



2021/2022 SESSION
of the
BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

30 SEPTEMBER 2022

Sitting number 24 of the 2021/2022 Session
(pages 1717–1788)

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

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BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT****30 SEPTEMBER 2022****10:02 AM***Sitting Number 24 of the 2021/2022 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.

*[Gavel]***MOMENT OF SILENCE***[In memory of Mr. Colin Pearman, former MP]*

The Speaker: Members, it is tradition that we recognise former Members of this House when they have passed. And while we were all recessed from these Chambers, a former Member, the Honourable Member Colin Pearman, passed away. So we want to take a moment of silence in honour of the late Member.

Please join me in standing for that moment.

[Members rose and observed a moment of silence.]

The Speaker: Thank you, Members.
You can be seated.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES*[Minutes of 15 July 2022]*

The Speaker: The Minutes of July 15 to be confirmed. Members, have you received your Minutes?

Any amendments or adjustments?

There are none.

The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

*[Minutes of 15 July 2022 confirmed]***MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR**

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING****NEW ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT IN
THE LEGISLATURE OFFICE**

The Speaker: First let me announce, you may have noticed in the Speaker's Gallery here to my left a new face, a new staff member. We would like to acknowledge Ms. Andrina Smith, who will be a part of our staff who assist the Members as we conduct our business here in the House.

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: I would also like to acknowledge that I have received . . . as is customary when Members are absent, they send notice that they will be absent. I have received notice from the following Members: Minister Wilson, Attorney General Simmons, MP Kim Swan, MP Jamahl Simmons, MP Scott Pearman, MP Caesar and MP Wade will all be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: There are six of those.
Premier, I think the first is in your name.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. E. David Burt: It is a pleasure to be back in this Chamber.

The Speaker: Yes, it is.

**INVESTMENT BUSINESS
(CLASS B REGISTERED PERSONS) ORDER 2022**

Hon. E. David Burt: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Investment Business (Class B Registered Persons) Order 2022, made by the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 13(1)(a) of the Investment Business Act 2003.

The Speaker: Thank you.

INVESTMENT BUSINESS (NON-REGISTRABLE PERSONS) (DESIGNATION) ORDER 2022

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Investment Business (Non-Registrable Persons) (Designation) Order 2022, made by the Minister of Finance pursuant to section 13(1)(b) of the Investment Business Act 2003.

The Speaker: Thank you.

INVESTMENT BUSINESS (CLIENT MONEY) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2022

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Investment Business (Client Money) Amendment Regulations 2022, made by the Minister of Finance pursuant to section 14 of the Investment Business Act 2003.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I note that the next two are in the name of the Minister of Health, who has indicated she will not be present today.

Is any Member . . . Deputy Premier.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Good morning, Members of the House and the listening public.

I will do the submissions on behalf of the Minister of Health.

The Speaker: Yes.

BERMUDA HOSPITALS BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Hospitals Board Annual Report 2016/17.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: May I go on to the next one, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes, you may.

PUBLIC HEALTH (COVID-19) EMERGENCY EXTENSION (NO. 1) ORDER 2022

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Public Health (COVID-19) Emergency Extension (No. 1) Order 2022, proposed to be made by the Minister of Health in exercise of the power conferred by section 107A of the Public Health Act 1949.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister Furbert, I believe you are introducing for the Minister of Sport.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

BERMUDA SPORT ANTI-DOPING AUTHORITY ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Sport Anti-Doping Authority Annual Report 2022.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: This morning we have 10 Statements. The first Statement this morning is in the name of the Premier.

Premier, would you like to present your Statement?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON PRAGUE AND BRUSSELS TRIP

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's economy continues to be driven by international business. This summer we saw a record number of young Bermudians enter the industry as interns, graduate trainees or full-time employees in the various sectors. The growth encountered in international business provides significant positive impact on the local economy. In the wake of the worldwide restrictions on travel and in-person meetings, there is a renewed sense of energy and urgency to reconnect again, and the Government of Bermuda must re-engage with the industry.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that between the 7th and 14th of September I travelled to [Prague and Brussels](#) for a series of meetings with top officials from the European Commission and Council of the European Union, as well as with member states and third country representatives, industry representatives, Brussels-based thought leaders and other stakeholders. The trip was planned around the Association of Bermuda Insurers and Reinsurers' (known as ABIR) annual Regulatory Dialogue, held in Brussels from the 8th through the 9th of September. As it was ABIR's first event in Brussels since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was an important occasion to demonstrate the Government's support for our local industry partners and for the Bermuda market more globally. I had the pleasure of delivering the conference's closing remarks over a "seaside chat" moderated by Stephen Catlin, Chairman of the Convex Group.

Mr. Speaker, the timing of ABIR's Regulatory Dialogue gave me the opportunity to attend the bi-annual Eurofi conference, the largest gathering of financial services stakeholders in Europe. Attendance at this conference facilitated many networking opportunities and side meetings, including with Petra Hielkema, the Chair the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA); with Colin Bell, CEO of HSBC Bank plc and HSBC Europe; and with FinTech businesses interested in domiciling in Bermuda. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these interested businesses literally tracked us down during the conference in order to get more information. This is truly a testament to Bermuda's leadership within the FinTech and digital asset space and shows the value of participating in events such as these.

Mr. Speaker, a key objective of this trip was to refresh and deepen connections with financial services and taxation stakeholders in the European Union [EU], with special attention to (1) maintaining Bermuda's equivalence under Solvency II; and (2) being removed from Annex II (otherwise known as the "State of Play document") of the Council of the EU's Code of Conduct Group.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say the trip was a success on all counts. On the European Commission side, I met with the EU Commissioner for Financial services, financial stability and Capital Markets Union, Commissioner Mairead McGuinness. We had a positive exchange regarding Bermuda's reinsurance sector and the importance of Solvency II equivalence. We also discussed Bermuda's strength on anti-money laundering [AML] and how it relates to our regulation on digital assets. Commissioner McGuinness was particularly interested in financing renewable energy and green investment. I was pleased to speak about Bermuda's new energy regulatory sandbox and Bermuda's work on climate risk finance. [Commissioner McGuinness] also took note of our comments on the

need to highlight countries that are achieving compliance in key areas rather than just a focus on weakness and non-compliance.

Mr. Speaker, I also met with Mr. Gerassimos Thomas, the Director of the Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs [Union] (known as DG TAXUD). While we must await the official report on the 4th of October, I am pleased to share that we received very positive feedback on Bermuda's progress to address our commitments under Annex II of the Code of Conduct Group. This was echoed by the Chair of the Code of Conduct Group, Madam Lyudmila Petkova, whom I also met with in Brussels. Based on all of the discussions and the information that the Bermuda Government has received, there is no expectation that Bermuda will be kept on Annex II when the list is updated on the 4th of October.

Mr. Speaker, on the member state side, we held meetings with Mr. Michael McGrath, Assistant Secretary in the Financial Services Division in the Irish Department of Finance, who is also the Vice-Chair of the EU Financial Services Committee, which helps prepare the Council's EcoFin meetings. The delegation also met with the Irish Ambassador to the EU, Mr. Tom Hanney; and Estonian Ambassador to the EU, Mr. Aivo Orav; as well as key members of their teams. Meeting with member states is crucial [for Bermuda] so that Bermuda can advocate for our interests directly and can strengthen our engagements on areas of mutual interest. In all of our meetings our message was clear: Bermuda is a transparent, cooperative jurisdiction committed to strong regulatory standards and high levels of compliance, and we are a trusted partner to the European Union during these uncertain geopolitical times.

Mr. Speaker, another objective of this visit was to buttress Bermuda's reputation in non-finance-related policy areas, namely, on climate change and sustainability. This was a topic of interest across all meetings and especially in the meeting with Elina Bardram, Acting Director for International Affairs and Climate Finance in the Directorate-General for Climate Action in the European Commission. Ms. Bardram was impressed by Bermuda's leadership on ocean monitoring and climate risk finance and suggested new opportunities for Bermuda to engage more closely with the European Commission on these topics. During the visit I also met with representatives of the UK Mission to the European Union, including the UK Ambassador to the European Union, Mr. Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby. We exchanged on many topics, including the Bermuda-UK-EU relationship post-Brexit and areas for further potential cooperation, such as on climate outreach.

Mr. Speaker, one of the highlights of the trip was a reception organised by the Bermuda Government's Brussels Office with about 50 attendees from EU member state representations, European Commission, European parliament officials, influential think

tank leaders, private sector representatives and third country representatives. This reception gave yet another opportunity to share the Bermuda message, which was well received by all in attendance.

Mr. Speaker, the European Union is a key trading partner for Bermuda and plays an increasingly important role in setting international standards in areas of vital importance to our economy. The impact and support provided by Bermuda companies to the EU infrastructure and in the management of risk is important and expanding. The Government of Bermuda will continue to engage actively with the European Union institutions, its member states and other stakeholders both through visits such as these and through our Brussels Office to ensure that relationships continue to be strengthened and Bermuda's interests are protected.

Mr. Speaker, those interests include the protection of Bermudian jobs in a sector that is increasingly being chosen by our young people. Their aspirations and those of their parents who support them demand that we continue to promote Bermuda internationally to ensure growth and opportunity locally.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier. I believe the second Statement is also yours.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Continue.

UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda with an update on the work being carried out by the Ministry of Finance. In the first instance I would like to advise this Honourable House of the latest estimates relating to the 2021/22 Budget arising from the extensive work done to prepare for the audit of the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Speaker, based on the numbers submitted for the audit of the Consolidated Fund, the 2021/22 budget deficit is now projected to be \$81 million. This is \$44 million (or 35 per cent) below the original estimate of \$125 million, as presented in the 2021/22 Budget Statement. The revenue is projected to be \$1.07 billion, \$74 million [7 per cent] above the original 2021/22 estimate of \$991 million, primarily due to increases in customs duties, stamp duty, civil aviation receipts, payroll tax, and increased revenue from the travel authorisation. In relation to Current Account Expenditures, they are now projected to be \$945 million, \$42 million above the 2021/22 original estimate of \$903 million. It should be noted that COVID-19 expenditures are projected to total \$37 million, \$22 million more than the original estimates,

which include \$20 million for the minimum revenue guarantee to Skyport and \$10 million for unemployment benefits.

Mr. Speaker, interest/guarantee management costs are projected to be \$133 million, \$5 million more than originally budgeted, with most of this increase related to costs for the failed Morgan's Point project which was guaranteed by the OBA Government. Capital account expenditures are projected to be \$76 million, \$17 million less than originally budgeted.

Mr. Speaker, the continued strengthening of the economy is already evident in the first quarter numbers that the Ministry of Finance has received to date. As indicated earlier, the actual revenues in 2021/22 in certain key areas were higher than originally predicted for that year, resulting in the lower than forecasted 2021/22 deficit. Therefore, it is expected that the loss in income from the aircraft register as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war will be offset by stronger payroll tax, land tax, stamp duty, customs duty, and tourism-related revenue from our stronger-than-expected tourism season.

Mr. Speaker, tourism revenue for the current year is now expected to increase by approximately \$30 million above initial estimates. This increase, along with the improvement in the 2021/22 deficit position, will enable the Government to fulfil the promise given in the 2022/23 Budget Statement to provide even more relief to the people of Bermuda who have been negatively impacted by rising global inflation. Mr. Speaker, this House has already passed relief measures such as increased support for financial assistance, a payroll tax rebate for 75 per cent of Bermuda's workers and support for parents of public school students. Further, we have frozen the price of fuel at February levels, and later today we will table a Bill to eliminate customs duty on essential goods, which will further benefit working families by reducing food prices as this Government takes action to deal with rising global inflation.

Mr. Speaker, this Government will also invest in critical infrastructure to stabilise the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility to reduce the risk of land-filling returning to Bermuda. Finally, the Cabinet has approved additional funding to the Bermuda Housing Corporation to address the shortage of affordable housing, which will be detailed by the Honourable Minister of Public Works in this Honourable House next week.

Mr. Speaker, despite the relief that this Government is giving to working families and the additional investment in housing that is needed after years of under-investment, it is expected that the Government will meet the deficit target of \$70 million. When this deficit is combined with the deficit figures from last year, this will see the government's net debt in a much stronger position than forecasted during February's budget presentation. The March 31, 2022, net debt level was \$48 million lower than previously forecast in

the Budget Statement. In addition, as at March 31, 2023, net debt is now forecasted to be \$60 million [lower] than originally estimated in the Budget Statement projections.

Mr. Speaker, the figures that I just mentioned highlight the result of the successful execution of Bermuda's Economy Recovery Plan, which has seen government revenues increase, economic growth that has exceeded expectations (5.4 per cent in 2021) and the strongest growth in international business since 2007. The successful management of Bermuda's economy has been recognised by external rating agencies and by investors, as noted from the results of the recent debt refinancing. There will continue to be close scrutiny of the government's revenue and expenditures to ensure that debt and fiscal metrics continue to move in a positive direction.

Mr. Speaker, I will now turn to matters related to the refinancing of the government's debt. In accordance with section 2(3) of the Government Loans Act [1978], I am pleased to inform this Honourable House of a successful capital markets transaction that occurred on the 15th of August 2022 to issue \$390 million of additional Senior Notes due in 2032.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will recall that on the 1st of July 2022, the Government issued \$500 million of new Senior Notes due in 2032, which were used to pre-fund an upcoming private placement maturity in December 2022 and to refinance the outstanding Senior Notes due in January 2023. Mr. Speaker, at that time global bond markets had seen unprecedented levels of volatility, with interest rates having dramatically increased from record lows. In response to an uncertain market, the Government made a key decision to "de-risk" the transaction by prioritising its most immediate refinancing needs. As a result, the Government took the strategic decision to issue \$500 million to address the short-term refinancing needs and to defer the refinancing of the 2024 debt. To refinance that longer-term debt would have required raising almost \$1 billion in new capital and would have [had to have] been offered at a higher interest rate, which would have increased Bermuda's interest payments.

Mr. Speaker, following the July offering, the Ministry of Finance continued to prudently monitor market conditions for opportunities to target the 2024 notes. Issuance markets continued to improve, US Treasuries and credit spreads narrowed significantly, and in early August Bermuda's new 2032 Senior Notes, issued the month prior, were trading at a significant premium to par value. Consequently, on the 15th of August, Bermuda re-opened the initial offering and issued an additional \$390 million of the same 5 per cent Senior Notes due in 2032, but at a placement yield of 4.54 per cent, or 54 basis points lower than in July. It also achieved a spread of 175 basis points over US Treasuries, equal to the second-lowest spread ever achieved by Bermuda.

Demand for the reopening was largely anchored by the same lead investors from the original offering in July, who were supportive of Bermuda's financing strategy and were looking to continue to increase their existing exposure to Bermuda due to our strong economic performance. In addition, we also saw demand from investors who did not participate in the July offering.

Mr. Speaker, I will also note that the 10-year US Treasury was at 2.79 per cent at the time of the reopening execution, which was about 1.0 per cent lower than where rates are today. Additionally, with the notes issued at a premium, the proceeds were sufficient to redeem the approximately \$400 million of outstanding notes due in 2024. When combined with the initial issuance, gross debt (taking into account the retirement of the upcoming \$154 million in notes) will actually decline by about \$6 million.

