . he was taken to the hospital and thankfully he is okay.

I want to serve a warning to parents. Please be vigilant. Please look out for your children. They do not deserve this type of treatment. Adults out there who are using these devices, consuming these things I have no issue with you doing whatever you do on your spare time. But please, please ensure that children are not getting a hold of these things and they are messing around with them. You are condemning our children to a life of misery if you continue to be irresponsible with your behaviour like this. This will not lead to good outcomes if we do not put things in place and we are not vigilant and look out for our children.

Please, I urge all of us here, have conversations . . . we all talk about we canvass and different things, have conversations about that. Let the people know that we are not going to tolerate that, and they need to do better when it comes to ensuring the safety of our children. They are our future, and we cannot do the things that are being done now to impinge on that future of our children.

Please, again, I make this the most heartfelt plea to every single adult here in Bermuda, do not let our children be exposed to and begin to think that this is normal behaviour to consume these types of things, play around with these types of things and to their own health determent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Opposition Leader, you have the floor.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise this evening to pay tribute to my honourable colleague, the Honourable Michael Dunkley, JP MP on the evening of his retirement. Mr. Speaker, being somewhat new to politics myself, I walked in, and I was very, very fortunate to have a number of experienced people around me.

Mr. Speaker, I will confess that I am inadequate to the task of paying tribute to a person who has served continuously and with a tremendous amount of effort over a number of years. But I will endeavour to do my best.

The Honourable Member from constituency 10 embodies the principles of service and love of country. He is someone who has changed my mind. Having come from . . . or been raised around people in uniform my whole life, I was not aware that you could have that love and not have a uniform. I was proven incorrect by a number of people in life, most especially the Honourable Member from constituency 10 who has

consistently and deliberately put the best interests of the country forward. Has tried his very, very best to ensure that Bermuda is made a better place by his participation in it and has done a great job representing constituents of constituency 10.

He has coached, educated, clarified, assisted. He has been nothing but a help to the members of the One Bermuda Alliance as we have gone from strength to strength over these few years. But most especially he has been someone who I could always call. Someone who boiled things down to the principles and basics for me. Someone who always supported me in all of the trials and tribulations that come with politics and someone who has stood firm and fast for the interests of Bermuda.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, I would beg your indulgence. I would like to read something that I think the Honourable Member from constituency 10 best shows.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: This speech is from Theodore Roosevelt, or a portion of it. It was given in Sorbonne in Paris, France, in the Sorbonne in Paris, France in 1910. The extract from his speech is from the *Man in the Arena.* It starts, Mr. Speaker:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member from constituency 10 will never be with those cold and timid souls. His name will be etched in Bermuda's history, and I am thankful to have known him in his time in politics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Opposition Leader.

Would any other Member wish to make contribution?

MP Famous, you have the floor.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, I was planning on speaking, but I have to inject something else before I say what I am going to say.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, pivot.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss if I did not add to the commiserations of MP Dunkley leaving this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, I say that because despite the fact that he wears red and I wear green, we both come from the same place.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Devonshire.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency I represent, Devonshire East, was once represented by Mr. Dunkley and Mr. Barritt. I used to call them the *Beverage—*

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Oh, okay. He still wants to point-of-order me.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, my last point of order.

[Laughter]

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Honourable Member is partially correct. Devonshire East was a single seat but when it was Devonshire South part of Devonshire East was in Devonshire South.

The Speaker: All right.

Mr. Christopher Famous: So I am partly right then.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, my brother.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, see!

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: So I say that to say that the same doors that he knocked on, I knock on. And the people in Devonshire just want to be represented by someone who actually cares about them. And that is the hallmark that we have set for Devonshire, that we are a parish that cares about each other. We go to each other's funerals irrespective of whatever melanin content that you have. We look out for each other.

I will say this, and I will say this once. Mr. Dunkley has, for the time that he has been in Parliament, represented the United Bermuda Party and the One Bermuda Alliance. But most importantly, Mr. Speaker, he has been one of those who has set the

standard of how to properly canvass a seat. There are people who normally would not vote OBA, but they voted for Michael Dunkley. And I would say that that is a testament to who he is as a person, that he actually does stay connected with his people. And I would say to all my colleagues in the House, whichever side you are on, that even if you disagree with some of his point-of-orders you cannot disagree with his ethics when it comes to canvassing.

NO SUPPORT FOR PATHWAYS TO STATUS

Mr. Christopher Famous: Moving on, Mr. Speaker.

Eight years ago, as I said earlier today, the people of Bermuda camped out at that House across the street all because of an announcement by Michael Fahy that he wanted to give Pathways to Status to people.

Mr. Speaker, you are old enough and I know the person right next to me is old enough to remember when the United Bermuda Party gave out status like candy to certain people to ensure that they had votes to survive. It worked well for a couple of elections. Then they started running out of people. So much so that in the 2016 bye-election in Devonshire North, when they lost, the next day Michael Fahy attempted to give out candy again to get votes, *Status for Votes.*

Mr. Speaker, it is one thing when you actually do something from the side of human compassion, but it is another thing when you have non-altruistic reasons. You see, they lost in 2017. They lost even more in 2020. So you would think they would realise that bringing up this story about status is a non-winning formula for them, Mr. Speaker. So the party themselves have not spoken about status for quite some time. But then earlier this year the same Michael Fahy who claims that he is no longer with the OBA starts talking about status again, Mr. Speaker. Can I quote something he says, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Very briefly. He says, and I quote, **"**I truly hope that the existing government programme will be expanded to include status." He then goes on in another article to say, "Granting status to long-term residents needs to be executed." Former OBA Senator Michael Fahy.

Mr. Speaker, on one hand one could say, Well, that's just Michael Fahy because, hey, he's not with the OBA anymore. It is just him talking. Waxing lyrically. But then when the Deputy Chairperson, co-Deputy Chairperson—I don't know what the configuration is—but the candidate for constituency 6, Mr. Joe Marable. (Can you help me? How does he pronounce his last name?) He says this, Mr. Speaker, if you don't mind me quoting?

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Christopher Famous: He said in an article, written by himself, "Granting such individuals clearly defined rights and streamlined pathways to full rights" (meaning Pathways to Status).

Mr. Speaker, you see? So Michael Fahy has set the foundation once again and now the OBA candidates are repeating what he said. As if people do not realise what they really mean.

Let me go one step further, Mr. Speaker. There is another OBA candidate who stated quite categorically, "The One Bermuda Alliance is standing on the truth, whether it's popular or not. . . . we must . . . forward a clear route to achieve Bermudian status . . .". That is from my friend, Dwayne Robinson, candidate for constituency 30.

So, Mr. Speaker, anybody who tries to say, Oh, that was Michael Fahy, that wasn't the OBA. Not true. It is the OBA. Mr. Speaker, I say this in the context that yes, we have a bye-election coming now. We have a General Election sometime or the other. And once again the OBA is floating this idea of giving out status in hopes to get votes to save themselves. Why, Mr. Speaker? Did they not understand what thousands of people stood up for, for one week, surrounding that House? When the BIU cooked food in the garage where your car is parked, Mr. Speaker, and lines of Bermudians gave up their job to come and stand up for the people of Bermuda? But they are still trying. I do not understand this, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote one other person, if possible. And this is from Honourable Member Crystal Caeser, Southampton West Central, constituency 31. **"**People's power stopped the OBA's Pathways to Status, and despite it being rejected across the island and heavily rejected in the 2017 and 2020 elections, the OBA has not acknowledged or apologised to the people for this 'powder keg' policy and remains convinced that it is right and that Bermudians are wrong." They remain convinced that they are right, and Bermudians are wrong!

Mr. Speaker, let me say this about that Honourable Member Crystal Caeser. She was one of those on the frontline long before she was even elected in a group called . . . One would think . . . some would say that young Bermudians do not care about their culture, they are not civic oriented. Ms. Caeser, then, was one of the leaders of people standing up against Pathways to Status, Mr. Speaker, along with the Honourable Walton Brown (dearly departed) and many others.

So, Mr. Speaker, I close by saying, as a warning to the OBA, understand, people are not going to surround this House. You do not see anybody fighting against us. But they will not support you all attempting to give out status ever, ever again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Deputy Speaker, I see you are on your feet. You have the floor.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just having heard the announcement by Michael Dunkley, my good cousin, my recent cousin as he says, it is certainly going to create a void in the One Bermuda Alliance and sort of a void in this House because you do not have many good debaters in this House. His politics and my politics are different, but one thing I must say about him, I don't think there is anybody who had more run-ins in this House than Michael Dunkley and myself. But we both remained civil to each other in and out of this House.

I remember one time in Parliament we were up there, and I said something and Michael got up (and I am saying Michael respectfully) and he objected and I said, *Well, I'll see you outside.* Meaning I was going to talk to him.

[Laughter]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Well, the press took it and said like I was challenging him. Now, why would I challenge the guy three times my size. You know, certainly older than me . . .

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: And I said, *Look at these people.* Right? But I would never have challenged Michael Dunkley because this is politics. Right?

In my tenure here I would say he was probably the best leader that the OBA has had. I can recall one time I had some problems . . . it took me a long time to get a hold of one of his Ministers. And I saw Michael Dunkley in the parking lot and I said, *Premier, man I cannot get a hold of so-and-so.* Within 30 minutes I got a call from that Minister. And that is the type of . . . even though we were on opposite sides, our politics were different, he knew politics. He [is] politically astute. And it is going to be very difficult for them to replace a guy as politically astute as Michael Dunkley is.

He knows what he has to do. I respect it. I have enjoyed the encounters with him. In fact, I look forward to him being here on Fridays. When he wasn't here, I said, *Oh, man. I ain't got anybody to fight.*

[Laughter]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: But it was always fun, in my opinion because once I left these Chambers here, I am back to normal. You know, politics is in here. That is the way I take politics. I am not going to take this home with me.

And one thing, I never go home and discuss what happened here, with whom . . . it just has never been my style whether I was a politician [or a] trade unionist, it stayed where it stayed. Home was sacred to me. Free of politics. Free of trade unionism. You know, if they asked me a question about trade, yes, I would tell them, about things on the job. I do that today. But it was not one that, you know, me and Michael we this and that. Never. None of my people can tell you that I came home and complained about anybody in this Parliament that, you know, we had our whatever today.

But I can tell you, Dunkley, again, you will be a miss to the party and a miss to politics in Bermuda. And I appreciate and I respect you. Despite our differences, which will continue because you are going to remain in politics. You know what I mean. Not here—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Yes, he will come back.

[Laughter]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: And you have been a good politician to your constituents. They talk to me. They tell me what you do. They tell me he brings them milk and all that stuff.

[Laughter]

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Whatever he gives them . . . and that is fine. Because . . . he does that because he knows the political culture in this country. And he did it well.

Dunkley, good retirement, man.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy [Speaker].

MP De Silva.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you.

I must say, you know, Mr. Speaker, we . . . we . . . we political folk in this House sometimes we come to this House prepared, sometimes we come unprepared, sometimes we have a strategy, sometimes tactics are discussed during the day. And I must say, Mr. Speaker, that the announcement by the Honourable Michael Dunkley today sort of threw me for a loop. Because you know, in this House we watch each other, and we sort of get body language. We see people preparing and so we do the same on this side. And you never know what one is going to talk about especially at motion to adjourn. So, I can say that I had a few things to talk about tonight, but I am going to put those aside and I will follow with other Members in this House in wishing the Honourable Michael Dunkley all the best in his retirement.

Now, probably me more than most have hooked with the Honourable Member Dunkley. But I will say this: Michael, respectfully, I think deep down in his heart does really care for this country. And I have said it many times in this House that if you are not in this House and you do not have this country at heart, you should not be here. Whilst I find it kind of hard to believe that he made the announcement tonight . . . because as my cousin Derrick said (the Honourable Member Burgess), he enjoys this House and the banter sometimes, the debate. The hooks that we have. And I certainly do the same. And I think many Members would know that I enjoy a good hook. Sometimes I get myself beat up on a little bit, but I do enjoy the hooks that we have.

But one thing that Michael talked about tonight was not only his branches, his colleagues and his party but he talked about his family.

[Pause]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You will know, Mr. Speaker, I have talked about my family and my colleagues' family many times in this House. And I felt his passion, and I felt his love for his family. And I know what a support his brother has been for him in politics. And I related because when we spend the time in this space, we need assistance and love from our loved ones. And I will say that my brother has done the same. My partner, Stephen Moniz, who like my brother Derrick, I consider family. My brother, Wayne Caines, who we have shared some very important moments together. But thinking back to our blood brother, Michael. I know that your brother . . . yes, it is getting a little too close.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But I am glad you made me laugh because it sort of relaxes one and we know that it does when you get a little . . . when you can get a little emotional. But it was good to hear you talk about your brother in that way because they are important.

And you finished, Michael, with your wife. And every one of us in this place that has a wife . . . well, some of us may have a husband in this spot or in their spot. We know what they go through because of what we go through. The support that we get is support that will live deep in our hearts, Michael, until we die. Deep in our heart.

To you, your family, who I know have had . . . they have had to have some really, really hard days and nights while you have been in this space. I wish them well and I wish them from the bottom of my heart to enjoy you as you leave this place.