Mr. Speaker, these latest transactions have allowed the Government to fully refinance all of its near-term external debt with more than four years until the next maturity in January 2027. As a result of our management of the country's finances and the successful execution of Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, we have not had to utilise the country's Sinking Fund balance for management of ongoing cash needs to the extent originally projected. Therefore, this gives the option for the government to repay the BD\$50 million debt outstanding next year without having to refinance this debt. This will allow for a further reduction in outstanding debt, and [this] is positive [financial] news.

Mr. Speaker, our focus in these matters has been to ensure that Bermuda continues to implement a strong and robust fiscal and debt management strategy. Consistent with this approach has been this Government's management and oversight of matters relating to government-issued guarantees. Such guarantees have been issued to support sustainable economic growth and to protect the safety, health and economic well-being of our residents.

We have worked closely with the Bermuda Hospitals Board [BHB], particularly to provide support during the significant challenges that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, relief was provided to the Bermuda Hospitals Board in relation to payroll tax, as well as waivers relating to immigration fees and customs duty. The previous relief on payroll tax and immigration fees expired on August 31, 2022 and has now been extended to March 31, 2023. In addition, the Government is working closely with the Clarion Bank in relation to the \$2.5 million guarantee issued to the bank for InnoFund to support the continued growth and development of a tech incubator in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, the successful execution of this refinancing initiative, coupled with the recent positive assessments by independent rating agencies and the strong economic growth which is now taking place

due to the successful execution of Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, reinforces the fact that Bermuda's economy is on the right track.

However, Mr. Speaker, too often in Bermuda's history the story has been purely the health of the balance sheet or the apparent skill at achieving some measure of fiscal discipline and accounting mastery. Yes, this is important, and it is something to which we must continue to aspire. But, Mr. Speaker, a healthy or improved balance sheet must be used to support the people we represent. It makes no difference to the struggling mother who is working two jobs to keep the lights on that the Government reduces its deficit unless those savings and better-than-expected fiscal performance means relief for her and her family. Hard-working Bermudians have had to endure plenty of *shared sacrifice*, and it is high time that the people benefitted from *shared success*.

Mr. Speaker, this [Government's fiscal performance](#) provides us with the scope to do just that, and as promised in this year's Budget Statement, "Relief Now and More Relief to Come," the Government will outline further measures to return more funds to working families in the coming weeks and will keep its promise to ensure that the shared success is not kept by the government but shared with the hard-working taxpayers of Bermuda to help working families cope with increasing global inflation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Deputy Premier.

Deputy Premier.

TABLING OF THE FUELS BILL 2022

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you and good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am tabling today the [Bill entitled the Fuels Bill 2022](#). This Bill is a watershed moment in the regulation of fuel in Bermuda, as first and foremost it moves the responsibility for the regulation of fuels under the auspices of government to the Regulatory Authority. The Regulatory Authority (or RA) was conceived over a decade ago to be Bermuda's multi-sector regulator responsible for any networked industry deemed appropriate to be regulated.

Mr. Speaker, because of the strength and capacity the RA has built in regulating the vast sectors of electronic communications—

(I am told that people are having difficulty hearing me, Mr. Speaker. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Let me just go back to that sentence, Mr. Speaker.)

Mr. Speaker, because of the strength and capacity the RA has built in regulating the vast sectors of electronic communications, electricity, and more recently submarine communications cables, the time is right for adding the fuels sector to the RA's portfolio. It

is therefore critical to the understanding of this Bill to consider its provisions in conjunction with the Regulatory Authority Act of 2011, which sets the rules of engagement between the regulator and any regulated industry under its purview. This Bill defines those things that are unique, specific and critical to the fuels sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Fuels Bill not only seeks to make the Regulatory Authority responsible for the regulation of the economic aspects of regulating the sector, but also proposes broader oversight to tie in environmental, safety and health regulations under one main umbrella. The addition of fuels to the RA also provides synergy in determining the cost to the consumer, both in considering the fuels surcharge and fuels at the gas station. The RA will, as for the submarine communication cables sector, be the *one-stop shop* for all matters of licensure. The Bill defines to whom the legislation will apply and the key terms of the industry. It is important here to make the distinction that this Bill applies only to those who sell fuel to others as their primary business. This means, Mr. Speaker, in broad terms that the Bill will apply to those entities that import fuel for the purposes of selling it in turn to others, and to those in the primary business of selling fuel in the context of gases for cooking and heating, or fuels for vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, at a high level, the purposes of the proposed Fuels Bill are as follows:

- to ensure that Bermuda has an appropriate and adequate fuel supply to meet its needs;
- to ensure safe, efficient, economic and environmentally responsible operation of the fuel sector;
- to ensure the continuity of service in ensuring the continued good management and maintenance of critical infrastructure like pipelines and storage tanks, for example;
- to protect the interests of consumers by ensuring that fuel pricing is fair and transparent;
- to promote competition where appropriate and feasible; and
- to promote investment in the sector that is beneficial to the economy, the people and the environment of Bermuda.

The Fuels Bill also sets out the functions of the Regulatory Authority and the Minister, setting the boundaries of responsibilities to ensure that all regulatory activities are conducted with transparency and fairness to all participants while enabling the Minister to set policy and priorities.

With regulation will come licences for the actual business in the local fuels market. To be clear, Mr. Speaker, this is not to be construed as any transfer of responsibilities for matters of fire safety, planning or environmental health. Those agencies will continue to hold responsibilities for the areas they do at present, and the new licences will require compliance with all of the relevant Acts as before. But in this

new setting, the ability to conduct business will be necessarily and inextricably linked to those compliances.

The Bill provides an additional layer of protection and a centralisation of service for any new participants in the sector. To be clear, as the matter of competition is being considered in the context of this new Bill, there is no intent to lift the existing moratorium on filling stations. Competition may come in several forms, including the possibility of the introduction of new fuels to Bermuda like biofuels or hydrogen as those technologies continue to develop.

Mr. Speaker, last but by no means least are the provisions for offences and penalties, which are envisioned to be sufficiently strict so as to give additional teeth to existing safety and environmental regulations. For the avoidance of doubt, Mr. Speaker, the Bill represents the beginning of our harder work, as it is the framework on which the regulations will be built. The regulations under design at the moment will provide for the details—the applications for fuel licences, including different types of fuel and different classes of operator. It is envisioned that the regulations will not be prescriptive but [will] allow for entrants with new and different products to participate in the local market. Those fuels might include biodiesel, or even hydrogen as that technology becomes increasingly more feasible. Regulations will also include actions and conditions to the licensees, including public information and measures to ensure transparency while preserving proprietary information.

Mr. Speaker, like many similarly sized and situated jurisdictions, Bermuda's fuel sector has multiple single points of failure in which if any one of those elements of critical infrastructure were to be disturbed or taken out of service for any reason, the entire country would be very adversely affected. Regulations will also define those elements of critical infrastructure and prescribe rules to govern and ultimately protect them, thus providing another layer of reliability and accountability for those components.

Mr. Speaker, service to the people of Bermuda is the single greatest purpose of this Bill. Protecting consumer interests with fairness and transparency in all aspects of regulation is paramount to the ultimate efficacy of the legislation, and therefore will be addressed in greater detail not just in regulations, but also through the processes of the RA in general determinations. Among the most important aspects of the regulations and indeed of the regulatory process is its inclusion of and consultation with industry. Regulations will not be derived in a vacuum, but rather in fulsome discussion and conversation with industry, including not only the main importers, but the filling stations and operators as well.

Mr. Speaker, I must add clarity and assurance in the matter of pricing in particular. Just as with the other regulated industries under the auspices of the Regulatory Authority at present, pricing methodologies

will be developed through the general determination process of the Regulatory Authority, which is required by law in accordance with the Regulatory Authority Act of 2011 to be inclusive, consultative, iterative and transparent. The public, the paying customers, deserve no less, and the Bill seeks to ensure that good practices are carried through the fuels sector for the benefit of all.

Mr. Speaker, regulations will also ensure that transitional matters are addressed so that operators and sectoral participants currently in the market will be allowed to continue their businesses with confidence and certainty, with a commitment to regularising their licensing and ensuring that their operations go forward under the new regulatory regime without interruption or disruption. With all of this change will also come preparation, and so the RA will have some work to do before it is able to assume the reins of the fuels sector, and the regulations will ensure that the transition is sensible and as smooth as possible.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, the legislation promotes and strengthens our sustainable goals. The Fuels Bill, once passed, will protect the people of Bermuda in ensuring fairness and transparency. It will ensure that the interests of sectoral participants are protected by providing rules and guidelines for the RA and the Government. Bermuda's environment will be protected by ensuring that related offenses are met with appropriate, proportional and serious penalties. Ultimately, the economy will be promoted by ensuring that there is regulatory certainty for all investors, both new and existing, in the fuels sector. The Bill will uphold the pillars of sustainability and contribute to Bermuda's continued growth and prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Health.

Are we carrying that [over], or someone is going to read it this morning for her?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: We will carry it over, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We will carry it over. Okay. Thank you.

The next Statement then would be in the name of the Minister of Education.
Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, colleagues.

The Speaker: Before you start, Minister.

Members, let me just remind you that if you would like to ask questions, I need to be notified. I have not had anyone notify me yet that they have questions. Just as a reminder. Thank you.

Continue, Minister.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I know we have been away from this Chamber, so I have to refresh memories on processes. So that was simply to remind us on the protocol of how the Speaker gets notified. I know everyone has been used to using their virtual space to do it. But I need it physically now.

GOVERNMENT'S \$150 RELIEF INITIATIVE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to update this Honourable House and the listening public on the [Government's \\$150 Relief Initiative](#) for parents and guardians who have children enrolled in the public school system. The \$150 relief is part of the Government's overall \$15 million economic relief package to ease the financial burden on working families in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, parents know their children's needs to prepare them for a good start in school. This Government has provided \$567,000 to help alleviate parents' yearly school expenses. The primary purpose of the relief is to help parents and guardians purchase school supplies, whether it be school shoes, sneakers, uniforms, sweaters, school bags, lunch kits, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, while the Ministry of Education is responsible for education in Bermuda, including private schools, funding for the provision of schooling is reserved for public schools only, Bermuda's only comprehensive system. As such, the provision of the \$150 per student grant is available to students in the public school system only.

Mr. Speaker, the \$150 relief is a one-time payment to parents and was rolled out on September 2, 2022. Technical officers from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance took the time to ensure the application and payment process was thorough and payments were provided to eligible persons only. The Education Department's PowerSchool System has been set up so that eligible parents can submit their applications directly into the system.

Mr. Speaker, every parent or guardian of public school students has access to this system. When a child is enrolled as a public school student, they are given an account with log-on details. Parents are positioned to check their child's school grades and daily attendance and obtain other information that the school or teachers may share with parents. The \$150 relief application form has been designed within PowerSchool and is linked directly to each student's PowerSchool account using the student's school ID number. Only parents and guardians listed as the primary contact on the student's PowerSchool account are eligible for the \$150 relief.

Mr. Speaker, parents were provided with an eight-step easy-to-follow list of instructions on how to apply for the \$150 relief. Visual graphics were issued so they could follow the steps on the graphics for resetting their PowerSchool account and completing the application form. A list of frequently asked questions (or FAQs) was also prepared and shared with parents. Should parents have further questions or require additional assistance, they should email relief@moed.bm.

Mr. Speaker, like anyone being paid from the public purse, all payments must adhere to the financial compliance requirements of the Accountant General's Office. This means that for persons applying for the relief, a government-issued ID must be submitted along with proof of document showing a bank account number with the same name and address as the applicant.

Mr. Speaker, a completed application is one where the primary parent listed in PowerSchool has submitted the application form providing all required information and emailed the banking confirmation details as per the government's financial compliance requirements. Once the application and banking information have been verified, a payment request is sent to the Accountant General. After their due diligence and compliance checks, the funds are sent to the parent's bank account.

I take the opportunity to remind parents and guardians to ensure that all information sent is accurate. The minimum time for the processing from application to payment is 10 business days after submitting a completed application.

Mr. Speaker, while in theory the application process is straightforward, this exercise has revealed various scenarios that have led to unforeseen delays in some payment disbursements. To date, the team working on the vetting has come across the following scenarios:

1. applications by persons who are not the primary parent;
2. applications are submitted, but the required supporting documents are not being sent in a timely fashion or following the process for it to be easily vetted;
3. the Office of the Accountant General required banking and ID documentation not matching the person who has applied;
4. while having PowerSchool accounts, parents either have never accessed the system before or have not accessed it in a long time, leading to difficulties remembering login details, passwords or how to navigate to the application form;
5. children in the same household having different primary parents assigned in PowerSchool; and
6. parents not recognising that an application must be made separately for each child in or

der for the government to maintain a clean accounting and auditing record.

Mr. Speaker, we are always encouraged to see opportunities instead of problems. The various unforeseen issues I just listed have helped uncover improvements that can be made to operate the PowerSchool system. Parents who may have never used the system before now have an opportunity to see what information they can get from its effective use. Lastly, it has helped us update parents' contact information and correct incorrect or outdated information. I take this time to apologise to anyone who has applied and has not received their \$150 relief payment. We are bound by the government's financial due diligence and want to ensure the correct parent receives the payment.

Mr. Speaker, we recognise that not every parent or guardian has access to a computer. The application form can be filled out using a desktop computer, a laptop, a tablet or a cell phone using the Internet. We are confident that our parents have one of these types of devices on hand to use. In fact, to date the Ministry has experienced only two parents who have called in or visited the Ministry offices to share that they did not have a computer. In those instances, immediate assistance was provided to show them how to apply for the \$150 relief using their cell phone. Similarly, Mr. Speaker, we understand that not all parents or guardians have bank accounts. Therefore, a process has been put in place for parents to inform the Ministry, and with the correct information provided, payments can be made out by cheque.

Mr. Speaker, the \$150 Relief [Initiative] was launched on Friday, September 2. A total of 434 parents submitted applications on this day. During the remainder of that weekend, including the Labour Day [holiday], 426 parents submitted applications to claim their relief. We can report that as of yesterday, September 29, the Ministry has received 2,253 applications from parents or guardians, of which 1,725 applications have been vetted for approval by the Ministry of Education and forwarded to the Accountant General's Office for payment. Of those 1,725 vetted applications, the Accountant General's Office has processed 933 for payment.

Mr. Speaker, [this Government] is mindful that some parents may choose not to apply for the \$150 relief. Some say, *I have finished purchasing school supplies*, while others say, *We do not need it right now*. Although this might be the case, the \$150 can still be used later in the school year; their children may lose a pair of shoes, need a new sweater for the cooler months or a replacement gym uniform, for example. The Government's financial support can cover these instances.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in closing I encourage all eligible parents to apply for the \$150 relief, as this provision by the Government is to ease the financial burden on our families with children enrolled in

public schools. Parents will have until Monday, October 31, to apply. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Works.

Minister.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

TYNES BAY WASTE-TO-ENERGY FACILITY STABILISATION PROGRAMME

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to provide a further update on the [Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility](#). Honourable Members may recall in February of this year, the then Acting Minister of Public Works advised this House on the \$150 million Capital Programme for the refurbishment of the Waste-to-Energy Facility and the commencement of said programme. Though the Ministry continues to advance the initiative, additional challenges have arisen since the aforementioned announcement such as the catastrophic failure of one of the two overhead refuse cranes which happened in April of this year. During normal operation of the crane, the entire hoist and access platform collapsed as the support welds failed due to excessive fatigue.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to state that no one was injured during this incident, but it does highlight the critical nature of works under the refurbishment programme.

Mr. Speaker, out of an abundance of caution, the remaining crane was then inspected and emergency repairs to the welds were completed, leaving it as the only operational crane available for the next several months, consequently slowing daily operations and putting the redundancy of the plant at risk while also compromising the existing contingency plans.

Mr. Speaker, to further exacerbate the situation, the Ministry has been notified by vendors connected to the refurbishment programme that there are significant delays in product delivery times attributed to global supply chain issues resulting from the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic climate, thus affecting the commencement of the refurbishment works. Delivery times for specialised equipment have been extended by some 12 weeks and in certain instances up to 42 weeks. The delay has a cascading effect which pushes the initial five-year plan back further to an unspecified date.

Colleagues will know that I do not mince my words: The current state of the facility is incapable of lasting this time to await the major refurbishments to commence. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, to preserve the

facility until major maintenance can begin, the Cabinet has recently approved a stabilisation programme of projects that focuses on replacing critical systems required to bridge the gap between their current condition and the newly renovated facility, at an estimated cost of \$22 million.

To avoid any confusion, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: The funding for this programme will be drawn down from the previously announced \$150 million Capital Programme.

Mr. Speaker, these projects specifically target failed or obsolete systems that can be replaced without major disruption to the daily operations at Tynes Bay and will be integrated into the overall refurbishment works to avoid wasted expenditure. These upgraded systems are intended to assimilate seamlessly with the larger refurbishment works. This stabilisation programme includes the following:

- the replacement of the two overhead refuse cranes;
- the low voltage switchgear system;
- the high voltage switchgear systems;
- two auxiliary transformers;
- the flue gas monitoring equipment;
- turbine overhaul; and
- various instruments associated with the feed water tanks system and sea water band screens.

Additionally, this programme will refurbish the top sections of both flues (the opening of the smoke chimneys). The estimated programme length is set at three years with the tendering process for this stabilisation programme already started and works intended to begin within the first quarter of 2023.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues are informed of the urgent nature of this programme as, due to supply chain issues, delivery times of 20 to 30 months are anticipated for specialised equipment. This delay will pose a significant operational risk to the facility.

Mr. Speaker, you will be familiar with the exercise of trash baling during extended periods of partial or full plant inoperability. During the execution of these works it is not expected that they will directly cause any baling to be required. However, technical officers have curated a garbage baling contingency plan if such an event arises. Two prepared areas are available for bale storage if required—the Tynes Bay contingency yard and an overflow site at Marsh Folly.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues can be assured that all bales shall be returned to Tynes Bay for proper disposal. The programme will see five projects completed by the end of the fiscal year 2023/24 and one project to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2024/25. The project contracts will be placed for all six projects in the current fiscal year with individual project costs being spread over three fiscal years, totalling the estimated \$22 million. The estimated funding per year required is as follows:

- 2022/23—\$7 million

- 2023/24—\$14 million
- 2024/25—\$1 million

Mr. Speaker, during this fiscal year (2022/23), the Ministry was allocated \$3 million toward the refurbishment programme, which is substantially less than the required funding to execute maintenance on the facility. To execute the stabilisation programme, there is a requirement for an additional \$7 million worth of capital investment this current fiscal year (2022/23). The remaining funds are set to be requested through the 2023/24 budget process under the previously authorised BMD\$150 million overall refurbishment programme, as detailed previously.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues shall recall the national disruption caused by the inoperability of the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility and the unfortunate alternatives faced due to circumstances in November 2021, [where], over the course of several weeks approximately 410 tons of refuse was landfilled at the Marsh Folly facility contrary to good practice and previous public commitments to avoid a repeat of this practice.

Mr. Speaker, I want to stress in the strongest possible terms that the risk of a catastrophic failure is very real. The plant has a number of issues that threaten the functionality of the plant—particularly the single overhead refuse crane, [the failure of] which will render the plant inoperable, and the baling of trash will be inevitable. Baling will also have to be performed in another location with garbage diverted to this new site along with storage. Every effort is being made to replace the broken crane as soon as possible. It is anticipated that with funding dedicated for the stabilisation works over the next two fiscal years to procure the critical parts for the facility mentioned earlier, the Tynes Bay team can focus their efforts on the major refurbishment works that will manage the country's waste requirements for the next 25 years.

Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to thank the management and staff of Tynes Bay ably led by Mr. Nasir Wade, Plant Manager; the Ministry of Public Works; and Ministry of Finance for their efforts in ensuring that the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility Stabilisation Programme has been implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Minister Furbert.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR GENDER AFFAIRS COUNCIL

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House and the general public of the progressive steps being made to formalise the [Gender Affairs](#)

Council. According to the United Nations, any gender council has a basic moral and strategic imperative to ensure that all people, regardless of their gender, can realise their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, some may recall that in 2008 the Government officially added “gender equity” to the Department of Human Affairs mandate, and approval was granted to establish an Equity Council for Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, in 2010, the then Ministry of Culture and Social Rehabilitation established a non-statutory body, a Women’s Council, under the former leadership of The Hon. Neletha I. Butterfield. This Women’s Council was established to focus on improving the quality of life for women, families and society. The Council had been charged to address urgent issues, highlighted in a 1997 Women’s Issues Report, such as equal pay, workplace sexual harassment, maternity leave, marriage licences and violence against women.

Also in the year 2010, Mr. Speaker, the Government engaged in the process to have United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) extended to Bermuda. CEDAW is the landmark international agreement that affirms principles of fundamental human rights and equality for women around the world and is often referred to as the *Women’s Bill of Rights*. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, this Convention defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end gender discrimination. On the 16th of March 2017, the United Kingdom extended CEDAW to Bermuda. In 2015, with the dissolution of the Department of Human Affairs, individuals were never appointed to the Women’s Council, and the body remained inactive to this date.

So, Mr. Speaker, in keeping with global [best] practice and the modern dynamics of gender politics, this Government has made the commitment to the establishment of a Gender Affairs Council that incorporates the philosophical shift such that individuals in our community can reap the gender benefits that are systemic, inclusive and sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, the importance and relevance of gender-based issues has been prominent in our small community. These issues have included domestic violence, employment, increasing poverty, burden of care, sexual orientation, political representation, economic opportunity, and safety and security.

Mr. Speaker, over the years Bermuda has seen a drastic increase in gender-based domestic violence rates, which is concerning. In 2020, the Director of Public Prosecutions revealed that 30 per cent of cases were domestic-related. Additionally, in 2020 the Centre Against Abuse shared that they have experienced a sharp increase in domestic abuse reports. Between 2018 and 2020, there was close to an 88 per cent increase in abuse reports, with 91 reported in

2018, and 161 reported in 2019, and 171 reported in 2020.

Mr. Speaker, there are also economic and employment gender-related issues, which unfortunately lead to further disparity in Bermuda. In 2020, on average, the median gross annual income by sex shows women earned \$68,294 per year compared to \$61,946 for men, representing a 9.7 per cent difference in pay. In 2021, the Bermuda Job Market Employment Brief illustrated a widening in the earnings gap between the genders.

Mr. Speaker, although these are just a few examples of gender-based issues that Bermuda faces, the Government understands the relevance and importance of working toward resolving them. The Gender Affairs Council will assist the Government in an advisory capacity to bring perceptions, experience and interests of women and men to influence legislation, policy and decision-making. This is key to driving change toward a more productive, profitable and equitable culture to improve society. It demonstrates the Government’s commitment to issues on gender balance as it relates to employment, economic opportunity, safety and security.

Mr. Speaker, the newly established Gender Affairs Council will comprise individuals representing government agencies, civil society organisations and entrepreneurs. Mr. Speaker, many of you may have seen the press conference I held on Wednesday, September 21. The press conference was also used to provide the importance of establishing a Gender Affairs Council and the overarching remit of the Council. This press conference also provided an opportunity for me to encourage individuals to submit an expression of interest so that they can be considered to serve on this non-statutory body that will drive change toward a more equitable community.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to receiving expressions of interest, and I want to thank our community in advance for their support, interest and commitment to what the Government seeks to achieve. I encourage individuals in our community who wish to serve on the Gender Affairs Council and be part of the progressive change to submit an Expression of Interest form by October 7, 2022. The form must be submitted electronically and can be accessed online at forms.gov.bm/Departments/The-Cabinet-Office/Expression-of-Interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I believe the next Statement is also in your name.

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

The Speaker: Continue on.

NURTURING OUR NATION: IMPERFECT PARENTING SERIES

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House and the general public about an exciting initiative, [Nurturing Our Nation: Imperfect Parenting Series](#), that provides an opportunity for the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors; the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS); and industry professionals to collaborate in providing resources that are designed to assist families.

Mr. Speaker, DCFS conducts quarterly Family Strengths and Needs assessments on all families engaged in intervention services with the department. Annual data gathered from these assessments indicate that two of the highest priority areas of need for most primary caregivers are the needs for support in the areas of coping and parenting skills. Being aware of these needs within the community, the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors, and DCFS, was keen to find a way to ensure primary caregivers were given the support and tools to help them strengthen themselves as parents and guardians.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry and the Department of Child and Family Services collaborated with industry professionals to develop this initiative, Nurturing Our Nation: Imperfect Parenting Series, to provide valuable resources and connections through the following:

- livestream panel discussions;
- focus groups;
- a Parenting Expo.

The purpose of this initiative is to educate primary caregivers and assist them in providing practical solutions such as coping and parenting skills that enable community development.

Mr. Speaker, Nurturing our Nation: Imperfect Parenting Series panel discussions are held twice a month starting at 12:30 pm live on Facebook (@mosds.bda and @bdagovernment), Twitter (@bdagovernment), YouTube (@citybermuda), and CITV (One Communications Channel 2 and WOW Channel 102). The first panel discussion was held on Wednesday, the 22nd of September, [during] which panellists discussed and answered questions on the topic of Routines.

Mr. Speaker, the upcoming livestream panel discussions schedule is as follows:

- Boundaries [i.e., setting boundaries for your child], which was held yesterday, Thursday, September 29;
- Effects of Bullying and Domestic Violence on Children on Thursday, October 20;
- Co-Parenting and Nurturing Parents on Thursday, October 27;
- Personal Care and Wellness on Thursday, November 17;
- Nutrition and Meal Planning on Thursday, November 24.

I reiterate these discussions will start at 12:30 pm on all Government of Bermuda virtual platforms and CITV. I encourage members in our community to submit questions to the e-mail address askus@gov.bm before discussion dates to add to what I believe will be a wholesome discussion.

Mr. Speaker, the panellists who will be participating in the panel discussions include representatives from numerous government departments and community organisations, namely, the Department of Child and Family Services, Child Development Programme, Department of Health, Bermuda Police Service, the Family Centre, the Coalition for the Protection of Children; ParentGuide LLC, Tele Connect, PsyNeu Wellness, Centre Against Abuse, Women's Resource Centre, Ocean Rock Wellness, and Beyond Therapy.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage parents, guardians, grandparents and other members of our community who are part of a *family support village* to watch these panel discussions. Many times parents/guardians (caregivers) feel helpless trying to cope with their children and think issues their child or family is experiencing are in isolation; but this is not true. You are not alone. Many parents/guardians and families regardless of factors such as race, sex, educational background, religious denomination and financial status have similar experiences when raising a child. These similar experiences could be, for example, not being able to cope at times, finding home and work-life balance, unaware of the support resources within the community, and not being able to communicate with your child.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to remind parents/guardians that we are not perfect, and we all will make mistakes when parenting a child. We must remember not to be hard on ourselves and also not to be judgmental of others. Parenting is definitely not easy. However, I believe this initiative will provide awareness of information, support and services that are readily available in the community that can assist with coping and enhancing positive parenting skills.

Mr. Speaker, as stated earlier, the Nurturing Our Nation: Imperfect Parenting Series includes a Parenting Expo. This expo will have vendor participants who represent various industry professionals from government departments/agencies and community organisations. These participants provide community programmes, child development support and services, mental health support and services, parent support, education support and extracurricular activities. The Parenting Expo will be held on Thursday, November 10, 2022, from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm on the Front Lawn of City Hall in Hamilton. Please save the date and look out for further information that will be announced in the media and on social media platforms.

Mr. Speaker, residents should be receiving a Nurturing Our Nation: Imperfect Parenting Series mailer sometime soon. This mailer includes the panel discussion schedule and monthly parenting tips, which I believe will be useful in educating primary caregivers. The parenting tips can provide ways for not just the primary caregiver to enhance themselves and other caregivers, but also suggests ways to engage and encourage your child. I recommend you try to use the tips in your daily routine.

Mr. Speaker, the Government remains committed to our parents, children and families and recognises that there are gaps in the level of awareness for some primary caregivers. Many of the caregivers in our community can truly benefit from sessions to assist with coping strategies, parenting skills and attaining community support. I believe Nurturing Our Nation: Imperfect Parenting Series will help to close some of the existing gaps by educating and providing resources to primary caregivers. It is hoped this would allow us to start healing the foundation of our families—the primary caregivers. Once our families experience healing, then together we can work collectively to heal our nation.

In closing, the quote by Art Solomon, Anishinaabe Elder, comes to mind: “To heal a nation, we must first heal the individuals, the families and the communities.” Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of National Security.

Minister, would you like to put your Statement?

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

AIRPORT FIRE RESCUE SERVICES

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide an update on the Bermuda Fire Rescue Service Airport Operations Division.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that I made a statement to this Honourable House on the 1st of July of this year advising of the revised requirements for the Bermuda Fire Rescue Service at the airport. Mr. Speaker, at that time—

The Speaker: Hold on one second, Minister.

Just to remind you we are back in Chambers. You have got to come around. You are crossing the line. Thank you.

Continue, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, at that time I advised that the Bermuda Fire Rescue Service operates the [Airport Rescue Firefighting Services](#) which

provides aircraft rescue and firefighting services for the L. F. Wade International Airport. This is an essential service that enables the airport to serve commercial flights.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that Skyport is the L. F. Wade International Airport's Aerodrome Certificate Holder. The certificate is issued by the Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority to Skyport and enables them to operate the airport. One of the many regulated activities under the certification is the Airport Rescue Firefighting Services.

Mr. Speaker, as previously advised, the Airport Rescue Firefighting Services is a Retained Government Service as part of the airport project agreement between Skyport and the Bermuda Airport Authority. The Bermuda Airport Authority is responsible for providing the Retained Government Service and have transferred responsibility for the delivery of the Airport Rescue Firefighting Services to the Bermuda Fire Rescue Service by way of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2007, with an amendment in 2017. There is no fee paid by Skyport to the Bermuda Airport Authority or to the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service for this service.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to remind my honourable colleagues that since 1995 the accepted minimum duty strength at the airport required three crews of five firefighters per shift. This enabled the airport to provide a response category rating of 9. A rating of 9 is required for large commercial jets including the British Airways' Boeing 777 aircraft service to Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, a February 2022 Skyport audit of the Airport Operations Division recommended increasing firefighter minimum duty strength from 5 per crew to 14 in order to maintain a category 9 response rating for the airport.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda Airport Authority retained a UK Civil Aviation Authority Rescue Firefighting expert to review the recommended requirements including the minimum duty strength. The expert has completed his on Island review, and his report is being used for further discussions with Skyport and the Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority on the minimum duty strength requirements at the airport.