I will end on this note. When I announced that I was running for the Progressive Labour Party in 2007, and I was then elected when no one expected me to be elected—no one but me and my branch; but no one expected it—I endured a tough time in business, because as a light-skinned fellow in the Progressive Labour Party a lot of things started to happen. A lot of light folks left, refused to do business with Island Construction. But I will say this, and as much as we have hooked in this House, MP Dunkley, we have continued to enjoy the pleasure and support of Dunkley's at Island Construction. You personally have had work done at your house over the years and have used the services of Island Construction. In spite of a lot of the hooks—and you and I have had some hooks in this house. In spite of that—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And I do thank my brother Stephen Moniz for that because you could have very easily said, *Listen, look, I don't want*—like many of us did—*that guy joined the Progressive Labour Party. Mm-mm. No longer*.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So for that, I do thank you because you continued to support my business whilst I was in this very difficult space and that, I think, shows the measure of a man.

So, Michael, I wish you all the best. Like I said, I want your family to enjoy you. I want you to enjoy your family because you have had a long stretch and I wish you all the best, mate.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Deputy [Premier]? Deputy, you have your time on the floor.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes, Mr. Speaker, just a few words because many Members have, I believe, covered their comments with authenticity and with heart-filled honesty and tribute to the Honourable Member who currently sits for constituency 10 as a senior representative of Devonshire. I feel certainly that I would like to pass on my own comments in relation to the announcement of MP Dunkley.

Having had (at least from the standpoint I have been involved with politics even prior to this House) an opportunity to observe Mr. Dunkley in his role as a politician prior to 2003 and also currently, I have had the opportunity to observe him from outside the House and in the House but still being involved in politics. And I must certainly commend MP Dunkley for being a worthy adversary of the Progressive Labour Party on the fronts upon which he contested and was victorious; defeated and victorious again. You must give tribute to somebody who has that level of tenacity and energy to be clearly convinced that giving service to their country on behalf of their community is something that they are committed to. Because you don't win and then lose and

come back again and win unless you are serious about service to this country. Without a doubt, MP Michael Dunkley has clearly been committed to service in our country and that has to be respected.

Certainly, as a servant of Devonshire, I understand the . . . of a part of Devonshire, I understand the commitment that those who serve in Devonshire bring to the table. And it has been with no doubt that I understand that MP Dunkley has been someone who has believed that he has brought good service to those in Devonshire that he has served over the years and they clearly have returned him to his seat acknowledging that. I must also say, as has been said by others, that outside of this House when dealing with Mr. Dunkley, and his brother, [he] has been most respectful, been most courteous and with honesty and integrity at all times.

Mr. Dunkley and I have talked about many issues that had nothing to do with this House that we share a common interest in. And I can say with unqualified certainty that Mr. Dunkley has always given his best to his work outside this House as well as in.

He spoke of many things that we all . . . when we come to this House we have to be mindful of: Ourselves and our health and our community and our families. Mr. Dunkley shared his wisdom in these areas which I do believe we all should take into account. I wish to thank Mr. Dunkley for the quality of his service to Devonshire, to Bermuda, and certainly on behalf of his family and all those who have believed that his being here has been the right thing. I wish him well in his retirement because he will take the quality of representation that he has given here and will take it home and to others certainly in the community.

Well done, Mr. Dunkley.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MP Caines, you were a little quicker. I would have normally let the lady go first, but you jumped like you had springs in your seat that time.

Mr. Wayne Caines: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Mr. Wayne Caines: Mr. Speaker, Shirley Chisholm said that service is the rent that you pay to occupy your space on earth. I think it is very fitting for us all to reflect on service as a result of the announcement—27 years is indeed yeoman service in this country. That is not something we can all take for granted. To do anything consistently for 27 years is significant. But to have the opportunity to serve this country for 27 years it is significant.

The opportunity that I first had to be in the Senate about 16 years ago, as a young Senator with MP Dunkley, it was a good time. The Senate Leader at the time was Colonel [Burch] and we were in the Senate, I was cutting my teeth and learnt a lot from that cadre of men and women down at the Senate. It was indeed an excellent time.

The Westminster system almost puts us all at different ends of the spectrum. You have the opportunity to see it from your standpoint and the Westminster system almost puts you at odds most times or at loggerheads with the opposing side. There comes a time where you get to see it in politics and outside of politics what a person is really made of. There are times where you have to stand on your own. There are some times where you have to go ahead and . . . I know that Mr. Dunkley has always been a man that has had his guiding principles. And it is indeed an opportunity for our country to see that he has given yeoman service to this country. I would like to wish him all the best in his future endeavours and to thank him for his service to our beloved country.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Caines.

Does any other Member . . . MP Foggo.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I once again think it would be remiss of me if I didn't stand and thank the honourable colleague who reported to the House that he will no longer be serving the people of Bermuda in the capacity of a politician as of 31 March.

I will say this, I personally do not know Member Dunkley. I had never travelled in the same circles as he has. But what I would say, during my tenure in this House, and we have sat on opposite sides of the aisle, one thing that many of my colleagues can tell you is that I have always said that in doing his duties, he has served his team well.

And politics can be . . . is often seen as an adversarial, I guess, entity. Especially when we are talking party politics. Philosophically and ideologically, we do sit in separate arenas. However, I believe wholeheartedly that anyone, all of us who sit in this House and put ourselves forward in public service in the political realm deserve the thanks that is afforded to them in their duties because this is not an easy job by any means.

As soon as you put yourself forward for public service you become a target of one type or another. While there has been bantering, and I certainly know that when he sat as the Premier and even in other capacities, there was many a word said across the aisle, back and forth. Again, what I will say . . . and those words that were spoken were spoken in support of, I guess, the ideology that we believe in; were spoken in support of the parties that we serve under. Our actions to that end, when we believe we are doing it for the people that we serve, can only be seen (in my opinion) as one that deserves being lauded for the very reasons

that I spoke just now. It is not easy and clearly sometimes we get it wrong.

Now, I will say, Honourable Member, because of the Government that I sit with and the party that I sit with, I do believe that there are things that were done under the opposing party which may not have served the people in the way that I thought it should have. But what I would never say is that in trying to deploy your duties that it was not done with that intent. I will say that it was done, and I will say it again because when we are standing in this House to serve our people, number one, they are our boss and I do believe for the most part in acquitting our duty, we do it with them first and foremost. Even if those policies that we are standing behind don't seem to serve in the best interest of our people in the eyes of some others.

I will say this on a personal note, there was never a day if I passed Member Dunkley in the street when he was the Premier or when he was just a sitting Member on his team when they were the Government or otherwise that he did not afford me the respect of a hello. So I would never say that he is someone who saw me as an enemy, as we know that people sometimes in the public domain think that we are enemies with each other. We are Members who sit on opposite sides trying to do what we believe is best for our people.

So I want to thank Member Dunkley for all of the service that he brought to his people, trying to ensure a better Bermuda for all.

Thank you. Thank you, Member Dunkley.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Foggo.

MP Ming.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good [evening], Mr. Speaker, and listening audience. I would just like to give my short message to MP Dunkley.

I have not known MP Dunkley very long and that is probably by virtue that we didn't make marbles together, but I have served in a parliamentary role since 2012, so I will say he is definitely a colleague of mine. I think that when people decide that they want to have a change in life, we respect that and we move on. But I will say that in my time in serving that MP Dunkley has been nothing but respectful and that is even when we have disagreed on many topics. I think he grew to accept that St. George's is where my heart lies and that even though he sponsored the team up in Somerset, you know I still had to—

The Speaker: He knows how to make good choices.

[Laughter]

Mrs. Renee Ming: I still had to respect his bad decisions.

[Laughter]

Mrs. Renee Ming: But, Mr. Speaker, all of this is just to say that I wish my colleague well. I hope he has a long and fruitful life [and] he enjoys his family because at the end of the day our families are extremely important. And although what we do here in terms of public service is important as well, we know those persons who will be there for us no matter what. So, all the best and we will see you around.

The Speaker: MP Swan.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I guess, Mr. Speaker, at this juncture I can declare my interest. I have known Michael Dunkley for quite a long time. I think I first knew Michael Dunkley in the capacity as young golfers together and I remember . . . one of the first impressions that I remember was playing in the golf tournament in honour of his father in 1974 which the Bermuda Golf Association named after him. I think it was the senior/junior or one of those tournaments they named . . . a plaque was on the wall to Dunkley, and I would know that it would be very difficult for any young person to have to grow up without their father.

So when he spoke of his brother, as I work closely with my brother who I trained in the golf industry, I can appreciate as Zane had said, Honourable Member De Silva had said, how important that family support is when you are in business.

I also got to know MP Dunkley as members of the United Bermuda Party. And I know that if Keith Pearman were still around he would have a golfing partner on a Saturday afternoon and he could probably fit in with maybe somebody that might not be able to play as much, maybe take somebody else's place. I will not call their name.

But I made a speech critical the other day because . . . you know, I was very outspoken. A lot of people would not realise this, but I never criticise my party in public. I tell you how I feel behind the scenes. And I always used to challenge the United Bermuda Party for what I called the safe-seat mentality. [MP] Dunkley can attest to that. And my best friends weren't. Some of my good friends were in safe seats. But I said it is a lot harder when you wake up and you know you are going to go in a Paget or a Smith's or whatever. Some of them have altered and become less safe, but . . .

I remember in the 2000s, I challenged MP Dunkley and I remember good people that came out of Devonshire. I remember Ramona Anderson, who was a hard worker. May she rest in peace and Mr. Barritt, and how they worked and would give advice in other areas.

But I always ran in a seat that was never a UBP safe seat although I grew up in Southampton West, I came up under Harry and Ralph and I grew up chasing

those cows out there. Come to find out as an adult, as a much older person that those were Dunkley's cows I was chasing around up in Southampton with the Quinns and all the like. But that is how we . . . we grew up around farms and stuff up in Southampton.

But yes, I challenged persons to run in safe seats. Nobody took me up on it except Mihcael Dunkley. Nobody took me up on it except Michael Dunkley. And I took a lot of criticism when Michael Dunkley ran in Devonshire in a very difficult seat and lost. He lost his seat when he ran in that particular area, in single seats.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Right, he was in Smith's North. But I think it had a bit of Devonshire in there because that was the first time when the boundary wasn't strictly to a parish. It crossed over.

So you could have a Smith's boundary that could go down to Hamilton Parish, go down to Shelly Bay. I challenged him and he did it and he lost his seat. And my friends . . . and Brutus, Brutus, who helped me strategise when we were sitting in his kitchen and I said, *I am running for leader*.

He said, *You have got to be crazy.* He said, *That's going to Barritt or it's going to Richards.*

I said*, No, you have got it wrong. All the MPs that can vote* (at that particular time).

And he said, *First you got to get on the ballot.* So I went around to everybody that could vote and asked them to nominate me. Which they did. They nominated me. They didn't think I was going to win. And I won that election up at Elbow Beach.

And the first person that I spoke to . . . well, no it was not the first person because I had some idea. I got a couple of calls from my mate Keith Pearman, *Now, Swan, what are you going to do?*

I said, *Well, you know, you encouraged that fellow to doggone go out there on a limb and now, you know, he's gone. . .* and we had some time and Keith was a very strong advocate in Devonshire and for the team down there and he made a case.

And, you know, I reflected, Mr. Speaker . . . Madam Acting Speaker, I reflected. And I said, *You know, the only person who had ever lost a seat that I could remember as a leader was Mr. Robinson, Walter Robinson.* And when he regained his seat (he lost his seat may have been in Hamilton Parish) and when he came back Dame . . . and she wasn't Dame Lois-Browne at that particular time . . . surrendered being Opposition Leader and made him . . . and he became the Opposition Leader again. He lost his seat and he came back.

So, I said, well, if I look at precedent . . . and at that time I had studied the PLP inside out because the only Opposition I could ever study was the PLP in Opposition and it was a great Opposition for those 30 years in the wilderness. Great speeches . . . you have heard me talk about them. I know them. I read them. I internalised them. Yes, and imitation is the best form of flattery. I go down memory lane today because I sat in this very . . . stood in this very Gallery and listened to Dame Lois and I listened to Austin Thomas and Barritt and Dame Jennifer put the time limits on, I guess, you know, they didn't want anyone else to give that Austin Thomas speech.

When I did become the Opposition Leader, I did appoint Mr. Dunkley. And I caught a lot of criticism from a lot of people because he went out there and ventured out and then, you know, he actually won a seat back there. For the last . . . since 2012 (12 and 12 is 24), for the last 12 years we have not been political colleagues. I have been . . . 2 of those 12 years have been, I was in the political wilderness, and it was prevailed upon me, he said, *Swan, you can get 22 per cent of the vote as an independent, but I don't think you could ever get more than that. And you have always spoken on social issues in there and those votes that you have, you know, why don't you bring them home.* Brutus again, in the kitchen over there. He helped me strategise when I became their Opposition Leader. And so I have been PLP . . .

And we have had some difficult moments, MP Dunkley and I. And a lot around the protest and the like and family members getting in the mix. And I understand that as well as the next. You know, my wife is a Caribbean lady with Central American blood, and others . . . families equally as passionate. But stay in the background. Mine wouldn't so there has been a rift there.

I will say this, from a business standpoint, and I will call in my good friend and cousin Paul Spring in his role and he is close to my . . . and my brother up at Belmont. He has helped to repair that type of difficulty that existed through politics.

And I will say that today, for the public, as I say that MP Dunkley . . . we joked the other day, I said, *Man, anybody ever gave me the whole four hours to speak, I know I couldn't believe your luck*. We just chuckled and smiled because when you come up in the old school of politics you learned how to do it before you get here, you don't learn on the job. You served as an apprentice under people like Dr. Saul. And Devonshire at that particular time wasn't a given to anybody. It was won by Ms. Lois Browne-Evans before she was Dame Lois Browne-Evans and UBP seats flip-flopped in between, among, Mr. Benbow and Mr. Cox and others. It wasn't a given on that side . . . although, on the PLP side it became very much a stronghold.

Recognising that we serve God first, our family first and foremost, I want to say thank you to his family for loaning him to the country. I have made the speech a few times of recent years, Mr. Speaker, weeks and months in particular saying that I know that everyone that has served in this House cares and loves Bermuda. I believe that in heart-of-hearts, we just have a different way of achieving that. And I just want to thank

Mr. Dunkley's family for allowing him to serve Bermuda through the United Bermuda Party first and the One Bermuda Alliance over the last 12 years.

BERMUDA UK IRELAND GOLF LINKS SOCIETY

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Speaker, in my few remaining minutes, I am going to speak about the Bermuda UK Ireland Golf Links Society. And I am going to just say thank you to 25 people from overseas who, through friendships and relationships, appreciate the passion and the love between us that we have been able to share over the last couple of years. A few that I have known before . . . not many. A majority, 90 per cent of, I had never met before but because of a friend of a friend and connections that have been born, they are here in Bermuda. And it is because of the good Lord above that yesterday they arrived. They had one of the most beautiful sunsets when I went to pick the balance of the group up at the airport. Thirteen . . . 12 of them arrived early and 13 arrived yesterday. This morning, to get off the British Airways flight and to be at St. George's Square at 8:15 is no mean feat. They got from Cambridge and they were there. But I knew they were four hours ahead anyway so they were good to go.

I want to say thank you to the mayor of St. George's, the MP for St. George's [constituency] 1, Mrs. Renee Ming, mayor [Quinell] Francis and former mayor/town crier Michael Jones for providing a great welcome along with my wife Cindy, Ms. Dawn Simmons and her sister Karen who has helped with events that we have had to hold to try to offset some of the personal costs that go into bringing people here. And they have made a commitment that they want to help us grow our winter season from November to March.

I have been talking about November to March for all my life in tourism, speaking on the floor of the House and speaking about that, running events myself from the 1980s when I was in St. George's that still run today at Pompano [Beach Club]. That when you do things that are fundamentally structure-based, they will stand the test of time. The Bermuda Easter Lily ladies that were helped founded by Marilyn Smith (may she rest in peace) one of the founders of the LPGA is going on right now at Pompano. You don't even hear much about it, but 12 foursomes (48 ladies), love Pompano.

You know this Bermuda UK Ireland Golf fan trip has a group of four ladies that two weeks ago were in Tenerife. And they call themselves the BOGGS Ladies Golf Society—Bermuda Old Girls Golf Society (BOGGS). None of them have ever lived a day in Bermuda apart from coming to Bermuda 12 years ago at Pompano and meeting each other playing golf where Chrstine Langford, a former LPGA tour player from Europe who is the Director of Golf at [Thorpeness] which is a seaside [village] in Suffolk up there, lower Norfolk, on the coast, used to bring these women. They stopped coming before COVID-19. And I said, *You know what? Maybe we need to reach out to some of the folk that's been suffering from COVID-19.* And today they are here. And they are here running in the water at Tobacco Bay. Why? Because when I shared this with Dennie O'Connor up at Ocean View [Golf Club] when we had the heritage . . . when Minister Owen Darrell had the event for the heritage awards I told him I got some folks that are coming to Bermuda. He says, *You can bring them down at White Horse. I will host the overseas group*. *Don't bring all those other lot, but you can bring* . . . and at that time I thought it was going to be 12. In January 12 turned to 25 and I had to stop, I had to hit the pause button.

So, today he said to me this week he says, *I want them to go to Tobacco Bay and I took them to St. Regis*. Why? Because getting people excited about the golf course in St. George's that, like St. Andrews, is within the municipal township where persons can walk from the town and have a tee time and then walk in the water . . . whether or not it be at the hotel resort or Tobacco Bay is very unique. They can get from Dockyard . . . and when they build that dock down there, they can get to Dockyard to Tobacco Bay even quicker from the water.

Those ladies that came 12 days early, yesterday in that nice, beautiful sunshine, they were out looking at the whales. You know where they watched the whales? When I looked at that picture, I said, *That's not Gibb's Hill lighthouse. That's St. David's lighthouse*. From St. George's . . . and this is a business opportunity for someone. Because if you want to go on a whale watching trip today, Mr. Speaker, most of the best ones are coming out of the aquarium. So you have to go out through Flatts and either go left around Dockyard through Watford Bridge or yesterday because of impending weather, they turned right and they went down around Fort St. Catherine and when they hit St. Regis and St. George's town cut, they went out about 15 minutes.

I saw St. David's lighthouse . . . the whales were jumping off St. David's. Any entrepreneur, you start promoting whale watching out of St. George's. Come St. George's and have lunch. You can go out, see the whales and within an hour and a half you will be back. You go up through the aquarium, it is going to take you seven hours, a whole day! Plus barfing.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Plus seasick pills and all the like. I am here to tell you, that is a business opportunity that is there for the offering.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, the late David White, the editor of the *Royal Gazette* when I canvassed him back in the 1990s said to me, *You know, St. George's must be a working town to survive.* And when I came to St. George's in 1985, Mr. Speaker, I am here to tell you we used to play 32,000 rounds when we had the bases. A lot of people don't really appreciate what a big blow it was to this country with the exodus of the US bases.

They rented houses. Base housing was the best landlords you ever wanted. . . you have a problem with a tenant, you had to look toward the base and that tenant bucked up in a minute. Guaranteed rents and the like. So we had to recalibrate.

We had hotels in this country that moved towards condominiums. So now we have less beds. People are there blaming us for not having enough hotel beds around but it is because private industry moved towards . . . the dollar in that regard.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have hope for this country. I have hope that with people coming, picking up and coming to Bermuda from the UK (just because a country boy like Swan who has some connections in Europe can make connections with them) that more people in this country that have connections around the world would leverage their friendships and encourage people to be here. It only takes about a hundred golfers a week for 20 weeks would make a tremendous dent in the economy. Would provide a lot more economic revenue circulating; people buying more things, going out to restaurants, taking more taxis.

And while I finish, let me say this. I spent a lot more time at the airport—just reminding me of what I used to do back in the 1980s and 1990s a lot. We do have a transportation challenge in this country. And I want to say thank you to . . . I have always, whenever I had ran golf events, always organised . . . got the best people to organise my transportation. I want to say thank you to David Burgess and Kyle Lipen who are shepherding my people around the country at this particular time. I remember the late Custerfield Crockwell who used to do that for me when he retired from the Bermuda Police and make sure that people get there.

Business in this country, international business in particular, have moved to prearranged scenarios. And if a person is at an airport—in Heathrow, in Boston and the like—a suitable application could allow them to prearrange for that transportation, but that transportation has got to be there when they get there so that we don't have even Bermudians waiting in line. We have got to move. The technology is there. The problem is there that we have to solve. People coming by here need to be transported about seamlessly and we need to make that happen and just speaking from my working experience that has been taking place more because I have put myself in that space, I want to just offer that.

So in closing, I just want to say, MP Dunkley, enjoy your life, enjoy your family and God bless.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Swan.

MP Lister.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. Good evening to the listening audience and to my fellow colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I too would like to stand and make remarks on the retirement of MP Dunkley. He said it best when he started, it is now time to put his family first.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that I have a very unique perspective, maybe one of few other Members of being a child of a politician and then becoming a politician themselves, Mr. Speaker. I know a fellow colleague, Lawrence Scott, sits in the House, and maybe previous Members, and MP Jamahl Simmons also. But Mr. Speaker, from that perspective, as MP Dunkley said, it is time to put family first.

Mr. Speaker, I was four when you were first elected to this Honourable House. So I have had a whole lifetime of being on the other end of a politician. I can recall, Mr. Speaker, growing up I knew Wednesdays: caucus. And then on the other side of it having a mother who also ran Youth Parliament. So Wednesdays I knew I didn't see either one of my parents. And then on Fridays, I knew it was Parliament and, you know, when I was younger and maybe in my early adolescent years, we would sit up and listen to Parliament. And, you know, we would wait to hear you come home, Mr. Speaker.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, I understand MP Dunkley, you know, he has put 27 years, if I am correct, 27 years into this service. And that is 27 years . . . not every day, but time and days spent away from your family. And, Mr. Speaker, it does have an impact depending on how the person takes it. But knowing that MP Dunkley has put in 27 years and he has now got to a point where he wants to spend time with his family, I don't think anyone can hate him for that, Mr. Speaker. Being in this House in my short time, you know, we have had some rough days and sometimes you don't want to come in or you leave here upset, but 27 years he has put in and I think he is due time to call it on his own.

Mr. Speaker, as I just flip to sports, most sportsmen . . . you know, they hate to see that . . . the end of the line. You know, you play football and as you get older you realise you have to come to that time where you have to retire. And most sportsmen like to do it on their own. They don't like to be forced out, whatever it is. So, I think MP Dunkley can say he is doing it on his own, in his own time and in his own way and just putting his hand up and saying *You know, I have had a good run and now I can take time to retire* and spend with his family.

Again, I just want to wish him the best in whatever his future endeavours are . . . whether it is spending time here, traveling, whatever it is. Enjoy it. You have earned it.

ROAD SAFETY REMINDERS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Speaker, I now just want to switch a bit, as I said in the beginning family is first. Well, Mr. Speaker, as this will be the last time we will

be in this House for a while, I just want to remind those out there, Mr. Speaker, putting on my road safety hat, that family is first. When you get on a bike, when you get in a car, whatever you do on our roads, remember that your actions impact not only you but others on the roads.

And, more importantly, if something does happen, it is your family, Mr. Speaker, that feels those consequences, the impact of those actions. If there is a serious injury, a life-changing, life-altering injury, your family has to step up and step in to help assist you. If there is a fatality, you are gone but your family has to go on without you. They have to try and replace you and it is the memories they will have, that they will hold on to, but you will be gone and that will be hurting them the most.

Always remember, Mr. Speaker, and when we do return to this Honourable House it will be nearing our annual Road Safety week and our theme for this year is *Changing minds, changing behaviours*. All of that is again in regard to keeping us safe. Changing how we act and how we behave on the roads, changing our mindsets of when we get on the roads or what we are going to do. Ultimately we have to put in practice good behaviours to keep us safe and again your family should be forefront in when you make the decisions and how it will impact them.

Mr. Speaker, I take my seat with those short comments. Again, well wishes to MP Dunkley and enjoy the future and whatever it brings.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other MP—Anthony Richardson, you have the floor.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Good evening to you, Mr. Speaker, and to those who are left in the Chamber and those in the listening audience. I am pleased to actually be in the Chamber today and I will say to MP Dunkley I was actually in St. George's at a funeral when I heard you make your announcement that you are going to be retiring and that was part of the impetus as to why I returned to be able to give some comments.

But before I do that, I will say to my uncle Bunny, his name is Ritchie Foggo, but uncle Bunny, and the entire family, I do extend my condolences. But in those circumstances it is always wonderful because you get a chance to actually get a sense as to what people did that you did not necessarily know. And so to the family, congratulations, in that sense.

To MP Dunkley, though, more directly I want to say congratulations. As you said you have spent, or we know you have spent, 27 years giving service and what I want to do in my comments is to equate your service as a Member of Parliament to service generally because Bermuda is about hospitality. And if we get this whole thing about service right, then we will be many . . . we will be much closer to where we need to be than we currently are.

I will say . . . obviously, I did not know about you deciding to retire today, but for those who may not know, I had the opportunity to interview you in a different space recently. It was interesting because you obviously, not obviously, but people commented on how well prepared you are, or you were for that discussion, and that reflects what people have said today in terms of when you come to debate or when you come to comment you are always very well prepared. Certainly, we congratulate you on that regard.

What I will say with a small smile on my face is I was also happy to hear what MP Zane De Silva said and how you responded in terms of you . . . the two of you may spar as politicians but there is a business relationship behind all of that which is irrespective of the political discourse. I say that because I have smiled for I don't know how many years now as I drive down Middle Road, I turn right and I drive across Dunkley's. No matter what has happened in the political sphere, I see the infamous yellow and blue ICS trailers there. And I am like, *What in the world?* These guys understand, for whatever reason, that irrespective of the political challenges or differences that they still have a good business relationship because clearly you need to move containers and ICS (or Zane De Silva's company) are very efficient in doing that. Today, I was able to have a smile around that.