Mr. Speaker, in the interim, 10 overseas firefighters were brought in as a temporary measure to ensure that the airport continued to operate as normal. However, the numbers only provided for us to maintain a category 7 rating. In order to provide a surge for the British Airways flight, staff are required to come back in on their rest days and do excessive overtime.

Mr. Speaker, this was not a sustainable short-term solution and put an unfair strain on firefighters who could not take leave or even a rest day. In order to maintain sufficient firefighters at the airport, an additional 25 firefighters are being contracted from overseas from October until the end of March 2023. This will enable the service to maintain the interim mini-

mum duty strength without excessive overtime and burnout of our local firefighters. It will allow local firefighters to take their leave and rest days.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of this surge to 35 firefighters through to the end of March is anticipated to be approximately \$2.75 million. I want to make it clear that the overseas firefighters are here on a short-term contract and their package reflects that fact. It includes return flights, housing and a base monthly fee paid in arrears. Their monthly fee equates to the lowest monthly rate for a local firefighter. They are responsible for registering and paying taxes. Whilst they receive two days off per month, they do not receive the same benefits as local firefighters who benefit not only from full-time employment but annual leave, sick leave, maternity or paternity leave, parental leave, bereavement leave, long service leave, lieu leave, special personal leave, public holidays, pension benefits, retirement benefit, medical benefit, dental benefit, [ophthalmic benefit] and a telephone allowance.

Mr. Speaker, we are very fortunate to have been able to secure the services of the overseas firefighters in such short order in order to maintain uninterrupted flight operations at the airport.

Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that the airport rescue and firefighting services continue to be provided in accordance with approvals provided by the Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority as these changes are taking place. I can further confirm that the level of airport rescue and firefighting services meets the requirements of Bermuda's commercial airlines operators and no flights have been cancelled due to the ongoing changes.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda Fire Rescue Service's goal is to successfully complete all of the required changes to the Airport Operations Division to ensure there are sustainable resources to maintain the recommended airport rescue and firefighting services.

Mr. Speaker, once we have agreed the final minimum duty strength requirements for the airport, we will look at all options for meeting those requirements, and as promised I will provide an update to this Honourable House at that time. In the interim, 11 local persons are being hired from November to train as airport-rated firefighters, and their training will be completed by the end of March 2023.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would like to thank the women and men of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service for their service and in particular to those who have stepped up at the airport to meet this challenge. I would also like to thank the executives of the Fire Service Association for their support in this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement, the final Statement this morning, is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister, would you like to present your Statement?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Jason Hayward: I am elated to rise today to present to this Honourable House on the initiatives the Government has undertaken to promote and support our youth.

Mr. Speaker, a strong economy hinges upon people having the skills they need to secure meaningful well-paid work. The flagrant consequences of youth unemployment highlight the importance of making good job options available for our young people. As part of our [Youth Employment Strategy](#) [Y.E.S.] we are making a deliberate effort to target and upskill our youth as they will play a vital part in the workforce in the coming years. Our goal is to position them to secure employment opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, in the next quarter the Department of Workforce Development will be engaging with stakeholders to implement initiatives as outlined in the National Youth Employment Strategy. In alignment with goal 1 of the strategy, which is to increase local training opportunities and promote pathways to securing employment, a working group comprising members from the public and private sector, as well as youth stakeholders, has been engaged to analyse labour market data to ensure training opportunities align with current and future demands.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure relevant training and education opportunities are available locally, the group will perform analysis on the following, to identify high-demand occupations and professions with low Bermudian participation:

- capacity across various industries to identify the need for entry level jobs to ensure youth services and programmes are aligned;
- non-traditional/conventional training opportunities; and
- capture data on Bermuda's school leavers ages 18 to 26 that will include their [level of] education, career interest, area of study, projected completion date, career goals and employment status.

Each of these steps strives to ensure that young Bermudians are suitably qualified and positioned to take advantage of job opportunities within the local [labour] market.

Mr. Speaker, the Graduate Trainee programme was implemented in 2021 with much success. The programme provided paid work experience for 21 unemployed recent Bermuda College and university graduates in their area of study. I am pleased

to report that applications for the next cohort of graduate trainees will open on September 23, 2022. Interested persons can apply through the Bermuda Job Board at <https://www.bermudajobboard.bm/>. Information has already been released on various media platforms; however, persons have the remainder of today to complete an application if they are interested. Participants of the programme will gain relevant work experience in their area of study, opportunity to refine their soft skills and one-on-one coaching as they navigate their career journey. The Department of Workforce Development is engaging with private sector employers to expand apprenticeships and register their apprenticeship opportunities with the department. The apprenticeship scheme affords mentorship support, education, paid on-the-job training and experience, professional development opportunities and sponsorship benefits. These programmes speak directly to goal 4 of the strategy, which ensures that a greater number of our young people receive relevant work experience to better prepare them for gainful employment.

Mr. Speaker, goal 5 of the strategy is to improve public access to relevant labour market information and career opportunities. The work of the Labour Market Review Working Group will be translated into clear, digestible formats through social media, marketing ads and other forms of communication to better connect with young people. Ensuring access to this information promotes strategic and informed decisions when choosing a career path.

Data gathering is a two-way street. Unfortunately, over the past several years we have not been able to ascertain where our young people are studying for their tertiary education, what degrees they are pursuing and their projected graduation dates. The Department of Workforce Development will make upgrades to the Bermuda Job Board to collect these data by the end of this fiscal period. These data will be used to project capacity in the job market.

Mr. Speaker, it is now well known that entrepreneurship can be a viable option in terms of job satisfaction and overcoming difficulties in finding employment. As the BEDC [Bermuda Economic Development Corporation] is actively supporting and growing Bermuda's entrepreneurial ecosystem, BEDC has developed programmes to help our young people succeed in jobs and entrepreneurship. The BEDC's Summer Student Entrepreneurship Programme, launched in 2018, is building Bermuda's next generation of entrepreneurs. To date it has seen entrepreneurs between the ages of 13 and 24 bring over 50 new jobs to the market, solidifying entrepreneurship as a viable career choice.

Mr. Speaker, [for] a young person there is nothing more exciting than competition. To create an environment where constructive competition in the business market is encouraged, the BEDC's Annual Youth Pitch competition inspires youth between the

ages of 14 and 18 to develop and pitch a business idea. Many students have pitched entrepreneurial ideas with some continuing on to start their own businesses in Bermuda. Since launching BEDC's Enterprise Bermuda Incubator programme in 2018, a total of 30 start-ups have been incubated, bringing 80 new jobs to market. BEDC's New Start-ups Payroll Tax Relief programme launched in 2018/19 has facilitated 85 businesses, bringing 150 new jobs to the market. The number of persons seeking a vending licence from BEDC has increased with 322 vending licences being approved since 2020. A number of these include licences approved for our young people.

Mr. Speaker, the initiatives shared highlight this Government's effort to encourage and develop our youth to enable them to thrive and experience fruitful lives within our community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Workforce Development and the BEDC for the work they are doing to help us get our young people working.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

This, Members, brings us to the end of the Statements for this morning. And we thank you for your contributions.

We now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are written questions, which will be carried for the moment. Then we will go to the questions on Statements this morning.

Ministers, the Statements this morning have not many questions, but we do have some questions.

We will start this morning, Premier, we have questions for you on your Statement from the Opposition Leader.

Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question now?

QUESTION 1: MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON PRAGUE AND BRUSSELS TRIP

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you very much.

In regard to the Statement on Prague, just two questions came to my mind while his Statement was being presented.

While in the EU and meeting with the shakers and movers of the EU, has the Premier considered discussing with the EU immigration [if they would consider] eases that would allow Bermudians to easily study in Europe And, in addition, help them find internships in Europe that will help Bermuda's IB [international business] in the long run?

The Speaker: He combined two questions there. But, Premier, we can separate them, or you could answer them together. How is that? You could answer them in a single response. It is two easy questions. If they were difficult ones, I might have had him separate them out.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Opposition Leader for his questions.

Those have not been matters that are typically canvassed with the European Union, but I am happy to take the suggestion on board. The Bermudian who runs our Brussels office, Ms. Aliyya Ahad, actually prior to her work did significant work on European migration studies. I am happy to pass that recommendation on to her and happy to revert back to the Opposition Leader on what is actually in place and if he has any further suggestions for possible enhancements.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: No.

The Speaker: No. Further questions?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes, on the same one.

The Speaker: Continue.

QUESTION 2: MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON PRAGUE AND BRUSSELS TRIP

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: On page 2 the Premier indicated that he spoke to Elina Bardram, the Director for International Affairs and Climate [Finance]. What jumped to mind for me, Mr. Speaker, is this question: Did the Premier encourage Ms. Bardram to advocate on behalf of Bermuda to the EU states to support and sign the Hamilton Declaration and ultimately become a member of the Sargasso Sea Alliance?

I am asking that because when I was the Minister of the Environment, I was working with Ireland, which is an EU state, and encouraged them to become a signatory on the Hamilton Declaration and become a member of the Sargasso Sea Alliance. So I was wondering if he would also examine the possibility of having EU members support and become a signatory in the Hamilton Declaration.

The Speaker: The question is, Will he seek to have the EU members support and sign the document?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Okay. Just wanted to wrap it up in a succinct question.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have been informed by the Honourable Deputy Premier that those discussions were held with various EU member states at the global Climate Change Conference, COP26, that took place last year in Glasgow. And I will ensure that any follow-up discussions that I have with climate, as there are regular interactions . . . we will make sure that that is included. That was not raised in that particular meeting, but I am happy to make sure that that is done in forward matters.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: No.

The Speaker: Additional question?
No. Thank you.

Premier, you also have questions on your second Statement. And those questions again are from the Opposition Leader.

Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you very much.

I will start with, I think, the easy question first.

The Premier indicated that there were a number of positive variances in regard to the budget. And I was looking to see if he had applied some of the positive variances to actually reducing our debt. So I would like to speak to him and have further clarification as to . . . is it his intention to apply some of the positive variance to a plan to reduce the debt?

The Speaker: Thank you. That was pretty straightforward, one single question. Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the answer to the Honourable Opposition Leader's question is mentioned inside the Statement, which noted that Bermuda's gross debt has decreased due to our refinancing activities, that our deficit is smaller. But I think it is important to note that we are still in deficit. And until we make it to the point of having a balanced budget, then that is the time when we need to reduce the debt. The Government has set out its plan to make sure that we return to a balanced budget. But I think what is also important and is recognised in this Statement is that, while maintaining our budget targets, we need to make the necessary investments which are needed to support the people of this country.

He would have heard me say in this Statement about the additional investments that are being

made in affordable housing to ensure that more housing can be provided, the investments and the relief that is being provided to the citizens of this country, with further relief to come. And I think that that is the best way to make sure that we manage the economy.

We will get to a space with a balanced budget. We have set out our long-term plans in accordance with the Fiscal Responsibility Panel, setting a target that was laid out in the Budget Statement to get ourselves to a \$50 million budget surplus over the next few fiscal years. But it is important that while we are on this trajectory to maintain budget discipline [we are] also providing relief to Bermudians who are under pressure due to global inflation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary or a new question?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Supplementary.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance indicated that the revenue projected to be \$1.27 [billion] was basically \$74 million above the original estimates. He said it was primarily due to customs, stamp duty, civil aviation, payroll tax and increased revenue from travel authorisation.

Can the Minister of Finance provide the dollar values attributed to these ministries in regard to the positive variances? So in other words, they said the increased revenue was due to customs, stamp duty, civil aviation, payroll tax and travel authorisation. Can he attribute dollar values to each of those revenue sources?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to do so for the Honourable Member.

The variance from original estimates to the revised estimates and final estimates for customs duty was \$23,901,373. The variance on stamp duty was \$13,052,640. The variance on payroll tax was \$8.8 million, and the variance in regard to the additional funds received from civil aviation, above budget targets, was \$10,881,000. And the travel authorisation fee was above budgeted expectations by \$8,850,000.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes.

Along the same line, [the Premier] also indicated that there was a \$5 million increased projection on the interest and in guaranteed management costs.

Can he break down the details of the increased costs attributed to the increased cost of our interest rates, as well as the breakdown on the costs attributed to the failed Morgan's Point project?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the 2021/22 budget year there was no increased interest rate costs that were there. Our interest rates were fixed, and there was no variance during that year, to the best of my knowledge. And I think that that was covered inside the Budget Statement.

In regard to a detailed breakdown of the matter for Morgan's Point, I do not have that in front of me. But I think it stands to state that the Morgan's Point project has cost the treasury more than \$240 million, as outlined in the Budget Statement prior. That number may be a little bit high, but I know it is over \$200 million, Mr. Speaker. And I am happy that the Honourable Member can go ahead and write for a specific question. I am happy to give the breakdown on all of the costs of Morgan's Point.

And also as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, I am sure that he can call a hearing if he wants to find out more about how money is being spent, the taxpayers' money, that should be able to be used for the taxpayers but is instead being used to bail out and to finance a project that was guaranteed by the former Government, Mr. Speaker. Over \$200 million that could be spent on Bermudians, relief for Bermudians, this Government had to go ahead, access the market and provide that cover for a project, Mr. Speaker, that I have said in this Honourable House was in default before the election of 2017.

The Speaker: Supplementary? You used two supplementaries. You can do a new question. (Turn your microphone on.)

QUESTION 2: UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: My second question is this: The Statement says "interest/guarantee." And it also goes on to say that most of this increase is related to Morgan's Point. The Minister of Finance said there was no increase in the interest expense. So is he now saying that this statement is incorrect? Because there was no interest increase based on his response to my question, and that all of this \$5 million was attributable to Morgan's Point?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Statement is correct. Not all of it was attributable to Morgan's Point. Those are the breakdowns. The Government man-

es various guarantees. I am happy to give the Honourable Member a breakdown, I do not have it in front of me, if he so requests and requires it. He could have also had it during the Budget Statement. And if he looks in the Budget Book it might also be publicly available. So I do not have a Budget Book [with] me. But if I look online or the Honourable Member looks online, he will be able to find it because those matters were detailed in the budget.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Supplementary. I am moving on to the—

The Speaker: Supplementary on the same question or a new question?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: New question.

The Speaker: All right. Third question, your third question.

QUESTION 3: UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes.

In regard to the debt refinancing, can the Minister provide details on who the runners or the brokers who managed the refinancing in capital markets were? And how much did we pay them in dollar value and as a percentage of the capital raise? Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the best of my recollection, the joint book runners for the debt raise were HSBC and Goldman Sachs, I do believe. And I do not have the information in front of me in regard to the cost, but I am happy to provide that to the Honourable Member if he goes ahead and writes the specific details. If he wishes, I will be happy to go ahead and provide it. It may have been provided in the Statement of which I made in July, but if it was not provided in the Statement that was made in July, [I am] happy to provide that information. It was a standard cost following a tender which goes out in accordance with OPMP [Office of Project Management and Procurement] guidelines and was approved by the Cabinet.

The Speaker: Okay.

Supplementary?

No further questions. Thank you for your contribution on that Statement.

The Speaker: The next Statement that Members have indicated that they have questions is for the Deputy Premier, your Statement on the fuel deal.

MP Cannonier, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: TABLING OF THE FUELS BILL 2022

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, colleagues.

On page 5—unfortunately my tablet is not working well. On page 5 going through to page 6, the Honourable Deputy Premier mentions, “service to the people of Bermuda is the single greatest purpose of this Bill.” Later on in that paragraph, it speaks of “Regulations will not be derived in a vacuum, but rather in fulsome discussion . . . with industry . . .” And then he qualifies that with the following: “I must add clarity and assurance in the matter of pricing . . .”

So my question was, the previous paragraph on page 5 speaks to—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, I declare my interest. Yes.

The previous paragraph states that there will be fulsome discussion. But it does not identify with the Regulatory Authority that the government and duty are going to be included in that. I am assuming that, as it mentions here, a fulsome look at the whole process will be done. And I am assuming that the duty on fuel will be a part of that process. Is that the case?

The Speaker: Deputy?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes, Mr. Speaker. But that discussion on duty will be had with the Ministry of Finance.

The Speaker: Okay.

Supplementary or a new question?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Supplemental to that.

The Speaker: Yes. Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay. Considering that to be the case, is it an ongoing discussion at present then that we should be reducing the duty on fuel? And to be transparent about it, we know that in the pricing of fuel, especially fossil fuel, the greatest part of that and

the one who makes the most is government off of the duty on fuel.

The Speaker: Deputy.

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

Let me just remind the House that it was the former Government that substantially increased the duty on fuel.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I asked a very clear question that has nothing to do with the past. It has to do with the present.

An Hon. Member: You are running from your record.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I am not running from the record. I said *transparent*. We know that Government—whichever Government has been . . . the greatest gain has been by Government. So if he can be specific.

The Speaker: No problem. No problem.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: He does not need to politic. It is a simple question.

The Speaker: No problem.
Can you respond?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I would hope, Mr. Speaker, as long as I am stating facts, I am within the rules of answering the question. The former Government doubled the duty on fuel.

The Speaker: You can state the facts and then answer the question.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Right. But I am answering the question. It is related to the duty on fuel, Mr. Speaker. And this Government is moving forward to review the duty and to perhaps be able to bring it down over time. But I can only state facts, Mr. Speaker. I am not trying to add anything else to the question of the Honourable Member.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Supplementary? Supplementary?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: No.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members, the next Statement that has questions this morning is the Statement by the Minister of National Security.

Minister, you have a question from MP Dunkley.

MP Dunkley, would you like to put your question now?

QUESTION 1: AIRPORT FIRE RESCUE SERVICES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you, colleagues and the listening audience.

To the Honourable Minister: Honourable Minister, in your Statement at the bottom of page 2, you read that “a February 2022 Skyport audit of the Airport Operations Division recommended increasing fire-fighter minimum duty strength from 5 per crew to 14 in order to maintain a category 9”

Honourable Minister, the question to you is, When did the conversations first start in regard to an increase in duty minimum strength?

The Speaker: Minister.

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

If I understood the question right, I would think that the conversation started right after the audit was complete as to an increase of the duty minimum strength.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

My supplementary question is, So prior to that audit there was no indication by Skyport or any other body connected with the airport that there would be the potential need to increase the minimum strength?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

I am not sure what the conversations were about. But you know how audits go. The auditor was hired, and they came in and did a review of the airport and the airport operations. And this is what they came up with.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, that does not answer the question.

The question was simple: Prior to that audit, was there any indication that there would be an increase of minimum strength? Yes or no?

The Speaker: Okay. He was pretty precise on that, Minister. Had the conversation taken place prior, or any knowledge prior?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Not to my knowledge. I do not know one way or the other.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes. Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: On the next page, the top of page 3, the Honourable Minister says that “the Bermuda Airport Authority retained a UK Civil Aviation Authority Rescue Fire Fighting expert to review the recommended requirements . . . and his report is being used for further discussions with Skyport and the Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority on the minimum duty strength requirements at the airport.”

Question, Mr. Speaker: Is the Government confident that the results of that report will be accepted by both parties?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
The answer, the simple answer, is yes.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: We will take your supplementary, yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.
Minister, when you were negotiating the construction of the new airport, what was the outline of the Fire Service and whether or not we were going to have the number of qualified people that we should have?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Thank you for that question, MP.

From my understanding, when the negotiations were going on in reference to the building of the

airport, the Fire Service was overlooked as to their minimum duty strength.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary, anyone?
No supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, I have a supplementary.
Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am just curious. What negotiations was MP De Silva from constituency 29 talking about?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You can't ask me a question.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: The question—

[Laughter]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Well, then I can direct it to the Minister; it does not matter.

The Speaker: Yes. Direct all questions to a Minister or a Member of Cabinet rather than a backbencher.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: So I would like to ask the Minister, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: If he might be able to give us some information around what negotiations they are talking about.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I cannot answer for someone else.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Hold up, hold up.

I think that you did answer the first question that was put by Member De Silva, which means you exposed yourself to now have to answer the second question. Had you said that reply that you are giving now, had you given that reply to Member De Silva, you would be clear. But because of the fact that you responded to the Member's question first, you now

have to continue responding because you set yourself up to respond.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: No problem at all, Mr. Speaker, no problem at all.

Would you ask that question again?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to ask the Minister if he could please let us know what negotiations they are referring to.

The Speaker: Okay.
Minister.

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

It would be negotiations to building the new airport under a former Government.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you.

Minister Weeks, can you tell us who was the Minister at the time?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, if memory serves me right, I cannot tell you who the Minister was. I could tell you that Minister was under the OBA Government.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary?
No supplementaries.
Any additional questions?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Now that the mischief has ended, let me get back to business here.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: This is your second question, so we will get there.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Honourable Member on the other side had some good breakfast this morning. He is full of himself, but the lunch will probably calm him down.

The Speaker: Well, we can just stick to the questions, put the question, put the question.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Excuse me. I had milk with my breakfast, too. Cheerios and Dunkley's milk.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Good healthy breakfast.

The Speaker: No problem.

[Laughter]

QUESTION 2: AIRPORT FIRE RESCUE SERVICES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, my second question is, the Honourable Minister at the bottom of page 3 says, "the cost of this surge in 35 firefighters through to the end of March is anticipated to be approximately \$2.75 million."

Mr. Speaker, the question to the Honourable Minister: Does the Honourable Minister anticipate that there will be a need for further interim firefighters past March 2023?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, as I had intimated on, I think it is page 4 (I am not sure which one it is), we are still in the process of looking at options. And once we have determined how many firefighters are needed for duty strength, then we would know exactly what we are doing going forward. Hence, this is why the contract is only until March 2023.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Bermuda Fire [and] Rescue Service and the Ministry of National Security require a supplementary estimate to cover this funding?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it was a situation that was not anticipated. So yes, we would probably need a supplementary.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, supplementary, my last supplementary on this question.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Minister in referring to the benefit package says that the package for the overseas firefighters includes "return flights, housing

and a base monthly fee paid in arrears.” Could the Honourable Minister please state if the overseas firefighters are provided free housing?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is a part of the package.

The Speaker: Okay.

You used your supplementaries. This should be your third question.

QUESTION 3: AIRPORT FIRE RESCUE SERVICES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Third question. Third question, and there is time in this, Mr. Speaker.

Third question, Mr. Speaker: The Minister goes on to say that in the benefit package for local firefighters, they have the benefit of full-time employment, annual leave and sick leave. It insinuates that the interim firefighters do not have that. Can the Minister please answer yes or no if the overseas firefighters are provided health insurance and sick leave?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: No.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Supplementary to the question, Mr. Speaker, in terms of manpower.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Honourable Minister said that there were 11 local persons being hired from November to train. And it is anticipated that their training will be completed by March 2023. Does the Honourable Minister have any plans for another recruitment drive to hire additional firefighters?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
The answer is yes.

The Speaker: All right.
Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: My last supplementary, Mr. Speaker, yes.

At the current time, Mr. Speaker, can the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House how far below manpower levels the Bermuda Fire [and] Rescue Service is at this time?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I think I answered that earlier, Mr. Speaker. Right now the exact number that we are under-manned has not been determined. But once that exact number is determined, I will bring it to this Honourable House.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you.

That brings to a close that questioning because you used all three of your questions. And actually it brings us to a close of the Members who had indicated that they had questions for Statements today. Thank you, Members for you—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, I had raised a question.

The Speaker: Oh, yes, I forgot. I had forgotten you had come up. We were discussing something else at the time and I did not put it down. Yes.

QUESTION 1: INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, honourable colleagues and to the listening public.

My question relates to the Minister's Statement wherein on page 3, the final paragraph, the Honourable Minister said, "The Department of Workforce Development is engaging with private sector employers to expand apprenticeships and register their apprenticeship opportunities with the Department." My question is, Would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to or explain the nature of the engagement with private sector employers?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Apprenticeships are generally given on the supply and demand. So potential apprentices will state their area of interest. And in order to find those individuals placements, most times we have to do engagement with employers to determine whether or not they have the capacity and the capability of taking on those apprentices. So that is the nature of the dialogue that happens with the private sector entities.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Supplementary, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Jarion Richardson: How many apprenticeships or new apprenticeships have been brought about due to this expansion of this new project? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the complete number, and I will endeavour to get that back to the Minister. But I will speak of one success story.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Jason Hayward: We did have a number of apprenticeships within BELCO. And when BELCO increased to a record number of apprentices, the Department of Workforce Development took on significant commitments. So 13 of those individuals received partial funding from the Department of Workforce Development at a total of \$9,000 per person. So that is the level of commitment that this Government is placing in training and developing our young persons.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second question?

The Speaker: Second question, okay.

QUESTION 2: INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

The Honourable Minister spoke to the work of the Labour Market Review Working Group on page 4 of his Statement, second paragraph. And would the Honourable Minister be able to explain to this Honourable House what the nature of that work was over the four months since the release of the Youth Employment Strategy?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, the work of the working group is highlighted in the Statement. The primary aim of the working group was to review labour market information, ensure that it is dissected so that it can be distributed in a digestible manner so that our young persons' career, guidance counsellors, educators and parents can clearly understand where opportunities lie, can understand career pathways, can understand what are the entry-level jobs to get somebody to their primary desired occupational category.

And that information will be disseminated via social media, at career fairs, within Penflip format and all sorts of ways so that we can get that information

into the households of our residents so that they make informed and knowledgeable decisions about their career path.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: No, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Third question.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Supplementary?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Do not believe that! Do not believe that for a moment.

The Speaker: Speak to the Chair! Speak to the Chair, Members. Bring it this way.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Not for a moment! I am enjoying life to the fullest.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: No, no. Speak this way.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I thank you for that, former Premier Dunkley. Thank you for that. I am trying to get back in Cabinet like you are trying to get back in leadership.

The Speaker: Member, let us have your question. Let us have your question.

[Laughter]

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, we know you are finished. Trust me. We know you are finished. And they know you are finished, too.

The Speaker: Question, question.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
But, Minister, Minister, obviously this initiative is a very successful one. When all of these apprentices become full-time employees do you anticipate to

increase or at least continue on with this very successful programme for the people of this country?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. The Ministry will be having discussions within Cabinet in terms of extended funding so that we can provide more funding for youth employment initiatives for the people of this country.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MP Richardson, do you have a third question? What was it, your third question now? Yes.

QUESTION 3: INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Third question. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My third question relates to [this]: The Honourable Minister in his Statement has updated us on three of the nine goals in the Youth Employment Strategy. Could he give us a progress report on the other five goals?

An Hon. Member: Six goals.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Six, thank you.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, this Statement pertains to the work that we are doing over the next quarter. And so while movement is happening in the other places, this will be our area of focus. Certainly by having focused on a number of goals within a certain time period, it means that we are moving forward in a strategic way. And so this is part of our strategic plan as to how we are moving forward, and those are the areas of focus over the next three months.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Jarion Richardson: When will the Honourable Minister inform or update this Honourable House on the other six goals?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I endeavour to give quarterly updates as to the initiatives that will be undertaken in those relevant quarters.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Further supplementary?
No?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: No further supplementary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members, thank you for your contribution this morning in the question-and-answer period. This now brings us to the close of that period on our Order Paper.

We now move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any Member like to make a contribution?

Premier.

The clock is on. I just remind Members of the clock.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all of my honourable colleagues, and certainly I will associate this entire House if I may. We would certainly be saddened of the death of former Senator, Mr. Raymond Tannock, as he was family to us in the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party. Mr. Tannock excelled as a well-known businessman and family man while remaining a party stalwart and supporter. His standing amongst the community influenced the leadership to approach him to run in the 2003 general election. He became the PLP candidate for constituency 30—

The Speaker: Mr. Premier. Premier. I have to remind you that you can refer to notes rather than read notes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh. My apologies, sir.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Even for this?

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, my.

The Speaker: Yes. You refer to notes.

Hon. E. David Burt: That is going to be tough.

The Speaker: You refer to notes.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am out of practice.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much.

He became the PLP candidate for constituency 30, Southampton, each schedule, and ran a spirited campaign. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, although missing success by just a few votes, Members were proud of his performance. And following that election, he served in the other place from 2003 until 2006. Even beyond the years after his appointment he served as an active and vocal supporter and could always be counted on for advice and counsel.

Mr. Speaker, you can tell the measure of a man and how much he was respected in the community by the outpouring at his homegoing service, which was attended by a wide cross section of the community. And he was certainly given tribute for his service by the Honourable Deputy Premier.

And certainly, Mr. Speaker, our prayers remain with his daughter, Barbara; his sons Raymond and Christopher; and their family. And certainly a man who lived a life well lived.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to ask this Honourable House to send a letter of condolences to the family of one of my constituents, but also one of Bermuda's centenarians who passed recently, Ms. Cleve Delmeige Davis, better known as "Cleo." People would know her as a long-time employee of the Spot Restaurant [& Bar]. And certainly, as she was a centenarian, I ask that we associate all Members of this Honourable House. She did work at Spot for 68 years. That is how long she worked at that establishment, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do is also to, if I may, extend the condolences to the family of my constituent, Mr. Ranville Wilford Thomas, Sr. He passed away recently in his 80th year. And certainly our thoughts remain with his family, Florence, Rohan, Norris, Shawn and David; and his grandchildren.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Caines, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Wayne Caines: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Caines: Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer congratulations to our helping services, to the EMO [Emergency Measures Organisation] that was led by Minister Michael Weeks. As you know, last week he went through a—

Can you hear me, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: I can hear you. I had to take a second look because I know you have got a twin, and you look a little different this morning.

Mr. Wayne Caines: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: I had to make sure it was the right brother, you know.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Go ahead. Continue on.

Mr. Wayne Caines: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks to the EMO for the work that they and the emergency services have done through the storm. Mr. Speaker, obviously I would like to declare my interest for the staff at BELCO. Mr. Speaker, you know that we have just over 235 members. At the zenith of the storm, Mr. Speaker, there were just over 29,000 BELCO customers who were without electricity. And through the leadership of the incident commander, Mr. Nadir Wade, that team and the BELCO workers were able to get each and every one of those households back on in record time. The opportunity was asked for a team to work together, but Bermudians in general, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we work together on a storm. And I would like to acknowledge all of our emergency services and the BELCO staff for making sure that Bermuda made it through the storm together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Premier, you have your three minutes.