In the words of another infamous person I will say this, *Bermuda, get ready, get ready, get ready*, because after tonight's love fest I am sure there is going to be this comment in terms of there is going to be a bye-election. And then we will get back to normal in some respects because then we have to go and see who is going to do what in that regard.

I trust that you will have a long and happy retirement, that you get a chance to . . . we make it seem as if you have not been enjoying your family all this time. What I want to say is that you will have more time to enjoy them in a different way. And as you explained already, one of your greatest joys is your grandchildren. Obviously, you know, your wife and children and all that, but your grandchildren are what seem to be one of your greatest impetus now in terms of giving you the joy when you get home, before you go home-home. So that is good.

The last thing I will say in this regard is that you have expressed to all of us that you had recent . . . I want to call it almost like a miracle of medicine because when we have these body challenges, medicine is now able to fix these things in a way they didn't use to do before. So you are now . . . I wouldn't say a miracle, but you are now walking in a more strengthened way than you were in the past. So that is all done.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what I want to say (we are on the love fest thing now) is about budget lessons I have learned. I always enjoy this time of year because it gives me a chance to learn more . . . and I can't

believe I have used that much time already. But anyway, I will go forward.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: I've got you down on paper, that was—

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Okay, thank you. Good, good, good. I can breathe. I can breathe better.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter.]

Mr. Anthony Richardson: I can breathe better. No problem.

So, Mr. Speaker, this time of year is always a joy to me because I get a chance to sit, to listen, to attend as much as I can and I learn. And I will say that for this year, several things I have learned, and I trust I am able to explain it to others who may want to know the same thing.

One is, Mr. Speaker, is the idea or the distinction between the excess borrowing fund and the Sinking Fund. I should have known all this stuff. But sitting and listening to the whole budget cycle, I was able to have a better appreciation. And to be honest, Mr. Speaker, even today when the Premier as Minister of Finance was explaining, I said to myself, *I don't know if I would want him to be my teacher*. Not because he can't explain stuff, but sometimes he is so expressive I just don't know if I would have wanted him to be my teacher. So anyway, he does an excellent job. He is so thorough and I am always amazed at how he goes through even sometimes the mundane to explain things and I trust that people that do not have an appreciation will take time to go back to parliament.bm and listen to what he said and take notes if necessary because it is very, very important.

I also learned, Mr. Speaker, from Minister Wilson as the Minister of Health about the rationale for BHB funding. There is a difference of opinion between us being the PLP and the OBA, but it was very interesting to hear her rationale in terms of the Hospital Board—

The Speaker: One minute. Minister Wilson wasn't here today.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: No, not today. She did it in her . . . before, during the budget—

The Speaker: That's the point. You cannot reflect back on—

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Okay, well—

The Speaker: —the Minister at this point.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: —I won't go back that far.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Anthony Richardson: But it was interesting for me just to understand how BHB is funded.

I also obviously reflected on the idea, or I made sure I understood the impact of freezing the hospital premiums, or the standard hospital benefit premiums in terms of how it has a positive impact on all of us in that we will not have to pay more money for our health premiums.

I learned also, Mr. Speaker, about some of the expectations for corporate income tax and how it is going to impact on us. So all of these things, Mr. Speaker, I am saying is that I learned, I listened and I trust that I am able to reflect these things to my constituents.

But, Mr. Speaker, now more importantly what has happened to me in the most recent time is I learned some personal lessons. And the personal lessons I learned really arose from an incident at the airport. I am not going to name any names, but that is what happened. What I will say is this, I am a proud graduate of Warwick Academy and the reason . . . one of the reasons why I am proud is because going to this school allowed me to interact with persons of all spheres of Bermudian society. Obviously White, obviously Black, some poor, some rich, some divorced, all the whole gamut if you will. And the lesson I learned is that Anthony should never be challenged by anybody else in the sense that I am who I am. I am academically brighter than some, not others. Sports-wise I am better than some and not others. And so what I mean by that, Mr. Speaker, is that I see myself as being equal and capable to anybody because that was the experience that I learned through Warwick Academy.

But, Mr. Speaker, recently what happened is some people came into the Island and they had an issue upon entry and there was some difficulty. My belief though is that my job is to make sure that there is always a solution. So I looked at it from that point of view in terms of no matter what the issue is, let's keep on pressing, pressing, pressing until we get to a solution. And clearly because of the issue there was significant emotions, there were tears flowing, there was no profanity but there were comments made that were tremendously negative and . . . we got to a stage whereby it was very, very tense and a decision was made to actually refuse entry. And because it is not my role, I had to be careful about how I interacted with everyone else because if I did the wrong thing, I would get myself in trouble. But I did it anyway and you will understand why I am saying all of this. Because at the end of it all, we were able to resolve the problem.

The lesson I learned, though, is that I—and I guess others also—sometimes have an inherent bias and this is how it manifested itself. The individuals that were coming in, they were White. A given. The persons they had to interact with were Black. A given. And so we went through the process and I was acting on the basis of let's, as I said, just try to get to a solution, but

at the end of it . . . one of the guests, which happened to be a White person, came to me and told me that I acted incorrectly. Which is fine. I don't have an issue with that.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, was that I went and explained to them what I did and how I actually put myself at risk professionally by doing what I did. But their response was, *Listen, I don't care what you have to say because no matter what you say, I am not going to agree with what you are saying.* And so that, of course, caused me some angst because in addition to what they said they were in my personal space. And it happened . . . and I am not saying this to be negative I am just saying it happened to be a physically small White girl. So you can imagine, my thing was like, *Hey, get out of my face because you don't understand what you are talking about*.

The point I am really getting at is that going back to my Warwick Academy days when I understood that we have differences, but you know, we can still manage, it was to reflect on *Was Anthony actually responding to the situation based upon what was or based upon the fact that I was a Black person and she was a White person and that all the other persons that interacted in the situation were Black?* So all the guests were White. All the persons that had the quote, unquote "authority" were Black. So it went back to my mind for the first time in all these years of life in terms *of Anthony, you need to be careful about how you receive or act in that situation.*

Now I reflect, to be honest, even in this House, in this Chamber, is for Anthony to be careful about how he responds or reacts to what takes place in the House to make sure that I do not have an inherent bias or that those who I am interacting with do not have an inherent bias.

I say all that to say that for me, during this period of time, beyond the budget and all those kinds of things and to my constituents and listening audience that has been an Anthony lesson. I believe that for all of us based on the Bermudian society we all have those interactions and we have to be careful though in terms of how we respond and remember our own biases in that situation.

I will say this, Mr. Speaker. In Bermuda I have had the opportunity to buy a house or at least to look for a house in a few situations. And on two occasions at least, one of which . . . and I will say this, I went to look at a house down at Sousa Estate, right. And what amazed me was that I was told, *Anthony, don't look in this area because you will never buy a house here* because of my skin colour. Which is crazy in this society, but it is true.

I will conclude by saying this, Mr. Speaker. I want to make sure that I specify significant congratulations to those who are regularly on the front of the entry into Bermuda and in that regard, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend I Customs Shift C who are supervised by the Customs Officer Dawnette Bell. But the people that were directly involved and were able to act at all times professionally and hold their cool despite the situation is Customs Officer Mayanasha Burch and Videll Armstrong. And also, as part of this conversation, Dr. Johnathan Nesbitt, acted with complete, complete professionalism despite being bombarded, despite being threatened, despite being all these kind of things, Mr. Speaker, he was able to keep his cool.

The beauty of all of this is that at the end of the day, despite all this drama, we were able to resolve the situation and that everyone acted in a positive way.

What I took away from this, though—and that is why I want to be very careful as to how I say this—is that the parents of the young lady actually, while she was ranting and raving, were trying . . . not trying, they were actually apologising on her behalf. And that is why I was also challenged to make sure that Anthony was careful about how he interpreted was going on and how I responded in that situation.

That, Mr. Speaker, for me over the past couple of weeks now, is one of the greatest lessons I have learned in this whole context. And I wanted to make sure that I was able to inform everybody but apply it in this context. And now you may say, *What does this have to do with MP Dunkley?*

What it has to do with MP Dunkley is MP Dunkley has—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Anthony Richardson: Yes, it is a long way home. But MP Dunkley has demonstrated . . . I believe a lack of bias in his presentation. He is forceful. He is sometimes . . . he will give his little snippets around. You know, he knows how to play the game. That is for sure. But I will say that there has definitely not been a sense of him acting in any conscious way towards me just because of my skin colour. And I think that is a testament to him the man.

MP Dunkley, we wish you well in your retirement. I thank you for all that you have done. You are a man to be respected.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Richardson.

Opposition Whip, MP Cannonier.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would be remiss if I did not address the retirement of the Honourable Michael Dunkley.

I think he and I, in my time, have seen the good, the bad, and I say the ugly on so many issues.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: In that we know what it takes when it comes to the sacrifice of time, the dedication

that is needed. If there were ever a Hall of Fame for this political arena other than having your picture as a Premier up on the wall, you would be inducted into the Hall of Fame in politics.

I think you will go down as one of those who have sacrificed so much to ensure that there was a voice for your constituents, for the party that you represent. I just . . . I am looking at this and I am saying, *Oh my goodness. This guy retired. He is gone*. And you have offered and done so much for us as a country.

There was a saying a couple of years ago that a gentleman came to me. He happened to be of a different political persuasion, and he said, *Man, we hate to love you man; but we also love to hate you*.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I said, *What are you talking about?* And essentially what he was saying is that there is massive respect there. And I believe you fit in that category. As we have seen tonight from both sides of the table, the aisle here, massive, massive respect for what you have done for this country.

So I wish you the best in your future endeavours with your new legs. You certainly will need to be able to have those new legs to keep up with your grandson and more on the way. And there will be other opportunities that we will have to talk about your legacy and the time you have spent here, but I just wanted you to know that we have appreciated you tremendously, beyond what you may even gather from these statements today.

Thank you for your time and service. And to your family, we know the sacrifice, man. Twenty-seven years of every day. You know what it is like to be on vacation and get that call. You know what it is like to be on that romantic dinner with your wife and get that call. You know what it is like to be with your kids and get that call, when they are trying to call with the issues that they have. So, it is not easy for any of us here in this room. All of us, most of us have kids and those who don't are probably heading that way. The sacrifice is tremendous. Tremendous . . . so I can feel the emotion that is coming from you now. But I will say this. The decision that you have made, you are walking out on top, man. You are walking out on top.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, Opposition Whip.

Does any other Member wish—Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you—

The Speaker: You have your time.

Hon. E. David Burt: I thank you. We have got 20 minutes on the clock. All right.

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is 7:00 pm on a Friday in the middle of March. I rise today, certainly, as you will note, Mr. Speaker, at the very beginning of this motion to adjourn, I yielded to the Honourable Member from constituency 10, the former Premier, as I caught wind that it may be his last time speaking in this House. And I wanted to at least allow him that level of respect. Now, I will say a level of respect that I would not normally give, but the fact is that he has not just been an Honourable Member in this House, he has also served as the Premier of this country.

Mr. Speaker, there are not many people who can speak to the amount of stress and toil that role takes on your life, takes on the fact of your family, the stress of which it puts, the years of which it adds, the hair of which it takes away, the grey of which it gives. The missed birthdays, the missed events, the requirement to be here, you know, begging and screaming saying, *No, I don't want to go to RIMS, I want to be here for my son's birthday.* Or, *No, I don't want to be here or do this* or something else and all those things of which it takes. It is not easy.

It will come as no surprise, Mr. Speaker, that the Honourable Member and I have hooked on many occasions. There is . . . I will show it to you before we leave, it will be a funny picture, but it is a picture that I have that I share inside of PLP headquarters of election night in 2007.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: In 2007, but you know, there is a time of which . . . but this is politics. This is the work of which we do. We are here to represent, but there is also this side of where we jostle to ensure that we can . . . make sure that our parties are in the best position to represent the people of this country.

Though we may have had disagreements on those levels, time when I think when we both served in the Senate together—

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Those were . . . when I was a brand new member cutting my teeth and there was Senator Dunkley on the other side, you know, ready to just start digging in and I learned a lot. Someone had said it before, that the one thing that you always knew about the Honourable Member from constituency 10 is he would be ready to debate and he had some tricks up his sleeve when he was ready.

What I will say is that as time goes on, it takes a special type of person to recognise that your time may be up and it may be time to step aside. I think that that is a powerful example. I know that I have set my time period for my time in office, but I think that it is important to recognise that he has given 27 years of service in

this House . . . or sorry, in the Legislature entirely. I think that that is a significant body of time.

What I will say to the Honourable Member from constituency 10, is people visit the Cabinet Office and they come upstairs, and they are like, *Well, why aren't Craig Cannonier and Michael Dunkley's pictures up on the wall? Didn't they serve as Premier as well?* And the answer is that you don't get to go on the wall until you say that you are retired.

So, Honourable Member, please pick your portrait person. I look forward to honouring you!

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I look forward to honouring you in the Cabinet Office, the place that we joke that was renovated—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Huh?