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

I would like to pass on condolences to the family of Ms. Mildred Hodgson, a constituent of mine who recently passed away. Certainly, those of us in the North Shore community, our hearts are with the family. Associating MP for constituency 16, Minister Michael Weeks.

An Hon. Member: Speak up.

Another Hon. Member: Who is this?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mildred Hodgson. And I am associating Minister Michael Weeks. And other Members of the House, Minister Wayne Furbert, as well with this particular condolence.

I would like to also, on a happier note, bring a measure of congratulations to the Heard AME Church on the Glebe Road, which celebrated their 114th anniversary recently, Mr. Speaker. I was in attendance, but also was Minister Michael Weeks, and also Minister David Burch. So we there joined them under the leadership of Rev. Ralph Trott, and also heard a wonderful presentation from a presiding elder of the AME

Church, Howard Dill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP from constituency 28, MP Lister. You were up just a while ago.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning to the House and to the listening public.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to associate myself with the comments by the Premier to Mr. Raymond Tannock and also MP Caines's [comments] to the BELCO staff.

I just want to add congratulations also, Mr. Speaker. I know it has been a while—two months as a matter of fact—since Cup Match. And we have not been in the House. And I would like to just send congratulations to the victorious Somerset Cup Match team for winning Cup Match again—

[Loud desk thumping!]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, I would like to be associated, please.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: So I would like to associate the whole House, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that time, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Member, there was a lot of echoing going on at the time. I understand that all of the St. George's folks wanted to be a part of that congratulations as well? Thank you.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Absolutely!

The Speaker: Thank you. We'll include all the St. George's folks with everyone else on that one.

Minister Weeks, I see you on your feet. You have your three minutes.

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

I would like to start on a positive note and want to be associated with the reminder of the Heard Chapel in their 114th anniversary. It was a good occasion. I was there with the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Public Works. And we had a good time. It was

a joyous occasion with a lot of celebration and the like.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to be associated with the remarks by MP Caines. I want to take my hat off to the EMO staff. I do not want to call them individually because I do not want to miss any of them. But the EMO organisation are very in tune with preparing for anything that may happen—i.e., like the hurricanes. And they go over and beyond. And I cannot say enough about them. I take my hat off to all of the EMO staff.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to end on a sombre note. I would like the House to extend condolences to the family and friends of a 16-year-old, Kanye Ford. Mr. Speaker, I would like to associate the whole House with this.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: He tragically lost his life a few weekends ago in an altercation at Horseshoe Bay. It is saddening, Mr. Speaker, to lose any life in our community due to a senseless act. But the loss of such a young life—there is a special pain and sorrow. Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to his family, his mother, his father, his sisters, his friends, everybody. I was at the funeral with a couple of other Members. And it was heart-wrenching to see so many young people up there crying and the like.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this time I just want to send out prayers to the community, send out prayers to our country that we have to get on top of this thing to reverse the situation that we find our country in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member [have a comment]?

I recognise the Opposition Leader. You have your three minutes.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to send congratulatory remarks to the organisers of the new Bermuda Maritime Academy. I saw this in today's newspaper, and I was very moved by it because I think it was overdue, and there are opportunities for young people. I have a nephew who is in the industry who is doing great things in shipping in regard to freighters and ferries overseas. So I would like, on behalf of the House, to send my congratulatory remarks to the organisers of the Bermuda Maritime [Academy].

I would like to also send congratulations to Roydell Neverson. She was appointed as Director of Operations at the Hamilton Princess. I think this is a first as far as an international organisation in tourism where we have a Bermudian as "number two." So she has served her time. She epitomises tourism in Bermuda. And it is well, well deserved.

The Speaker: The House needs to be associated.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: And on behalf of the House—

The Speaker: The whole House.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: —I would like to associate all of the Members of the House on her recent appointment. And I wish her continued success in the future.

I would like to associate myself with the comments made in regard to the EMO staff, the Regiment, and so on and so forth because they have done a sterling job with the hurricane.

I would like to also associate myself with the [comments regarding] the death of Senator Raymond Tannock. He was always the consummate gentleman. And irrespective of what side of the fence you are on, he embraced you, welcomed you, listened to you and engaged with you in a manner that only he could do. So condolences to Barbara, Raymond and Chris.

I would like to send condolences to the family of one of my constituents, Gilbert Amaral, a jovial person. Condolences to Donna, his wife; his children, Elizabeth, Teresa and (I think) [Tanya].

I think that is it for me. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I recognise the Honourable Minister from St. George's to get up to, I guess, support the congratulations for Somerset. But I will leave that for her to do.

MP Ming, you have your three minutes.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and listening audience.

The Speaker: Good morning, MP Ming.

Mrs. Renee Ming: If there are any comments I do not want to be associated with, it will be those ones.

[Laughter]

Mrs. Renee Ming: But you know, I wish your team all the best.

The Speaker: We know you have a good spirit. We know you have a good spirit.

Mrs. Renee Ming: It is what it is. There was going to be a winner. There was going to be a loser. And it just was not the outcome that I had hoped and prayed for.

But, Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning because I would first of all like to be associated with the comments for Roydell Neverson. I know she has worked in hospitality for years. And it is, I am sure, a major

accomplishment for her to find herself in the second position.

I would also like to acknowledge and congratulate Dionne Morrison-Shakir on being appointed the Accountant General. It is further confirmation, Mr. Speaker, that not just locally in Bermuda, but globally we see women stepping up and putting themselves in leadership.

Another congratulations, Mr. Speaker, is for the seafood festival that was held in St. George's a few weeks ago. Many of you would have heard that it was truly over-subscribed probably by 400 per cent. There was an estimate of approximately 600 to 800 guests, and they went over 4,000. So a great event and collaboration between the BTA [Bermuda Tourism Authority] and the Corporation of St. George's. And a hearty thank-you to the Bermuda community for coming out and supporting something that we hope will become an annual event.

The Speaker: Are you finished, Member? Thank you. MP Tyrrell, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, colleagues.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Or good afternoon, colleagues.

First let me associate with the remarks on the passing of Raymond Tannock. Mr. Tannock and I sat in the other place for a number of years under a different—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: He sure did. And I appreciated his counsel, certainly.

But, Mr. Speaker, I certainly rise in a sad way to ask if this House can send condolences to the following families in my constituency in Warwick who [have loved ones] who passed recently. The first one was—to the Albuoy family on the passing of their mother, Maybelle, known as “May” Albuoy. She passed in her 92nd year after a bit of a struggle. So I certainly send my personal condolences to her sons, Anthony and Derek; and daughters Laverne, Alanda and Deborah.

The next family I ask if condolences could be sent to is the family of the late Mary Williams. Ms. Williams was formerly of Whaleview Lane, but latterly went to a care home [before] her passing. She was in her 107th year. So she obviously lived a long life.

The Speaker: The Opposition Leader will be associated.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Yes, I associate the Opposition Leader.

My condolences to her sons, Lloyd and Michael.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if I could ask that condolences be sent to the family of the late Frederina Darrell. Frederina was not one of my constituents, but her family, headed by Heather Darrell, lived in Carver Heights in my constituency. And Frederina was very close to the family, and I am sure she will be missed. So I ask that condolences be sent to her friends and family. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Jackson, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would just like to send condolences to the family and friends of Michael Wagner. He was someone whom I had just met recently, so I do not have a long history. And there is association around the House, and I would like to include Members.

The Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I met him more recently, and he was a constituent who was living in a wheelchair after an accident earlier in life. And I certainly enjoyed my visits with him. He was such an affable, friendly and considerate young man. He was a peer, my age. But I did also find out later on that he had lived such a fulsome life. He was a counsellor at Whitney Institute. He was a very active member at Young Life, which was a Christian-based social organisation for young people. Mr. Wagner also had an opportunity to do some schooling in the Azores, and he also worked down in St. Croix. So I would like to celebrate all of the fulsomeness of his life. But it is a very sad time, and we will miss him very much. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other—

I recognise the Minister of Transport.
Minister, you have your three minutes.

Hon. W. Lawrence Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to ask this House to send a letter of condolence to Mr. Marcus Wilson, who was tragically taken from us earlier this month. I will associate his neighbour, Cole Simons. Mr. Wilson and I, I would not say we were the closest of friends, but we had a friendship where I would go around and visit. And what we had in common was motorbikes and racing. So he liked to fish, a much better fisher than I was. But also we had the bikes in common. And with his signature colour of gun-metal grey for his bikes, you always knew when it was him. But he will be missed. He was a good character, loved to have a good laugh

and make people smile. So just want to have a letter of condolence sent on his behalf.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other Member?

I recognise the Opposition Whip. You have your three minutes.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to associate myself with the comments made by the Honourable Member Caines as it relates to the EMO, but most especially as it relates to the services and forces that worked during the hurricane and helped us recover from it. Getting through a hurricane, Mr. Speaker, is by no means automatic, and it is not a default. It requires a considerable amount of dedication from a number of people, including those in the planning staff, but most especially those young men and women who pack up their rucksacks as the hurricane is barrelling down toward us and head up to camp, to Prospect, to the fire stations to forward deploy and get ready.

Because what they have to do over the next 24 to 48 hours is not easy. It is tremendously difficult. And I am always mindful that they leave behind their loved ones in the house, and they are not entirely sure what they are going to find when they get back. So to them I give thanks for their tremendous service.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other—

The MP Foggo is jumping up and down quite a bit.

I have a clear view of you now. I missed you the first time. Go right ahead, MP.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give brief condolences to the Richardson family in St. David's for the loss of Ms. Darlene Richardson. I believe an aunt to the Member who sits—I forget your constituency number—Jarion Richardson. And the matriarch of former Senator Curtis Richardson. So I just would like acknowledgement in the House for her loss.

Mr. William Bassett from St. George's, I would like to associate the Member from constituency 1 with those condolences. And with the Swan family from Sofar Lane in St. David's, Swan-Simons' family. They lost their mother as well.

But I think the House has to recognise congratulatory remarks for the great T20 St. George's cricket team, who won the league.

[Desk thumping]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: So I would like the House to understand that we are still heroes in the East! I am talking about St. George's at this point in time.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes. St. George's and St. David's are cousins, all right? And there are St. David's people who sit on the St. George's team. And so I know that St. George's, St. David's are very happy with the win.

[Laughter]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Anyway, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Minister of Education, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to begin on a sombre note and send condolences to the family of Ms. Frances Rogers, one of my constituents who stayed in Alexandra Court. It was always a pleasure to go visit these elders who stayed up there. As a matter of fact, they had a group who called themselves the Golden Girls. I am sure Sandra, Beverly and Doreen are surely missing their friend, Frances, from up there.

Also, Mr. Speaker, and out of total surprise from the Somerset contingent, I would like condolences sent to the family of Miriam Dickenson, who did pass in her 105th year. She was a well-known educator from the West End.

The Speaker: Yes. Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: [She] was also married to my daughter's great-grandfather, Bishop Norris Dickenson. So I would like condolences sent to the family, and of course associate anyone else who wants to be associated with that.

The Speaker: She came from a family of educators in the West.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to be associated with the comments on the seafood fest in St. George's, and also add to the accolades that have been given out to A-Rose Affair, who were the people who organised that function that was made up out of Ambiance Bermuda and Rose of Sharon, again two dynamic women who run organisations that put together a very, very good event there.

And although it was missed by my colleague who spoke before me, I would like to send congratulations to the Bailey's Bay Cricket Team—

[Desk thumping]

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —who are the winners who defeated the St. David's Island Warriors in the last game, Mr. Speaker. But those of us who are not familiar with that because we are all Cup-Match oriented here, the Eastern Counties Association has been in effect since 1904, the second-oldest competition to Cup Match, which started in 1902, of course, involving (and I do not see cousin here) Tucker's Town Cricket Club versus St. David's Cricket Club.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. I will associate the Opposition Leader because he does hail from actually right across the street from the field where we practice.

And, Mr. Speaker, in my last 50 seconds I would like to send a hearty congratulations to everyone who was involved in the opening of the signature schools at the Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy this year. It has been a work in progress. Thirty months have gone into the work needed to open those signature schools, and our students are much better off for that. We have our S1 students entering into programmes where they will be exposed to things such as trades and business services, STEM, financial services, and health and social services signature programmes this year, Mr. Speaker.

So my hat goes off to all of the persons who have contributed over the last 30 months. We are talking about 500-plus people who have given their personal time in order to make this happen. Thank you.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: You are the first one to get a buzzer today, Minister. Look at that.

MP De Silva.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have to associate myself with the condolences for the Tannock family. As many will know, Raymond ran in constituency 30, the election before I actually won the seat. And I spent a lot of time with Raymond. I actually knew him before politics. But obviously, I was very honoured to have him canvass with me many nights around Southampton prior to my victory in 2007. So my condolences certainly go out to Barbara and the rest of the family, and he will be sorely missed, I am sure, by many people in Bermuda from many—let us just say from a wide cross section of people as well.

Mr. Speaker, while I am on my feet, I would like to send congratulations to Ms. Eunice Pitt, who is currently in hospital, but she turns 100 on Sunday. And she is the aunt of my chairman, Mr. Sean Symons. Hopefully, she will recover from hospital well and maybe go on to break Bermuda's record for old

age. So I certainly wish her a happy birthday on Sunday.

And whilst I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Mr. Cannonier, Ire Cannonier, that is. I do not want Craig to think I am coming for him. But Ire Cannonier.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now you will understand, and the reason I congratulate him, Mr. Speaker, is because he was on the St. George's team that MP Foggo was so proud to announce had won the league. The good news is, Mr. Speaker, for young Cannonier is that there is still space for him if he wants to come up and play for Somerset.

[Laughter]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Never!

The Speaker: I see you concluded on that note.
MP Famous, you have your three minutes.

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

Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off with condolences for one of my dear constituents, Ms. Zoleta Smith, nee Thompson.

The Speaker: Yes, that was my comment, yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I assume the whole House will associate with that.

The Speaker: Yes, yes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I also want to give condolences for another Devonshire resident. He actually lived in constituency 13, Mr. Jahi Butterfield of Alexander Road.

I associate myself with my brothers at BELCO. For 30 years we ensure—more than 30 years, but every hurricane we are there.

Mr. Speaker, the next name you may know, and I think MP Jackson would know (but she is not here), our brother in the Cayman Islands. Minister Kenneth Bryan has now been elected as the President of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation. He promises to fulfil his promise to come here and visit us.

The Speaker: It has been a while since he made that promise to us, you know. But go ahead.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes. Well, I just thought I would mention it.

The Speaker: All right.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I have got it on record now.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to associate myself also with Mr. Ire Cannonier, future St. George's cricket Cup Match player, Berkeleyite, wrong house, but good team.

The Speaker: The only house.

Mr. Christopher Famous: And, Mr. Speaker, 125 years ago on this same street, Court Street, there was a gathering of 27 students a little further north at a place called Samaritan's Lodge. That is where the birth of the Berkeley Institute started, Mr. Speaker. So from humble beginnings on Court Street, down onto St. John's Road and now at a sprawling campus, Berkeleyites have been producing leaders for the last 125 years. I repeat: leaders, not followers, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I am waiting for your congratulatory remarks. Who are you congratulating, though? Or condolences? Or condolences?

Mr. Christopher Famous: I am congratulating Berkeleyites, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Christopher Famous: There are so many in this House on both sides of the fence.

An Hon. Member: You need to be watching the clock.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, I am watching the clock.

But most important, Mr. Speaker, Berkeleyites and Gold House, *Respice Finem*, Mr. Speaker. Have a great day.

The Speaker: No, you lost us when you said "Gold House."

MP Cannonier.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you.

The Speaker: You have your three minutes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to be associated also with the bereavement and condolences to the Tannock family. I had the opportunity of getting to know him many years ago in the fuel industry when he was a senior at it and quite frankly taught me the ropes in the industry. He was a leader at the time when I came in. And his insight was invaluable to the fuel industry and what is going on. So we have had many, many, many mo-

ments together just the two of us. So again, I add my condolences to the family.

Also, I would like to add my condolences to the Smith family. Zoleta and I were very, very good friends. In fact, she purchased Little Tyke Service, a company that I had many moons ago and started. She was the one who took it on to make it even larger. So she and her husband at the time, we were very close in the industry of transporting kids to school. So again, a tremendous loss. What a beautiful, beautiful temperament she had.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: And so, to Terry and the kids, my condolences to them as they continue on to grieve.

I would like to, as far as congratulations are concerned, thank Ire for carrying on the Cannonier name.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: The Cannoniers have been known for cricket, including myself as opening bowler for St. David's.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I would have clean-bowled you any day. Yes.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I do not think you would have seen the ball.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: But also, on a more serious note, I would like to thank Cambridge Beaches. I had the opportunity with the Opposition Leader and Minister Rabain, I include him and I saw him come up as well. We did pass in the House, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the allowance for them to be able to get concessions to make some expansions and improvements. And, my goodness, it was beautiful! I did see and I just want to acknowledge the Minister of Tourism as well. I did see him there as the Opposition [Leader] and myself walked through the improvements that they have made there. I really, really like that property up there. It is beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

Then also I would like to congratulate BELCO and its leadership. I know that one of our esteemed Members in the House during the aftermath of the hurricane. You could see nothing but BELCO trucks back and forth.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: I think that buzzer is for you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

I think this could take us to lunch after that.

MP.

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

Mr. Speaker, associating myself with the condolences and the congratulations already. I want to end this on a lighter note and to send congratulations and happy birthday to our world champion, Flora Duffy, who celebrates her 35th birthday today.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And while I do that, I hope Honourable Members still clap on the next one. I would like to send congratulations to a future world champion in something, to my grandson, Chase Bailey, who celebrates his birthday today.

[Desk thumping and cheers]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: As long as he does not have your talent, he will be just fine.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Ah, Member, Member, Member.

Thank you, Members. It looks like no other Members are rising to make a contribution.

Oh! Before you do that, Premier, I am going to just add a couple of comments to the condolences, mainly to where we started this morning when we had the moment of silence for a former Member. I just think it is only fitting that we say a couple of remarks in reference to that Member. Those who knew Mr. Pearman knew that Mr. Pearman was really a friend of the community. He was known for his undertaking in business professionally, but he really was very much involved in the community over his years. And if I was to list the number of organisations that he had been involved in in Somerset, we would be here for a time longer. I will not name them all. But just to say he was actually a founding member of—we are talking cricket. He was a founding member of the Western Counties Cricket Association. Many did not know that.

He taught at Sandys Secondary. He was a member of the West End Sailboat Club and a former commodore and sailed for them. He was the secretary for them and secretary for the Somerset Cricket Club. And I just picked those things as, you know, he was very much involved in the community. He was a Member of Parliament from 1980 to 1985. And there was a young fellow who was actually his tenant who ran against him and won the seat—myself. He was my landlord where I had my business.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: No, no. He was my landlord where I had my business at the time.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Yes, we continued a very good relationship that lasted many years. It speaks to the type of man that he was; he didn't hold that against me. In fact, our friendship grew much more after that. I think he was relieved to be out of here, to be honest, and to pass that burden onto someone else.

But I just wanted—I have said a few remarks for Mr. Pearman because he was a very nice gentleman to have known. And his loss is felt throughout our community in Sandys.

Lastly, I would like just to be associated with the remarks given to the Smith/Bailey/Thompson family on the loss of Zoleta. We are actually cousins. Much can be said on how she was really a warm personality who touched the lives of many whom she came in contact with. She was a mother to many in the business that she ran with transporting children back and forth to school and the programmes that came out of that. So my condolences are added to what has been said to her husband, Terrence, who is one of our immigration officers.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: And her children and her brother and “Pilot Mario” Thompson.

With those few remarks, I am going to call on the Premier to take the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Until what time do you want us to adjourn until?

The Speaker: At two o'clock.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay.

Mr. Speaker, I move this Honourable House do now adjourn for lunch until 2:00 pm.

The Speaker: Any objections?

No.

The House now stands adjourned until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:38 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:04 pm

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members. The House is now back in session.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: Before we recessed, Members, we had concluded the condolences and congratulatory remarks. We are now on Matters of Privilege.

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: I believe that Government has a few Bills to introduce today.

Premier, I believe the first is in your name.

FIRST READING

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION (NO. 2) ACT 2022

STAMP DUTIES AMENDMENT ACT 2022

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (NO. 3) ACT 2022

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bills for their first reading, so that they may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting: Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation (No. 2) Act 2022, Stamp Duties Amendment Act 2022, and Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 3) Act 2022.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy Premier, I believe the next one is in your name.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

FIRST READING

FUELS BILL 2022

Hon. Walter H. Roban: 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: Fuels Bill 2022. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister of Works.

FIRST READING

WEST END DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION AMENDMENT ACT 2022

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: 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: West End Development Corporation Amendment Act 2022.

The Speaker: Thank you.
And the Minister of Social Development and Seniors. Minister.

FIRST READING

PARISH COUNCILS AMENDMENT ACT 2022

Hon. Tinee Furbert: 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: Parish Councils Amendment Act 2022.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister of Transport, I think you have the last one.

FIRST READING

GARAGES LICENSING ACT 2022

Hon. W. Lawrence Scott: Yes. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I am introducing the following Bill which according to section 36(3) of the Bermuda Constitution requires the Governor's recommendation so it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting: Garages Licensing Act 2022.

The Speaker: Thank you.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTION

The Speaker: There are none. We now move on.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: The first matter is the second reading of the Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act 2022.
Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act [2022] be now read for a second time.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
[There are] none. Continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (NO. 2) ACT 2022

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members are now requested to give consideration to the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act 2022.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill proposes to amend the Customs Tariff Act 1970, the principal Act, with the introduction of duty relief on fuels. It should be important to note, of course, Mr. Speaker, when this matter was tabled in July, it was tabled under provisions of the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act and therefore is already in force unless this House does turn it down.

Mr. Speaker, the measures in the Bill affect the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act. Mr. Speaker in the 2022/23 Budget Statement, this Government promised relief now and more relief to come. And in keeping with that promise, a relief package was introduced in July to seek to provide working families direct support during this period of global inflation, which included the protection of the people of Bermuda from fuel prices. Mr. Speaker, in March 2022, as one of my early actions upon resuming the role of Minister of Finance, I rejected the recommendation to increase the cost of gasoline and diesel, and in working with the fuel importers have kept the prices at the pump frozen at the February 2022 rates. Without this action, the average working family would be paying \$23 more this past summer to fill up their cars they use to transport their family to school, camp activities and work. Without this action, taxi and minibus opera-

tors would have been paying \$35 more each time they fill up their tanks to transport tourists around our Island during this last stronger-than-expected tourism season.

Mr. Speaker, I know that this move has generated some controversy, as any time you take urgent action there are bound to be some challenges in implementation. But it was important that we acted quickly to protect our residents, businesses and our transportation providers. This quick action ensured that no one on this Island has paid more at the pump than they did in February to refill their vehicles. And of course, Mr. Speaker, this applies to fishermen as well, despite the significant fuel price increases that other countries around the world are experiencing.

Just as we acted quickly when the pandemic was ravaging the world, the Government acted quickly at the onset of the war in Ukraine. Mr. Speaker, the introduction of a new end-use duty relief in the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act will facilitate the ongoing freeze in fuel prices at the pump, while seeking to ensure continued safety of the delivery and continuity of supply. This extension will create an effective mechanism which can allow for relief to be given to families, taxi operators, fishermen, tour operators and local businesses. The amount of relief under this initiative for the fiscal year 2022/23 is estimated to be \$6.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, the new end-use duty relief introduced by the Bill will grant the Minister of Finance the ability to vary the rate of duty for gasoline, kerosene and diesel fuels that are being removed from a bonded warehouse for use in Bermuda. It provides a mechanism to positively assist residents in a prudent and considered way.

In February, when I addressed this Honourable House during the Budget Statement and pledged to this country that this Government would provide relief now and relief later, there may have been some who doubted that this Government would keep that pledge. But, Mr. Speaker, this Government is committed to doing whatever we can to reduce the burden that working Bermudians are facing every day.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to commenting in further detail on the principal changes and other measures of this Bill in Committee. And I look forward to the approval of this measure in the House to confirm the relief that this Government wishes to provide to the people of this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Opposition Leader, yes.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you will be pleased to note that in principle we agree with the Government's recom-

mendation and the relief in regard to fuel and other gasolines and light oils.

But we also would like to have further details and I will go through a couple of questions that I have momentarily. Now, as this is a financial Bill, I would have thought that the Premier may have had a financial memorandum done to support this as a money Bill.

Mr. Speaker, in his brief the Minister of Finance said that the value of this relief is \$6.1 million. Can the Minister provide details on whether the rate of taxation, the structure of the rate of taxation, will change, or is it going to be a fixed sum per litre? If he can provide more details on how he sees the rate of taxation operating, we can have a better appreciation for how the taxes will be calculated for the wholesalers.

The other question is, Does the Minister of Finance have a commitment from the St. George's Oil Docks customs area? Do we have a commitment from them that they are going to pass the savings on to the end users? It would be a shame, after we give them a break, for them not to help members of our community who are struggling because of the continuing increase in the cost of living in this country. I take the view that the people of this country are making sacrifices, so other stakeholders in our community should be making similar sacrifices. And so it is imperative that I have some clarity on ensuring that the wholesalers in the oil and gas industry, despite being reimbursed for the reduction in taxes, pass the savings on to the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that I would like to speak to is in the preamble. It says the principal Act "by inserting a new end user relief" and the Minister of Finance spoke to a couple of end users, like fishermen, taxi operators, [and] tour operators. I think this could extend beyond the taxi operators. What about the end users like everyday residents, because at the end of the day, our electricity and energy bills are linked to the cost of gas, oil, and diesel? So will the average householder be deemed to be an end user? And will they benefit from these wholesale price reductions in taxes? Can we get a further commitment from the Premier that the reduction in prices, in regard to the wholesale prices for fuel and diesel, apply to the energy industry? And I'm not specifically going after one organisation. I'm going across the board.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that I would like to speak to is the issue of . . . Yes, those are my main issues. And then I will just open the floor for the rest of the House to debate. But those were my issues. I didn't have many issues. As I said, I would like to get more details from the Premier on the rates of taxation. Will the structure change? And how will it change? And also the financial impact on the consolidated fund. Now, I know that he has indicated that this relief is \$6.1 million, so I just repeat that as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Minister Furbert, you have the floor.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the Premier and the Minister of Finance for making, taking such bold steps in regard to the fuel. There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that the average person going to the fuel pump . . . the cost of driving their cars or driving the bikes would have gone up tremendously. And these are just some of the steps that the Government continues to do to ensure that we try to at least control some of the cost that is forever escalating around Bermuda and around the world. And the Premier said that the steps were taken boldly in, I think it was February or March of this year, and so we have had, basically, six months of good control within that particular sector.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, I [would] like to congratulate the Premier and the Minister of Finance and, of course, the Cabinet and caucus for making such a decision.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Premier.

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

I am happy to rise and give a few comments in relation to this particular measure bought by the Premier and Minister of Finance. Certainly, as the Minister responsible for energy, I am mindful of the impact of the cost of energy on this country and particularly on every individual resident, businesses and other institutions. And it adds to the cost of doing business in this country because of our obvious exposure to fossil fuels. We . . . the volatility that happens in the community is reflected in what happens in international markets over time, and this impacts everyone. And if we are to make Bermuda and keep Bermuda competitive, it is essential that we do things.

Also, Bermuda is not just business competitive but socially competitive, because the costs that many of our residents have to deal with often changes the stability of how they live, their households, and their economic welfare. So, anything that can be done to bring stabilisation or rationale . . . and certainly there will be measures debated in this House in the upcoming future which will also address that, will be helpful to everyone.

So certainly, from the standpoint of my role as Minister responsible for energy and, by extension, having been mindful of the impact that energy and fuels and the use of fuels of which we are so heavily

dependent on for the functioning of Bermuda, it is important that measures like this are bought.

I commend the Premier and Minister of Finance for bringing this in light of the global impacts that we are all facing. And it is just a part of our continuous effort to bring a level of reasonableness, sanity and stability to the realities of living life in Bermuda. So I certainly welcome it as the Minister of Energy, and I'm sure the people of Bermuda welcome it as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Adams. I know you were having problems with your microphone. Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, let me be the first to say that in my opinion this is long overdue for you and me to have a direct conversation, one on one in this forum.

The Speaker: There you go.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jache Adams: Yes.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Been looking forward to it.

Mr. Jache Adams: Indeed. So, allow me to add a bit of colour to this contribution to this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, according to the August CPI [Consumer Price Index], delivered with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in the US, the inflation rate was 8.5 per cent, which was a slight improvement from the 9.1 per cent, which was a 40-year high for the US. In the United Kingdom, their Office for National Statistics reached a new 40-year high of 10.1 per cent between the months of July of last year and July of this year. In Canada, the Consumer Price Index reached 7.6 per cent for the same time period and they have cited that a large reason for this inflation is the high gasoline prices. So, for perspective for my colleagues, consumers paid 35.6 per cent more for gasoline in July of this year compared to what they paid in July of last year.

In Japan, July made 11 consecutive months of consumer price increases. In Turkey, according to the *Al Jazeera*, Turkey's inflation reached 79.6 per cent in July. It got so drastic that this year alone they have increased the minimum wage twice. In South Africa, they reached a 13-year inflationary rate, which was at 7.8 per cent in July, largely, again, driven by

food and fuel prices. And in Israel it hit a 14-year high as its inflation reached 5.2 per cent. And so to again give a bit of context, the inflation rate in Israel was 5.2 per cent this July, and last year was 1.5 per cent, and that was according to their Central Bureau of Statistics.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is this: Rising inflation is not an issue specific to Bermuda. It is an issue that the entire world is grappling with, and it just so happens that Bermuda is not immune.

Mr. Speaker, as a country which imports 80 per cent of the food consumed, it is easy to see that if the price of a can of soup increases in the US and we are purchasing and importing that can of soup to Bermuda, it is reasonably expected that the cost of soup will increase when it hits the shelves on Island. In essence, we are importing that inflation, so much of the inflation that we speak of and are concerned about, did not derive within our shores.