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Hey, hold a second. If there was one thing, there were always time for jokes back and forth in this Chamber. And if we listen to what the Honourable Member said about, you know, times of, you know, there can be some fun jostling. But the fact is that you must recognise that 27 years of service and 3 years of service in the highest office of the land is something to be recognised. I think, as you have seen from Members on that side and Members on this side, we celebrate and acknowledge the fact of his time of service to this country, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, Honourable Member, I look forward to seeing you at the Cabinet Office and I look forward, of course, to seeing you at the Somerset Cricket Club on the last Thursday and Friday before the first Monday in August as our team will once again reign victorious.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Now we are on the same team!

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, that's it. Don't worry, we are on the same team twice a year, that's it. Two days a year! That is all. Every other time, no, no, no, no, no. Now you might even be able to come and get some swizzle, look at that!

[Laughter]

COUNTRY ON PATH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in my 15 minutes left, I think that it is important that I touch on a few issues.

I think today was a first for that Honourable Member because the first time that he was put in a position to have to vote affirmative for a Progressive Labour Party budget. But what is important is the fact that we have ended the budget session, and we have . . . put this country on a path towards a stable future.

The work has not been easy and I want to make sure that I pay tribute not only to all the Ministers who have had to do all the work, but also all the Members in the Panel of Chairs who have had to sit through a very long debate process, all the public servants who have to put these things together, to answer all the various questions. But the scrutiny of government funds is an important function of the legislature, and it is an important function that we come here to debate, to understand, so people know where it is. The Constitution is very clear that funds are not a label to be spent unless they are authorised by this particular House and that is the reason why we make sure that we take care of the various things during the budget cycle.

Of course, there was a little bit of politics and back and forth and challenges of which we have seen. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we have passed a budget that will go to the other place and, if delivered, will be the first balanced budget that this country has had in 21 years. An end to borrowing, a path to a brighter future, funding for things for the future. A significant amount of infrastructure spending. We heard the Minister of Public Works speak earlier about the items of which have already been authorised by the Cabinet and will be set to be delivered to this country within the next three weeks, to even ramp up the pace of work even further. So we are turning a corner.

The fact is, as said in the Budget Statement, we know and recognise that things are difficult. And it is really hard of course, Mr. Speaker, to say that things are better here than they are in other spaces and places. Or things are less bad here and they are bad everywhere. But policies matter. And there is a difference in approach of the policies of this Government and the policies of the Opposition. We have seen it over the times of the debates of which we have had in this House during this budget session and of course, Mr. Speaker, we have seen that today.

Now, I don't need to reflect on what took place on the budget today, but what I can state is something very important, Mr. Speaker. That due to the work of this Honourable House, and due to the economic performance and shared sacrifice of everyone in this country from public officers to citizens around, we will be able to enjoy a third consecutive year freeze on Government health insurance premiums. And at a time when we know how difficult it is for many to make ends meet, health insurance is not something that is voluntary. Health insurance is something that everyone has to pay. It is not as though you get to say, *Oh well, I am not going to pay it*. It is something that everyone has to pay when they are in work. It is something that every business has to pay when they are employing persons

and that measure of what we have done demonstrates the difference of approach. They can take a different stance but it is important that we recognise what this Government has delivered over this time in this budget session.

I want to speak again, Mr. Speaker, to the matter of housing. And I also want to touch on something that is not so much with housing, but it is important that we recognise how platforms translate to Throne Speeches, translate to budgets and translate to delivery. We hear a lot of Ministerial Statements, and I would love to brag about my Ministerial Statement today. We are going to cut red tape; we want people to go ahead and consult. But we heard a most poignant Ministerial Statement earlier today from the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors speaking about the first-year anniversary of the Independent Living programme.

Mr. Speaker, I remember that this was something that was inserted into the party's 2020 platform not from Ministers, but from the party members themselves who are working in the communities and recognised that there was something that was needed and required on this issue.

I remember telling the story, which I know I have said in this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, that during the 2020 election there was a young man who was outside of Progressive Labour Party headquarters. That young man . . . I was just engaging him and asking him how we was doing and he was telling me of his challenges. He was a young person who aged out of care at the age of 18 and was homeless. He didn't have anywhere to go. We brought him inside, tried to assist. Gave him some work, at least tried to assist, but I was able to take him inside, Mr. Speaker, and I was able to show him inside of our Election Manifesto which had been printed a couple of days before that if re-elected, this is our plan. I know it might not be most beneficial for you, but this is what we plan on doing.

Now here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. You go through election, you win election, you go through a Throne Speech you deliver, you go through a budget process, you assign the funds. Persons have to execute and commit. But later, as we have seen a year on, the testimonies that the Honourable Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors delivered today demonstrates why this work matters. It demonstrates the difference you can make if you have the social conviction to ensure that you do whatever you can to take care of those who are less fortunate in society.

Time and time again during this budgeting process, during our time in Government we have done as much as possible in order to make that a reality. And the team and staff who are part of that facility, the Minister who has been championing that facility are to be commended. It is important that we recognise that there is the politics that goes on, but we are actually impacting and changing persons' lives by the work in which we do inside of this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. Things like that are reflected throughout this budget.

Investments that are being made, new persons that are being hired, positions that are being filled, programmes that are being restarted to tackle the issues that the country faces from a social perspective.

Yes, I get it. We can do the economics right, we can get the great ratings, we can make sure that international business comes, we can talk about the record numbers of Bermudians employed. But it is really a testament to our most vulnerable in our society. And that Ministerial Statement earlier today, Mr. Speaker, was probably one of the most touching things that I have heard in my time in this Honourable House because it brings home the fact that the work we are doing in this Honourable House matters, Mr. Speaker.

As I end my contribution on today's motion to adjourn, I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that we will be back here in a month and a half. And during that time and through that time, there will be the holidays. Right now the Government has extended the holidays for Ramadan. We understand that there will be of course the holidays that are Easter, the commemoration of Easter and of course Good Friday here in Bermuda. And what I want to do is to make sure that we wish everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday. Recognise and understand that just like the Government looks out for those persons who need help and assistance, it is also the responsibility of all of us to look out for those in our community.

When I delivered remarks to the Chamber of Commerce, I made it very clear. The Government cannot be all things to all people, and we need members of the community to play their part as well. So, just as we are making progress, more and more persons need to step up to the plate in order to be a part of healing our communities, Mr. Speaker.

As I say that, we will go to holidays and I look forward to seeing all Honourable Members, with the exception of the Honourable Member from constituency 10, on the 3rd of May when we return.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Thank you, Members, for not only participation today, but throughout this budget session. We trust that the debates have been taken to heart and meaningful and that the intents will be impactful to the lives that we intend to benefit.

MP Dunkley, I notice the nametag is already gone!

[Laughter]

TRIBUTES PAID TO MICHAEL DUNKLEY

The Speaker: Making sure, right? When you came to me earlier today and indicated at what you will be doing this evening, I said to you then that you took me by

surprise. But I do understand that after having served as long as you have served, you have to reflect on where your life is, your family and you got young grandchildren that you want to spend time with. All that is understandable.

As much has been said tonight, there are very few I can add to that other than to say it is well deserved. All the comments that were given tonight indicates the respect that Members have for your length of service and the time that you have given to the country.

Yes, there has been bantering back and forth but that is part of what politics is about. And it is not to be taken personal, but it is to understand that we all come with a commitment deep in our heart to do the best for our country and for those who elected us to be here. And if we do that and we represent that well, then we have done what we were given the opportunity to do.

With that, I congratulate you and say to you that you have indicated that you are looking forward to putting your feet up and relaxing a bit and take the time to enjoy it and do well with your family.

You did take a little steam away from me, though, because my closing remarks tonight were actually going to be on what has become a topic I have made reference to over the last few occasions that I have spoken in closing the House. And again, I will just take a brief minute, I don't want to take from the comments that have been said here, but I cannot leave here tonight without again . . . I think this is probably my fourth occasion probably that I have made reference to my concern about what we see going on around the world, particularly in Israel and the war that is taking place there.

APPEAL FOR CEASE FIRE IN UNJUST WAR IN ISRAEL AND GAZA

The Speaker: I think, you know, we grew up in a time when we read about genocides in books, that happened before us. And even as we read it years later, we were horrified by what we read. It touched us in the deepest of our hearts and souls. Today, we don't have to read about it. It is happening right now in front of us in our living rooms every day, every night. And it has gone on far too long. Far too long.

Tonight, I am even making a stronger appeal that those countries that have the power to make a difference, to force a cease fire, our neighbours just to the north of us need to stand up and do the right thing in this, at this time. We cannot continue to sit here and watch this type of genocide—women and children, innocent people being destroyed. Their homes, their livelihoods, their town, their cities being destroyed and we sit back and see nothing being done about it by the powers that have the ability to stop it.

Our neighbours to the north, the US, the leadership in the US have to understand their hands are being tied to this as long as they continue to prevent the cease fires from occurring. I cannot say it any clearer or any stronger and if those get offended by it because I have named them, then that is their issue. But they need to do the right thing or they wouldn't have to be named.

With that, enjoy your time away from here. While you are away, take time to rest, reflect because this has been a long session. This is what the budget does to us and these 56 hours and eight hours today but come back refreshed and ready to serve again and your contribution to this country that your constituents have sent us all here to do.

With that, Mr. Premier, Mr. Opposition Leader, and all Members, enjoy this time and enjoy the holiday, the Easter season that will be fast upon us.

The House now stands adjourned until May 3rd.

[Gavel]

[At 7:18 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 3 May 2024.]

[This page intentionally left blank.]

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
2023/2024 SESSION

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
INDEX
February - March 2024

Key: Pages 327-646, February 2024 Volume | Pages 647-1160, March 2024 Volume

This Index is arranged alphabetically with "Order of Business" headings and MPs' names in ***bold****. "Bills" are arranged both alphabetically and procedurally (i.e., First Reading, Second Reading,* Committee*,* Report*,* Third Reading*).*

A

Abandoned Vehicles, update on tackling of (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Adams, Mr. Jache
- Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 459–462
- Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1110–1111
- Premier's Question Period
  - Mortgage Guarantee Programme, 336, 337

Adjournment, motions thereon
- Bermuda UK Ireland Golf Links Society
  - Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 1151–1152
- Birthday wishes to Government Whip
  - Roban, Hon. Walter H., 646
- Black voters
  - Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 645–646
- Budget
  - a balanced budget
    - Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 886–889
  - Committee of Supply, seeking explanation for being carried over
    - Burt, Hon. E. David, 1075
    - Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 1074–1075
    - The Speaker, 1075
- Consultants, use of
  - Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 882–884
- Cost of living, coping with
  - Roban, Hon. Walter H., 884–886
- Customs Acting Outside of Scope of Law
  - Burgess, Hon. V. Derrick, Sr., 356
- Drugs, use of mind-altering
  - Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 1143
- Dunkley, Hon. Michael H.
  - announces retirement from Parliament
    - Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 1141–1143
  - tributes to
    - Burgess, Hon. V. Derrick, Sr., 1146
    - Burt, Hon. E. David, 1156–1157
    - Caines, Mr. Wayne, 1148
    - Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 1155–1156
    - DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 1146–1147

Adjournment, motions thereon (continued)
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to (continued)
Famous, Mr. Christopher, 1144–1145
Foggo, Ms. Lovitta F., 1148–1149
Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 1152
Ming, Mrs. Renee, 1149
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 1143
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1143–1144
Richardson, Mr. Anthony, 1153–1155
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 1147–1148
The Speaker, 1158–1159
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 1149–1151
Elder abuse starting to be a prolific problem in Bermuda
Caines, Mr. Wayne, 994–996
International Women's Day 2024: Honouring Bermuda's Political Women Leaders
Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 993–994
One Bermuda Alliance (OBA) Opposition not fit for purpose
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 996–999
Pathways to Status, no support for
Famous, Mr. Christopher, 1145
Progressive Labour Party
Clear on Mission and Vision for Bermuda
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 362–365
Committed to the People of Bermuda
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 357–359
Vision-oriented Initiatives
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 359–362
Putting our lives on the line
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 990–993
Road Safety Reminders
Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 1152–1153
Strategic Oversight Group breached section 71 of the Constitution
Burgess, Hon. V. Derrick, Sr., 356–357
Sustainable Future, country on pathway to
Burt, Hon. E. David, 1157–1158
Wars
appeal for cease fire in Israel and Gaza
The Speaker, 1159
concern over unjust
The Speaker, 487
Workers, exploitation of
Burgess, Hon. V. Derrick, Sr., 355–356
Agriculture, Progress on the Integrated Agriculture Strategy (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Announcements by the Speaker or Member presiding
Adjournment, motions thereon
Committee of Supply, seeking explanation for being carried over, 1075
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1158–1159
Wars
appeal for cease fire in Israel and Gaza, 1159
concern over unjust, 487

Announcements by the Speaker or Member presiding (continued)
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 344, 404, 654, 1009, 1095–1096
Somner, Mr. Clark, appointed as Clerk to the Legislature, 1077
Appropriation Act 2024 (*See* Bills)
Approved Residential Scheme Kickstart Programme (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Asset Retirement Obligations (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Azura Bermuda
Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024 (*See* Orders)

B
Bermuda College
Annual Report 2022/23 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House; Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Audited Financial Statements 2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House; Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Bermuda Health Council
Amendment Act 2024 (*See* Bills)
Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House; Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Bermuda Immigration and Protection
(Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals List (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Bermuda Land Development Company and West End Development Corporation, merger update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Bermuda Police Service, HM Customs, Department of Corrections, Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service
Manpower approved for financial year 2023/24 (*See* Question Period)
Manpower as of 31 January 2024 (*See* Question Period)
Officers hired April 2023 to January 2024 (*See* Question Period)
Bermuda UK Ireland Golf Links Society (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Bills
Appropriation Act 2024
First Reading, 1097
Second Reading
Burt, Hon. E. David, 1098
Third Reading
Burt, Hon. E. David, 1098
Division, 1099
Bermuda Health Council Amendment Act 2024
First Reading, 1096
Civil Aviation (Air Transport Licensing) Amendment Bill 2024
First Reading, 487
Second Reading
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 642–643, 644
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 643–644
Committee, 644–645
Report, 645
Third Reading, 645

Bills (continued)
Economic Development Amendment Act 2024
First Reading, 345
Second Reading
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 798–799
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 799
Committee, 800
Report, 801
Third Reading, 801
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024
First Reading, 917
Second Reading
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 1121–1122
Burt, Hon. E. David, 1113–1116, 1130–1132
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 1119–1121
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 1123–1127
Famous, Mr. Christopher, 1127
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 1122–1123
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1128–1129
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1129–1130
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1116–1119
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 1128
Committee, 1132–1133
Division, 1133
Report, 1133
Third Reading, 1140
Investment Business Amendment Act 2024
Second Reading
Burt, Hon. E. David, 345–348, 350
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 349–350
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 348–349
Committee, 350–355
Clause 1 amended, 350
Report, 355
Third Reading, 355
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024
First Reading, 917
Second Reading
Adams, Mr. Jache, 1110–1111
Burt, Hon. E. David, 1110–1111
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 1107–1108
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 1109–1110
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1106–1107, 1111–1112
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1108–1109
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1107
Richardson, Mr. Anthony, 1110
Committee, 1112–1113
Report, 1113
Third Reading, 1140

Bills (continued)
Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024
First Reading, 801
Second Reading
Burt, Hon. E. David, 982–983, 986–987
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 983–986
Committee, 988–989
Report, 989
Third Reading, 989
Registrar of Companies (Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024
First Reading, 345
Second Reading
Burt, Hon. E. David, 982–983, 986–987
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 983–986
Committee, 987–988
Report, 989
Third Reading, 989
Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) 2023/24
Second Reading
Burt, Hon. E. David, 1133
Committee, 1133–1139
Report, 1139
Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024
First Reading, 881
Second Reading
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 1102
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 1101–1102, 1103
Committee, 1104–1105
Clause 6 amended, 1105
Report, 1106
Third Reading, 1140
Birthday wishes to Government Whip (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Black voters (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Budget
a balanced budget (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon
Adams, Mr. Jache, 459–462
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 457–459
Burgess, Hon. V. Derrick, Sr., 446–448
Burt, Hon. E. David, 483–486
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 443–446
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 471–475
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 466–471
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 450–457
Famous, Mr. Christopher, 482–483
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 448–450
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 417–423
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 440–443
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 462–466
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 475–477
Richardson, Mr. Anthony, 477–480

Budget (continued)
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon (continued)
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 480–482
Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 423–426
Smith, Mr. Ben, 426–431
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 436–440
Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 431–436
Committee of Supply, seeking explanation for being carried over (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Opposition's Reply to the Budget Statement 2024/25
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 405–416
Statement in Support of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2024/25
Burt, Hon. E. David, 367–388
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A.
Asset Retirement Obligations, 1003–1004
Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2023, 569, 569–571
Bermuda Land Development Company and West End Development Corporation, merger update, 1001–1002
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 457–459
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 343, 399–400, 916
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Public Works
Head 36-Ministry Headquarters, 608–611, 637
Head 53-Bermuda Housing Corporation, 611–613, 639
Head 68-Department of Parks, 613–616, 639, 641
Head 81-Public Lands and Buildings Department, 616–619, 638–639
Head 82-Works and Engineering, 619–625, 629, 637–638, 640
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1121–1122
Roadworks update, 391–393
UNESCO Advisory Mission to the Historic Town of St. George's and Related Fortifications, 894–895
Burgess, Hon. V. Derrick, Sr.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Customs Acting Outside of Scope of Law, 356
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1146
Strategic Oversight Group breached section 71 of the Constitution, 356–357
Workers, exploitation of, 355–356
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 446–448
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1008–1009, 1094
Burt, Hon. E. David
Adjournment, motions thereon
Committee of Supply, seeking explanation for being carried over, 1075
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1156–1157
Sustainable Future, country on pathway to, 1157–1158
Appropriation Act 2024, 1098
Approved Residential Scheme Kickstart Programme, 1002–1003
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 483–486
Budget Statement in Support of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2024/25, 367–388
CARICOM Membership update, 389–391
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 343–344, 399, 914, 1091–1092

Burt, Hon. E. David (continued)
Consolidated Fund Financial Statements 31 March 2023, 1077, 1078–1080
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Finance
Head 10-Ministry Headquarters, 754–765, 790–793
Head 11-Accountant General, 765–768, 793–794
Head 12-Bermuda Customs, 768–769
Head 28-Department of Social Insurance, 769–773, 794–795
Head 38-Office of the Tax Commissioner, 773–775, 795–797
Head 39-Registrar of Companies, 775–781
Head 58-Interest on Debt and Guarantee Management, 781–782
Non-Ministry Heads
Head 01-Governor and Staff, 956–958, 979
Head 02-The Legislature, 958–962, 979–980
Head 05-Office of the Auditor General, 962–965, 980
Head 63-Parliamentary Registrar, 965–967
Head 92-Department of Internal Audit, 980
Government guarantees, issuance of new, 719
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1113–1116, 1130–1132
Information Commissioner Office of, Annual Report 2023, 891
Investment Business Amendment Act 2024, 345–348, 350
National Economic Report of Bermuda 2023, 367
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1110–1111
Red Tape Reduction, launch of consultation, 1080–1081
Registrar of Companies
(Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024, 982–983, 986–987
(Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024, 982–983, 986–987
Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) 2023/24, 1077, 1133
Supplementary Estimate (No. 3) 2022/23, 1141
Tax Reform Commission, update, 803–805

C

Caesar, Ms. Crystal
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1093
Caines, Mr. Wayne
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1148
Elder abuse starting to be a prolific problem in Bermuda, 994–996
Campbell, Hon. Vance
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 443–446
City of Hamilton Draft Plan 2024, 394–396
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 402
Cyberattack on Government Systems, establishment of a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee, 1096
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Cabinet Office
Head 09-Cabinet Office, 847–856, 880
Head 13-Bermuda Post Office, 856–861
Head 32-Department of Planning, 861–866, 879
Head 43-Department of Information and Digital Technologies, 866–869

Campbell, Hon. Vance (continued)
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25 (continued)
Cabinet Office (continued)
Head 51-Department of Communications, 869–872, 880
Head 61-Department of Employee and Organizational Development, 873–876
Head 80-Office of Project Management and Procurement, 876–878
Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors
Head 23-Department of Child and Family Services, 824–827
Non-Ministry Heads
Head 101-Privacy Commissioner, 971–974
Head 85-Office of Ombudsman, 967–968
Head 98-Information Commissioner's Office, 969–971, 981
PIPA, meetings in London for further preparations, 1005–1007
Privacy Commissioner for Bermuda, Office of, 330–331
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1155–1156
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 471–475
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 344, 403, 721
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of National Security
Head 25-Department of Corrections, 708–709
Ministry of Public Works
Head 36-Ministry Headquarters, 627, 630–632
Head 53-Bermuda Housing Corporation, 627–628, 632
Head 68-Department of Parks, 628, 633–634
Head 81-Public Lands and Buildings Department, 625–627, 628, 634–637
Head 82-Works and Engineering, 628–629, 637
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport
Head 71-Ministry Headquarters, 741–747
Non-Ministry Heads
Head 01-Governor and Staff, 974–975
Head 02-The Legislature, 975–976
Head 05-Office of the Auditor General, 976
Head 56-Human Rights Commission, 976
Head 63-Parliamentary Registrar, 976–977
Head 85-Office of Ombudsman, 977
Head 92-Department of Internal Audit, 977–978
Head 98-Information Commissioner's Office, 978
Premier's Question Period
Mortgage rate, low interest, 904
Oarrs Incorporated Settlement, 338
Question Period
Roadworks update, 398
Spousal letter applications, new processing timelines, 805
Workforce Retaining Local, Consultation Position Paper 2024, 1089
Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024, 1073
Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024, 1102
CARICOM Membership update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
City of Hamilton Draft Plan 2024 (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Civil Aviation (Air Transport Licensing) Amendment Bill 2024 (*See* Bills)

Confirmation of Minutes
15 December 2023, 327
9 February 2024, 367
16 February 2024, 389
23 February 2024, 569
26, 28 February 2024, 647
1 and 4 March 2024, 803
6 March 2024, 891
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 343, 399–400, 916
Burgess, Hon. V. Derrick, Sr., 1008–1009, 1094
Burt, Hon. E. David, 343–344, 399, 914, 1091–1092
Caesar, Ms. Crystal, 1093
Caines, Mr. Wayne, 651, 914–915
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 402
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 344, 403, 721
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 402–403, 492, 1008, 1091
Famous, Mr. Christopher, 654, 1094
Foggo, Ms. Lovitta F., 400, 652, 720, 1095
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 402, 653–654, 721
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1092–1093
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 341
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 343, 399
Lister, Mr. Dennis III, 342, 403–404, 652, 806–807, 915, 1092
Ming, Mrs. Renee, 401, 720, 1094–1095
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 720–721, 915–916, 1008
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1008
Richardson, Mr. Anthony, 653
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 340, 400–401, 490, 651–652, 807
Simmons-Wade. Mrs. Ianthia, 341–342, 400, 1095
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn, 1091
Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S., 807, 1093
The Speaker, 344, 404, 654, 1009, 1095–1096
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 342, 398–399, 491–492, 653, 719–720, 1009
Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S., 341, 402, 491, 1009
Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 341, 401–402, 490–491, 916, 1008, 1093–1094
Consolidated Fund Financial Statements 31 March 2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House; Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Consultants, use of (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Cost of living, coping with (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Customs acting outside of scope of law (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Cyberattack on Government Systems
establishment of a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee (*See* Motions)
update (*See* Premier's Question Period)

D

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1146–1147
Putting our lives on the line, 990–993

DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S. (continued)
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 466–471
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 402–403, 492, 1008, 1091
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Transport
Head 34-Transportation Control Department, 1068
Head 48-Ministry Headquarters, 1068
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1119–1121
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1107–1108
Divisions
Appropriation Act 2024
Third Reading, 1099
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024
Committee, 1133
Drugs, use of mind-altering (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H.
announces retirement from Parliament
tributes to (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Committee of Supply, seeking explanation for being carried over, 1074–1075
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., announces retirement from Parliament, 1141–1143
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 450–457
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Health
Head 21-Ministry Headquarters, 523–526
Head 22-Department of Health, 527
Head 91-Health Insurance, 526–527
Ministry of National Security
Head 06-Defence, 695–705
Head 07-Bermuda Police Service, 698–703
Head 12-Customs, 703–704
Head 25-Department of Corrections, 704–705
Head 45-Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, 705–707
Head 83-Ministry Headquarters, 668–695
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1123–1127
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1109–1110
Question Period
Bermuda Police Service, HM Customs, Department of Corrections, Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service
Manpower approved for financial year 2023/24, 490
Manpower as of 31 January 2024, 489
Officers hired April 2023 to January 2024, 490
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H.,
announces retirement from Parliament (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
tributes to (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)

E

Economic Development Amendment Act 2024 (*See* Bills)
Recovery Plan (*See* Premier's Question Period)

Elder abuse starting to be a prolific problem in Bermuda (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Electric Bus Fleet, Reliability of (*See* Premier's Question Period)
Employment Act
Procedural Guidance for Determining what Constitutes Work Regularly performed to a Substantial Degree Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House; Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Tips and Other Gratuities Policy Statement Template
Pursuant to Schedule 1A of the Employment Act 2000 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023 (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Committee of Supply
Cabinet Office
Head 09-Cabinet Office
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 847–856, 880
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 878–879, 880
Head 13-Bermuda Post Office
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 856–861
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 879, 880
Head 32-Department of Planning
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 861–866, 879
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 879
Head 43-Department of Information and Digital Technologies
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 866–869
Head 51-Department of Communications
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 869–872, 880
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 880
Head 61-Department of Employee and Organizational Development
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 873–876
Head 80-Office of Project Management and Procurement
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 876–878
Ministry of Economy and Labour
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1010–1011
Head 14-Statistics
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1013, 1024–1025, 1027–1028
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1021–1022–1024
Head 27-Department of Immigration
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1014, 1026, 1030–1033, 1035–1038, 1038–1039
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1020–1021, 1029, 1033–1035, 1038
Head 44-Ministry Headquarters
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1012–1013, 1025
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1017–1018, 1020, 1028
Head 60-Department of Workforce Development
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1014, 1040–1043, 1044, 1045–1046
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1039–1040, 1044
Head 94-Economic Development Department
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1015–1016, 1044–1045, 1046–1047
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1043, 1046–1047

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25 (continued)
Committee of Supply (continued)
Ministry of Economy and Labour (continued)
Head 99-Department of Labour
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1016–1017, 1026–1027, 1029
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1019, 1021, 1029, 1047
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 1011, 1012
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 1011
Ministry of Education
Head 16-Ministry Headquarters
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 917–921
Head 17-Department of Education
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 921–931, 940–950, 951–952
Smith, Mr. Ben, 932–940, 950
Head 18-Libraries and Archives
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 931
Head 41-Bermuda College
Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S., 931–932
Ministry of Finance
Head 10-Ministry Headquarters
Burt, Hon. E. David, 754–765, 790–793
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 782–784
Head 11-Accountant General
Burt, Hon. E. David, 765–768, 793–794
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 784–785
Head 12-Bermuda Customs
Burt, Hon. E. David, 768–769
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 785
Head 28-Department of Social Insurance
Burt, Hon. E. David, 769–773, 794–795
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 785–786
Head 38-Office of the Tax Commissioner
Burt, Hon. E. David, 773–775, 795–797
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 787–788
Head 39-Registrar of Companies
Burt, Hon. E. David, 775–781
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 788–789
Head 58-Interest on Debt and Guarantee Management
Burt, Hon. E. David, 781–782
Ministry of Health
Head 21-Ministry Headquarters
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 523–526
Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 493–499, 528
Head 22-Department of Health
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 527
Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 499–514
Head 24-Hospitals
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 523
Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 514–520

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25 (continued)
Committee of Supply (continued)
Ministry of Health (continued)
Head 91-Health Insurance
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 526–527
Wilson, Hon. Kim N., 520–522
Ministry of Home Affairs
Head 29-Department of Registry General
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 531–535
Head 49-Department of Land Valuation
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 535–538
Head 79-Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 556–557, 560, 561, 562–563, 565
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 538–547, 558, 559, 560, 561, 563–565, 566
Head 89-Department of Energy
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 547–550
Head 93-Ministry Headquarters
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 553–556
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 528–531, 558
Head 97-Land Title and Registration Department
Roban, Hon. Walter H., 550–553
Ministry of Legal Affairs
Head 03-Judicial Department
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn, 584–589, 591–592
Head 04-Attorney General's Chamber
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn, 589–591, 592–594
Head 74-Department of Court Services
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn, 594–601
Head 75-Department of Public Prosecutions
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn, 601–604
Head 87-Ministry Headquarters
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn, 572–584
Head 88-National Drug Control Department
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn, 604–607
Ministry of National Security
Head 06-Defence
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 695–705
Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 664–669, 712
Head 07-Bermuda Police Service
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 708
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 698–703
Smith, Mr. Ben, 707–708
Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 669–674, 711, 713–714
Head 12-Customs
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 703–704
Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 674–678, 715–716
Head 25-Department of Corrections
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 708–709
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 704–705
Smith, Mr. Ben, 708
Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 678–684, 714

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25 (continued)
Committee of Supply (continued)
Ministry of National Security (continued)
Head 45-Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 705–707
Weeks, Hon. Michael A., 684–688, 711
Head 83-Ministry Headquarters
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 668–695
Smith, Mr. Ben, 707
Ministry of Public Works
Head 36-Ministry Headquarters
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 608–611, 637
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 627, 630–632
Head 53-Bermuda Housing Corporation
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 611–613, 639
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 627–628, 632
Head 68-Department of Parks
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 613–616, 639, 641
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 628, 633–634
Head 81-Public Lands and Buildings Department
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 616–619, 638–639
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 625–627, 628, 634–637
Head 82-Works and Engineering
Burch, Lt. Col. Hon. David A., 619–625, 629, 637–638, 640
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 628–629, 637
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 639–640
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport
Head 20-Sport and Recreation
Smith, Mr. Ben, 748–750
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 737–741, 751–754
Head 52-Department of Culture
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 730–737
Head 71-Ministry Headquarters
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 741–747
Smith, Mr. Ben, 747–748
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 722–730, 751–754
Ministry of Transport
Head 30-Ministry and Ports Services
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1053–1054, 1064–1065
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1060–1061
Head 34-Transportation Control Department
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 1068
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1054–1056, 1066, 1071
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1061–1063, 1066
Head 35-Department of Public Transportation
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1056–1057, 1065, 1068–1070
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1063, 1067, 1069, 1070–1071
Head 48-Ministry Headquarters
DeSilva, Hon. Zane J. S., 1068
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1048–1053, 1063–1064
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1058–1060, 1069

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25 (continued)
Committee of Supply (continued)
Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors
Head 23-Department of Child and Family Services
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 824–827
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 821–824, 827–837, 845–846
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 844, 846
Head 55-Department of Financial Assistance
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 837–843
Head 86-Ministry Headquarters
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 808–821, 845
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 843–844
Motion to approve, 1097
Non-Ministry Heads
Head 01-Governor and Staff
Burt, Hon. E. David, 956–958, 979
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 974–975
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 979
Head 02-The Legislature
Burt, Hon. E. David, 958–962, 979–980
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 975–976
Head 05-Office of the Auditor General
Burt, Hon. E. David, 962–965, 980
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 976
Head 101-Privacy Commissioner
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 971–974
Head 56-Human Rights Commission
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 976
Furbert, Hon. Tinee, 952–956, 980–981
Head 63-Parliamentary Registrar
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 965–967
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 976–977
Head 85-Office of Ombudsman
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 967–968
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 977
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 979
Head 92-Department of Internal Audit
Burt, Hon. E. David, 980
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 977–978
Head 98-Information Commissioner's Office
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 969–971, 981
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 978
Report, 567, 641, 717, 797, 881, 982, 1072, 1097
seeking explanation for being carried over (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)

F

Family Office Solutions
Framework (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Framework for Empowering Your Legacy (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)

Famous, Mr. Christopher
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1144–1145
Pathways to Status, no support for, 1145
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 482–483
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 654, 1094
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1127
FinTech
in Bermuda, a year in review (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Economic Development Department of FinTech 2023 year end report (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
Fisheries update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Foggo, Ms. Lovitta F.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1148–1149
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 400, 652, 720, 1095
Furbert, Hon. Tinee
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 448–450
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 402, 653–654, 721
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors
Head 23-Department of Child and Family Services, 821–824, 827–837, 845–846
Head 55-Department of Financial Assistance, 837–843
Head 86-Ministry Headquarters, 808–821, 845
Non-Ministry Heads
Head 56-Human Rights Commission, 952–956, 980–981
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1122–1123
Independent Living Programme and Social Work Month Activities 2024, update, 1085–1087
International Women's Day 2024, 899–901
Mirrors Programme 2024, Transform your Perspective World Summit, 901–902
National Mini Youth Conferences, 647–649
United Nations Joint Programme "Building Back Equal Through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" update, 649–651
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L.
Abandoned Vehicles, update on tackling of, 898–899
Civil Aviation (Air Transport Licensing) Amendment Bill 2024, 642–643, 644
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1092–1093
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Transport
Head 30-Ministry and Ports Services, 1053–1054, 1064–1065
Head 34-Transportation Control Department, 1054–1056, 1066, 1071
Head 35-Department of Public Transportation, 1056–1057, 1065, 1068–1070
Head 48-Ministry Headquarters, 1048–1053, 1063–1064
Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024, 892, 1100, 1101
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1106–1107, 1111–1112
Public Service Vehicle Reform, 1087–1088

G

Government guarantees, issuance of new (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024 (*See* Bills)

H

Hayward, Hon. Jason
Adjournment, motions thereon
Progressive Labour Party committed to the people of Bermuda, 357–359
Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024, 891–892
Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals List, 895–896
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 417–423
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 341
Economic Development Amendment Act 2024, 798–799
Employment Act Procedural Guidance for Determining what Constitutes Work Regularly performed to a Substantial Degree Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023, 327, 329
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Economy and Labour, 1010–1011
Head 14-Statistics, 1013, 1024–1025, 1027–1028
Head 27-Department of Immigration, 1014, 1026, 1030–1033, 1035–1038, 1038–1039
Head 44-Ministry Headquarters, 1012–1013, 1025
Head 60-Department of Workforce Development, 1014, 1040–1043, 1044, 1045–1046
Head 94-Economic Development Department, 1015–1016, 1044–1045, 1046–1047
Head 99-Department of Labour, 1016–1017, 1026–1027, 1029
Family Office Solutions
Framework, 1004–1005
Framework for Empowering Your Legacy, 1001
FinTech
in Bermuda, a year in review, 896–897
Economic Development Department of FinTech 2023 year end report, 891
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1128–1129
Investment Business Amendment Act 2024, 349–350
National Training Board Annual Reports 2019-2023, 327, 328
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1108–1109
Spousal letter applications, new processing timelines, 805
Tips and Other Gratuities Policy Statement Template
Pursuant to Schedule 1A of the Employment Act 2000, 389
Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023, 393–394
Workforce Retaining the Local, Consultation Position Paper 2024, 1078, 1081–1083

I

Immigration
Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals List (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

Spousal letter applications, new processing timelines (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Independent Living Programme and Social Work Month Activities 2024, update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Information Commissioner Office Annual Report 2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
International Women's Day 2024 (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Honouring Bermuda's Political Women Leaders (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)

J

Jackson, Ms. Susan E.
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 440–443
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 343, 399
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Transport
Head 30-Ministry and Ports Services, 1060–1061
Head 34-Transportation Control Department, 1061–1063, 1066
Head 35-Department of Public Transportation, 1063, 1067, 1069, 1070–1071
Head 48-Ministry Headquarters, 1058–1060, 1069
Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors
Head 23-Department of Child and Family Services, 844, 846
Head 86-Ministry Headquarters, 843–844
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1129–1130
Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024, 1101
Premier's Question Period
Middle East consultant contract, 909
Onyx Law, contract to, 335
Question Period
Abandoned Vehicles, update on tackling of, 913
Independent Living Programme and Social Work Month Activities 2024, update, 1090
Public Service Vehicle Reform, 1090, 1091
Spousal letter applications, new processing timelines, 806
Street Harassment, Addressing of, 339, 340

L

Lister, Mr. Dennis III
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1152
Road Safety Reminders, 1152–1153
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 342, 403–404, 652, 806–807, 915, 1092

M

Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House; Regulations)
Messages to the Senate
Appropriation Act 2024, 1099
Ming, Mrs. Renee
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1149
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 401, 720, 1094–1095

Mirrors Programme 2024, Transform your Perspective World Summit (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Mortgage Guarantee Programme (*See* Premier's Question Period)
Motions
Cyberattack on Government Systems, establishment of a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee
Campbell, Hon. Vance, 1096
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2024/25, approval of
Burt, Hon. E. David, 405

N
National Economic Report of Bermuda 2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
National Mini Youth Conferences (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
National Sports Centre Solar Project (*See* Premier's Question Period)
National Training Board
Annual Reports 2019-2023 (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Report 2019-2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)

O
Oarrs Incorporated Settlement (*See* Premier's Question Period)
One Bermuda Alliance (OBA) Opposition not fit for purpose (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Onyx Law, contract to (*See* Premier's Question Period)
Orders
Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 1073
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E., 1072–1073, 1074

P
Papers and Other Communications to the House
Bermuda College
Annual Report 2022/23, 1078
Audited Financial Statements 2023, 1078
Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2023, 569
Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024, 891–892
Consolidated Fund Financial Statements 31 March 2023, 1077
Employment Act Procedural Guidance for Determining what Constitutes Work Regularly performed to a Substantial Degree Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023, 327
Family Office Solutions, a Framework for Empowering Your Legacy
Hayward, Hon. Jason, 1001
FinTech, Economic Development Department of FinTech 2023 year end report, 891
Government guarantees, issuance of new, 719
Information Commissioner Office of, Annual Report 2023, 891
Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024, 892 (*See also* Regulations)
National Economic Report of Bermuda 2023, 367
National Training Board Report 2019-2023, 327
Supplementary Estimate (No. 1) 2023/24, 1077

Papers and Other Communications to the House (continued)
Supplementary Estimate (No. 3) 2022/23, 1141
Tips and Other Gratuities Policy Statement Template Pursuant to Schedule 1A of the Employment Act 2000, 389
Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024, 803
Workforce Retaining Local, Consultation Position Paper 2024, 1078
Parliamentary Questions (*See* Question Period; *See* also Premier's Question Period)
Pathways to Status, no support for (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024 (*See* Bills)
Pearman, Mr. Scott
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 462–466
Civil Aviation (Air Transport Licensing) Amendment Bill 2024, 643–644
Economic Development Amendment Act 2024, 799
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Cabinet Office
Head 09-Cabinet Office, 878–879, 880
Head 13-Bermuda Post Office, 879, 880
Head 32-Department of Planning, 879
Head 51-Department of Communications, 880
Ministry of Home Affairs
Head 79-Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 556–557, 560, 561, 562–563, 565
Head 93-Ministry Headquarters, 553–556
Non-Ministry Heads
Head 01-Governor and Staff, 979
Head 85-Office of Ombudsman, 979
Premier's Question Period
Onyx Limited, contract with, 907, 908
Question Period
Abandoned Vehicles, update on tackling of, 912, 913, 914
Fisheries update, 396, 397
Registrar of Companies
(Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024, 983–986
(Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024, 983–986
PIPA, meetings in London for further preparations (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Premier's Question Period (*See also* Question Period)
BTA grant reduction for sports events
Smith, Mr. Ben, 905, 906
CARICOM membership
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 902
Custom Duty, elimination of for staple goods
Wade, Mr. Jason, 908
Cyberattack
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 903
Cyberattack update
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 333
Economic Recovery Plan
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 333, 334
Electric Bus Fleet, Reliability of
Simmons-Wade. Mrs. Ianthia, 337, 338

Premier's Question Period (continued)
Health Insurance, freeze on rates
Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S., 904, 905
Middle East consultant contract
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 909
Mortgage Guarantee Programme
Adams, Mr. Jache, 336, 337
Mortgage rate, low interest
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 904
National Sports Centre Solar Project
Smith, Mr. Ben, 334, 335
Oarrs Incorporated Settlement
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 338
Onyx Law, contract to
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 335
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 332
Onyx Limited, contract with
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 907, 908
Register of Members' Interest, updated
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 903
Road repairs
Scott, Mr. W. Lawrence, 906, 907
Privacy Commissioner for Bermuda, Office of (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Progressive Labour Party
Clear on Mission and Vision for Bermuda (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Committed to the People of Bermuda (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Vision-oriented Initiatives (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Public Service Vehicle Reform (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Putting our lives on the line (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)

Q
Question Period (*See also* Premier's Question Period)
Abandoned Vehicles, update on tackling of
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 913
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 912, 913, 914
Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024-Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals List
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 909, 910
Bermuda Police Service, HM Customs, Department of Corrections, Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service
Manpower approved for financial year 2023/24
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 490
Manpower as of 31 January 2024
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 489
Officers hired April 2023 to January 2024
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., 490
FinTech in Bermuda, a year in review
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 910, 911

Question Period (continued)
Fisheries update
Pearman, Mr. Scott, 396, 397
Independent Living Programme and Social Work Month Activities 2024, update
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1090
National Training Board Annual Reports 2019-2023
Richardson, Hon. Jarion, 338, 339
Public Service Vehicle Reform
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1090, 1091
Roadworks update
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 398
Spousal letter applications, new processing timelines
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 805
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 806
Street Harassment, Addressing of
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 339, 340
Workforce, Retraining Local, Consultation Position Paper 2024
Cannonier, Mr. L. Craig, 1089

R

Rabain, Hon. Diallo V. S.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Consultants, use of, 882–884
Drugs, use of mind-altering, 1143
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1143
Bermuda College
Annual Report 2022/23, 1078, 1083–1085
Audited Financial Statements 2023, 1078, 1083
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 475–477
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 720–721, 915–916, 1008
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Education
Head 16-Ministry Headquarters, 917–921
Head 17-Department of Education, 921–931, 940–950, 951–952
Head 18-Libraries and Archives, 931
Head 41-Bermuda College, 931–932
Scholarships and Awards 2024 update, 897–898
Red Tape Reduction, launch of consultation (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Registrar of Companies
(Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) Act 2024 (*See* Bills)
(Annual Corporate Regulatory Fees) (No. 2) Act 2024 (*See* Bills)
Regulations
Merchant Shipping (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2024
Furbert, Hon. Wayne L., 1100, 1101
Jackson, Ms. Susan E., 1101

Richardson, Hon. Jarion
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1143–1144
Budget
Opposition's Reply to the Budget Statement 2024/25, 405–416
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1008
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Economy and Labour, 1011, 1012
Head 14-Statistics, 1021–1022–1024
Head 27-Department of Immigration, 1020–1021, 1029, 1033–1035, 1038
Head 44-Ministry Headquarters, 1017–1018, 1020, 1028
Head 60-Department of Workforce Development, 1039, 1039–1040, 1044, 1045
Head 94-Economic Development Department, 1043, 1046–1047
Head 99-Department of Labour, 1019, 1021, 1029, 1047
Ministry of Finance
Head 10-Ministry Headquarters, 782–784
Head 11-Accountant General, 784–785
Head 12-Bermuda Customs, 785
Head 28-Department of Social Insurance, 785–786
Head 38-Office of the Tax Commissioner, 787–788
Head 39-Registrar of Companies, 788–789
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1116–1119
Investment Business Amendment Act 2024, 348–349
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1107
Premier's Question Period
CARICOM membership, 902
Cyberattack on Government systems update, 333, 903
Economic Recovery Plan, 333, 334
Onyx Law, contract to, 332
Register of Members' Interest, updated, 903
Question Period
Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024-Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals List, 909, 910
FinTech in Bermuda, a year in review, 910, 911
National Training Board Annual Reports 2019-2023, 338, 339
Richardson, Mr. Anthony
Adjournment, motions thereon
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1153–1155
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 477–480
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 653
Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2024, 1110
Road
Safety Reminders (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Street Harassment, Addressing of (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Roadworks update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Roban, Hon. Walter H.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Birthday wishes to Government Whip, 646
Cost of living, coping with, 884–886
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1147–1148
Progressive Labour Party

Roban, Hon. Walter H. (continued)
Adjournment, motions thereon (continued)
Clear on Mission and Vision for Bermuda, 362–365
Agriculture, Progress on the Integrated Agriculture Strategy, 892–894
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 480–482
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 340, 400–401, 490, 651–652, 807
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Home Affairs
Head 29-Department of Registry General, 531–535
Head 49-Department of Land Valuation, 535–538
Head 79-Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 538–547, 558, 559, 560, 561, 563–565, 566
Head 93-Ministry Headquarters, 528–531, 558
Head 97-Land Title and Registration Department, 550–553
Fisheries update, 391
Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024, 1101–1102, 1103

S

Scholarships and Awards 2024 update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Scott, Mr. W. Lawrence
Premier's Question Period
Road repairs, 906, 907
Simmons-Wade. Mrs. Ianthia
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 341–342, 400, 1095
Premier's Question Period
Electric Bus Fleet, Reliability of, 337, 338
Simmons, Hon. Kathy Lynn
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 1091
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Legal Affairs
Head 03-Judicial Department, 584–589, 591–592
Head 04-Attorney General's Chamber, 589–591, 592–594
Head 74-Department of Court Services, 594–601
Head 75-Department of Public Prosecutions, 601–604
Head 87-Ministry Headquarters, 572–584
Head 88-National Drug Control Department, 604–607
Simmons, Mr. Jamahl S.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Black voters, 645–646
International Women's Day: Honouring Bermuda's Political Women Leaders, 993–994
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 423–426
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 807, 1093
Smith, Mr. Ben
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 426–431
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Education
Head 17-Department of Education, 932–940, 950
Ministry of National Security
Head 83-Ministry Headquarters, 707

Smith, Mr. Ben (continued)
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25 (continued)
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport
Head 20-Sport and Recreation, 748–750
Head 71-Ministry Headquarters, 747–748
Premier's Question Period
BTA grant reduction for sports events, 905, 906
National Sports Centre Solar Project, 334, 335
Somner, Mr. Clark, appointed as Clerk to the Legislature (*See* Announcements by the Speaker or Member presiding)
Speaker (*See* Announcements by the Speaker or Member presiding)
Spousal letter applications, new processing timelines (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers
Abandoned Vehicles, update on tackling of, 898–899 (*See also* Question Period)
Agriculture, Progress on the Integrated Agriculture Strategy, 892–894
Approved Residential Scheme Kickstart Programme, 1002–1003
Asset Retirement Obligations, 1003–1004
Bermuda College
Annual Report 2022/23, 1083–1085
Audited Financial Statements 2023, 1083
Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements 2023, 569–571
Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2024-Bermuda's Visa Controlled Nationals List, 895–896 (*See also* Question Period)
Bermuda Land Development Company and West End Development Corporation, merger update, 1001–1002
Budget Statement in Support of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2024/25, 367–388
CARICOM Membership update, 389–391
City of Hamilton Draft Plan 2024, 394–396
Consolidated Fund Financial Statements 31 March 2023, 1078–1080
Employment Act Procedural Guidance for Determining what Constitutes Work Regularly performed to a Substantial Degree Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023, 329
Family Office Framework, 1004–1005
FinTech in Bermuda, a year in review, 896–897 (*See also* Question Period)
Fisheries update, 391 (*See also* Question Period)
Independent Living Programme and Social Work Month Activities 2024, update, 1085–1087 (*See also* Question Period)
International Women's Day 2024, 899–901
Mirrors Programme 2024, Transform your Perspective World Summit, 901–902
National Mini Youth Conferences, 647–649
National Training Board Annual Reports 2019-2023, 328 (*See also* Question Period)
PIPA, meetings in London for further preparations, 1005–1007
Privacy Commissioner for Bermuda, Office of, 330–331
Public Service Vehicle Reform, 1087–1088 (*See also* Question Period)
Red Tape Reduction, launch of consultation, 1080–1081
Roadworks update, 391–393 (*See also* Question Period)
Scholarships and Awards 2024 update, 897–898
Spousal letter applications, new processing timelines, 805 (*See also* Question Period)
Street Harassment, addressing of, 329–330 (*See also* Question Period)

Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers (continued)
Tax Reform Commission, update, 803–805
Tips and Other Gratuities Policy Statement Template Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023, 393–394
UNESCO Advisory Mission to the Historic Town of St. George's and Related Fortifications, 894–895
United Nations Joint Programme "Building Back Equal Through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" update, 649–651
Workforce, Retaining Local, Consultation Position Paper 2024, 1081–1083 (*See also* Question Period)
Strategic Oversight Group breached section 71 of the Constitution (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Street Harassment, addressing of (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Supplementary Estimate
(No. 1) 2023/24 (*See* Bills; Papers and Other Communications to the House)
(No. 3) 2022/23 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
Sustainable Future, country on pathway to (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)
Swan, Mr. Hubert (Kim) E.
Adjournment, motions thereon
Bermuda UK Ireland Golf Links Society, 1151–1152
Budget, a balanced budget, 886–889
Dunkley, Hon. Michael H., tributes to, 1149–1151
One Bermuda Alliance (OBA) Opposition not fit for purpose, 996–999
Progressive Labour Party
Vision-oriented Initiatives, 359–362
Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 436–440
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 342, 398–399, 491–492, 653, 719–720, 1009
Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25
Ministry of Economy and Labour, 1011
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport
Head 20-Sport and Recreation, 737–741, 751–754
Head 52-Department of Culture, 730–737
Head 71-Ministry Headquarters, 722–730, 751–754
Government Loans Amendment Act 2024, 1128
Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024, 803, 1072–1073, 1074

T
Tax Reform Commission, update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Tips and Other Gratuities Policy Statement Template Pursuant to
Schedule 1A of the Employment Act 2000 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)
the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023 (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)
Tourism Investment (Azura Bermuda) Order 2024 (*See* Orders; Papers and Other Communications to the House)
Tyrrell, Mr. Neville S.
Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 341, 402, 491, 1009
Premier's Question Period
Health Insurance, freeze on rates, 904, 905

U

UNESCO Advisory Mission to the Historic Town of St. George's and Related Fortifications (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

United Nations Joint Programme "Building Back Equal Through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" update (*See* Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

V

Voluntary Registration of Vital Documents (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2024 (*See* Bills)

W

Wade, Mr. Jason

Premier's Question Period

Custom Duty, elimination of for staple goods, 908

Wars

appeal for cease fire in Israel and Gaza (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)

concern over unjust (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)

Weeks, Hon. Michael A.

Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, 341, 401–402, 490–491, 916, 1008, 1093–1094

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25

Ministry of National Security

Head 06-Defence, 664–669, 712

Head 07-Bermuda Police Service, 669–674, 711, 713–714

Head 12-Customs, 674–678, 715–716

Head 25-Department of Corrections, 678–684, 714

Head 45-Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, 684–688, 711

Head 83-Ministry Headquarters, 655–664, 709–711

Street Harassment, Addressing of, 329–330

Wilson, Hon. Kim N.

Budget Statement and Reply, Debate thereon, 431–436

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2024/25

Ministry of Health

Head 21-Ministry Headquarters, 493–499, 528

Head 22-Department of Health, 499–514

Head 24-Hospitals, 514–520

Work

Procedural Guidance for Determining what Constitutes Work Regularly performed to a Substantial Degree Pursuant to the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House)

Workers, exploitation of (*See* Adjournment, motions thereon)

Workforce

Retaining Local, Consultation Position Paper 2024 (*See* Papers and Other Communications to the House; Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers)

~~~~~~
~~~~~~

Dates of Sittings 6–16:	**Pages in Hansard:**
9 February 2024	327–366
16 February 2024	367–388
23 February 2024	389–488
26 February 2024	489–568
28 February 2024	569–646
01 March 2024	647–718
04 March 2024	719–802
06 March 2024	803–890
08 March 2024	891–1000
11 March 2024	1001–1076
15 March 2024	1161–1212