But, Mr. Speaker, I get it. The people of this country do not care about the origin of the inflation. They just want to know what the Government is doing to address it. That is why I am proud to stand with a Government that has reduced payroll taxes, has reduced vehicle licensing fees, has increased the pensions for our seniors, has given tax relief for the charities and registered nursing homes. We have not increased across-the-board government fees. We have managed the public purse so prudently that we just were able to give money back to many of our parents. And we are getting ready to do the exact same thing for 75 per cent of the workers in this country.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Jache Adams: But, Mr. Speaker, with this Bill, we have ensured that every time [we] go to the pump, we are saving money.

Mr. Speaker, those are just some of the accomplishments of this Government. And I list them not to suggest that everything is wonderful, but rather to emphasise that we hear the concerns of the working people of this country and are committed, as the Premier said earlier, to provide relief now and more relief to come.

Mr. Speaker, I am not immune to inflation either. I buy the same groceries as everyone else. I get the same monthly BELCO bill as everyone else. My loan rates have increased as well. But in my opinion, it is too easy to blame everything on the government. In a free market society, the government does not control the price that our grocers decide to charge for that can of soup. We do not control the rates and fees that make up our electricity bills. And we do not control the interest rates that our local banks decide to charge. Make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker. They are controlled by private companies with the primary focus of increasing the wealth of their shareholders.

Mr. Speaker, [the reason] why I support this Bill so strongly is because, if necessity is the mother of innovation, the Government has worked hard and found creative ways to freeze the cost of gas in this country for the last eight months. While many countries around the world were experiencing record highs, the same cannot be said within Bermuda because of the actions done by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, the part that often gets overlooked is the fact that this Government would be the first to admit that more can and must be done. We will continue to seek innovative ways to protect the people of this country from the rising cost of food. And I am reminded that the Minister of Economy and Labour recently spoke about vertical farming being a potential option for this. I recall the Premier recently speaking about how the change in social insurance contributions is about to change, where people who earn more will pay more and those who earn less will pay less. And this Government continues to fund efforts such as the BEDC [Bermuda Economic Development Centre], who continue to provide assistance for those who have an entrepreneurial spirit, for those who want to set or create their own private companies and set their own prices.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to say that I support this Bill fully and along with my colleagues, we are committed to keeping our head down and working to continue to deliver for the people of Bermuda.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister Hayward, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, as I talk to the residents of Bermuda, the cost of living in our society is one of the major concerns. There are two primary reasons why residents are making decisions to leave our shores. One, because they feel as though there is a lack of opportunity and, two, because the cost of living in Bermuda is eroding their quality of life. This is an item that actually transcends politics. This is an item that impacts us all within this country. The cost of living in Bermuda has been high for decades, but the increasing pressures of global events have exacerbated the problem that we were facing.

I joined the Progressive Labour Party because it is the party that espouses that it supports the working-class people of this country. I am proud to stand today to say that I am pleased to be a member of the Progressive Labour Party for the actions that this party has demonstrated. We talked about coming from a coronavirus pandemic where we saw a huge disrup-

tion in our society based on the level of restriction that we had to put in society to protect individuals, where persons lost their livelihoods. When I speak to persons globally and compare Bermuda's pandemic response to that of other countries, Bermuda went above and beyond. And that is what I would have expected from a Progressive Labour Party Government.

Now, we are dealing with another crisis, which is the cost of living in Bermuda. And again, this Government continues to demonstrate its commitment to the working-class people of Bermuda. I am pleased to have a Minister of Finance with a social conscience. What we are doing represents the ethos of the Progressive Labour Party Government. We promised relief and we have delivered on a number of relief packages. And as the previous MP just indicated, there is more relief to come.

But this particular Bill deals with one particular item, which is fuel, an industry that has been unregulated for decades. There should be no reason [for us to be] here today to try to cap the price of fuel. It ought not be at the level it is currently at and for decades [was] left unregulated. This has put us in the predicament that we are now in. The Minister of Home Affairs has tabled a Bill today which will seek to finally regulate that industry, and this is welcomed.

We would prefer to be in a proactive situation rather than one that is reactive. But if we are going to react, we react appropriately, and the actions of the Minister of Finance can only be deemed appropriate at this time. The reduction in car licensing fees can only be deemed appropriate at this time. No across-the-board fee increases can only be deemed appropriate at this time. Payroll tax reductions for those workers making less than \$96,000 annually can only be deemed appropriate at this time. Providing support to parents of our schoolchildren can only be deemed appropriate at this time. Working to reduce food costs can only be deemed appropriate. The payroll tax that this Government provides to not just employees, but employers also can only be deemed appropriate.

Both hotels and restaurants benefit from tax relief. Small businesses also get relief within our community. We have provided the necessary support to provide for both businesses and the working-class people of this country. So I stand here proudly today, Mr. Speaker, to simply tell the Minister of Finance thank you for doing what is most appropriate.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Cannonier, you have the floor.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to weigh in on this particular Act. I have . . . well, first, let me say that I am glad to see this. I have believed (having been in the industry, I

declare my interest) that for far too long it has been a great secret of the two who make the most money out of fuel, and that is the wholesaler and government. And I know that, as has been said before, that under an OBA Government, it was increased.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: And in fact, yes. And I'm sure I am hearing interpolations already taking place. Yes, that is fine. We are talking about this. But at some point in time we will talk about their increases as well in other areas.

But we are talking about increase, the increase . . . well, we are talking about fuel here and how we are going to regulate it. It has been, clearly, a challenge for me that . . . and this may be a tip for the Government, that the local wholesalers of fuel with the landmass that they take up in pipelines and the likes, in our parks and whatnot, to get . . . they are not taxed on that. They are not taxed on it. And it is an easier area. They have been getting away with this for far too long.

Now, I know that this is an industry that I am in. But when I found out the truth behind it, I was like, *What's going on here?* We really need to look at this here.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: When did you find out? In 2017?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: So—

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I found at the same time as you.

The Speaker: Talk to the Chair. Talk to the Chair.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes, yes.

The Speaker: Speak to the Chair.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I found out about the same time as he found out. Basically, he didn't know.

So, it is good to be able to see this here, that were taking a stab at this. I really do not know what the \$6 million the Premier speaks of, in the grand scheme of the total revenue that is derived from fuel, what percentage that is. It would be interesting to hear that, and the total revenue that is received, because I know it is a whopping amount that the Government makes off of fuel.

As far as the fuel industry is concerned, I also know that before it gets here and while it is on its way here, which is something else that has to be looked at, that it receives increases by the time it actually lands onshore. So I would be more than willing to lend what

I know to the Government. I certainly did when we were Government and spoke of it. But here we are in a difficult position that even with fuel now, we have the opportunity where we need to reduce the amount. I mean, our fuel prices are just through the roof, quite frankly.

I recall, in having discussions with the former Premier, Paula Cox, that the rate that the retailers make was so far behind industry (and it was at a time where people were being laid off), we made a promise that we would not lay off anyone in the industry because Bermuda is one of the few places where you still . . . [where] someone pumps your gas. It hasn't been made mandatory that self-pumping be the status quo. So, it will be interesting to see how the industry goes. But we made that promise, that we would not lay off people to ensure that folks stayed employed, as long as we were allowed to at least somewhat catch up in the retail industry.

That still hasn't taken place. And my concern, really, at the end of the day, is that as we regulate and do all kinds of things and figure out where all the money is coming from, and how much we are going to give away, that those end users, like the retailers, are not at the brunt of taking the hit, but it is actually those who have been making substantive (in the billions over the years) money that they take the rebate and do their part. And so, I am glad to see that the Government is doing its part and take a rebate.

But again, I'm hoping that the Premier can give me an idea of the \$6 million and what percentage that would be of the total value that we take in in fuel. So, if he needs to have anyone please do that, it would be interesting to hear. I support this. I absolutely support this. It has been a long time coming. But I must say that it has been one of the best kept secrets in Bermuda that has kept plenty of revenue coming into government. That the fees . . . Bermudians just didn't understand it.

You know, we are at the pumps and were selling it in litres, but we are buying it in gallons. It is totally confusing. So, people don't even know how much fuel, actually, they are putting into their tanks when you ask them about litres. *How many litres are you putting in and what does that mean in mileage?* They could not tell you. The average person couldn't tell you. What they can tell you is, *Well, I fill up my tank for \$75. That's what it takes to fill up my tank, and that's that. That's what I do.*

One of the other interesting things about fuel is this. I thought that at one particular time that, you know, the fuels were coming from two different places. You got two major dealers in the fuel industry, the fossil fuel industry, and it was quite interesting to realise that it's the same boat, it pulls up, a pipeline goes to one side and a pipeline goes to the other side. But yet people are saying when they get the fuel, *Oh well, if I put Esso in my tank, I go longer than if I put Shell in.* Nonsense. Complete nonsense. But if that floats your

boat, that floats your boat. What we would like to see now is something that makes sense.

I do not know if this is the beginning of more reductions that we are going to see. I don't . . . really, with the \$6 million, I do not know if it is a good start or not. But if you can give us some numbers and I can tell you whether or not I think is a good start for Bermuda. Because, you know, it is extremely expensive to fill up your car, your truck. And maybe Government is looking at how it can give additional reductions to other industries. I believe that is the case. I don't know. But we will see. I know that the retailers have been giving reductions to [companies with] large fleets for some time now.

But I will say this, in 2009, when the recession . . . well, in 2008 the recession hit and in 2009 it really took grip here in Bermuda. One of the unfortunate things for the fuel industry and the retailers was it took a hit in millions of dollars . . . and the reason it did was because back then it was encouraged to have charge accounts. And many of those companies who went out of business, quite frankly, were not able to pay the monies back. And I am talking about the retailers took a hit in the millions and millions of dollars that people could not pay because they obviously did not have their businesses anymore. So, I say all that to say that the retailers have been doing their part. So, I am now glad to see that Government is stepping up and doing its part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: Sounds like they are writing your speech for you.

Hon. E. David Burt: I know, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just have to say it is so good to be back here in the House of Assembly. It is much more—

The Speaker: Very much so. I am glad all Members feel that way.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes. It is much more—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You missed me.

The Speaker: I sure did.

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: It is. And so, from the perspective, Mr. Speaker, I welcome the support of Members of the Government, from backbenchers of the Government, and from Members of the Opposition, because I think that all of us are in the same perspective and the same space that the one thing that we recognise is that we must take action on the cost of living.

And the Honourable Member who spoke last, you know, asked a particular question, which I do not have an answer to as of yet. Hopefully I will have an answer, maybe in Committee I might get it. But you had asked about how much money comes from, you know, fuel. And I don't know the exact up-to-date figures, but the one thing that I do know is that when I was Shadow Minister of Finance in this Honourable House, I said about a third of customs duty collection comes from fuel. So, you know, a third back then was about \$60 million. It is a significant amount. And its fuel from . . . fuel that goes to BELCO, fuel that goes to many things: kerosene, diesel, gasoline. All those types of fuels are from customs duty.

But I think, Mr. Speaker, I must always say this is the fact. And it is history, but it is fact, because the last time that there was an increase on the price of fuel taxes on the price of fuel came into effect on the first of April 2017. And I can promise you, Mr. Speaker, I was not the Minister of Finance on the 1st of April of 2017. And the only thing that this Government has done is work to make sure that we can reduce pressures on the working class. As Minister of Finance, I have not raised taxes on the working class and I will not, because that burden in this country is far too high.

So where we are here right now, Mr. Speaker, and of course, the Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour said about, you know, making sure that from the Ministry of Finance we have a social conscience. That's what this was. We see that there was a problem coming and we acted to ensure to protect persons from the rate of fuel.

But I'm going to tell you a story. I am going to tell you what happened, Mr. Speaker. It was in . . . I was appointed Minister of Finance by the Governor again, the second time, on February 16, 2022. And I remember a few days afterwards, the Deputy Premier said, *You approved a fuel price increase?*

I said, *What do you mean, I approved a fuel price increase?*

[The Deputy Premier] said, *People are saying that you approved a fuel price increase.*

I said, *I can promise you, I have not approved a fuel price increase.*

[The Deputy Premier said] *I checked with the team at the Ministry of Finance and they said, 'Yes, a fuel price increase was . . .'*

And I'm like, *No, they did not come to me.*

It was an automated process, Mr. Speaker. It was an automated process. Take the global price of oil, go ahead adjust it every month. This is the maximum price. Go. Bob's your uncle. No interference, no

anything. And the directive given at that time is that there will be no approvals given for any increase in fuel. It will not happen when we go to March. It will not happen when we go forward. And I made sure I gave that statement when I came to the House of Assembly to announce the fuel price freeze back (and I want to say) in May.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a few questions were asked about, you know, Are we changing the duty relief for how we charge duty relief? There is no particular change in how it is. Duty is charged at the per litre rate. It is not at an *ad valorem* rate, as per the value. It is charged for each litre and it is set at a certain amount. And what this Bill does is allow the Minister of Finance to vary that amount because all we did, due to the significant amount of taxes that is on gasoline in this country, we are just reducing the duty rate—not punishing the retailers, not touching the wholesalers. The only people who are at being affected by this is the government coffers. And we are reducing that tax rate to basically compensate for the increase in global prices. So we will reduce the tax rate, [whenever] the global prices go up, and we are going to keep it stabilised.

Now here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. The good news is that gas prices have fallen since they peaked at over \$120 a barrel, and I want to call it April. Right after the war [started] it went up and kept going further. And at last week's check, they were around or a little bit below the levels of where they were prior to the war. Now that is going to take a while to trickle through. But the projection from the Ministry of Finance is that this rebate amount, if fuel prices stay where they were since yesterday when we ran the latest figures, it is expected that by the time we make it to November then this will not be necessary.

But here is the thing to ask, Mr. Speaker, because here is the real question. Will the price of fuel go down? And yes, it is the intent to lower the price of fuel. If the fuel prices go on the local markets, it will go down. And to answer the question of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and also the Honourable Member for constituency 12, who certainly has declared his interest and knows a little bit more about the fuel industry in Bermuda than I certainly do, what we will do, Mr. Speaker, as we announced in the Budget Statement, 50 per cent of any savings in that year, or change to the budget, will be used to provide additional relief to the people of this country.

At lunchtime, I was asked by *Bermuda Broadcasting [Company]* if we are going to hold to that. And the answer is yes. We are going to keep that promise. So now there is additional relief that is there to be given. The Government is going to examine the full range of relief that may be given. There may be relief on gasoline taxes. However, there may be other types of things we may do with electricity bills. I know that the Regulatory Authority, which will be pleasing for many people to hear, has just published that the fuel

adjustment rate will be going down by 20 per cent as of October 1.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: So, these are things which are happening. And so, there is space for providing additional relief. And that is the work of which we are going to continue to do because, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, it makes no difference if the budget is balanced; it makes no difference if your fiscal matters are moving the right way if the people of this country are challenged to make ends meet. And it is the responsibility of the Government to assist them in making sure that they can have a lower tax burden, when coping with the global price of inflation.

The question that was asked by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was, Is there a commitment by the wholesalers or others to pass the savings on to end users? And I think the Honourable Member from constituency 12 would know, by publication of the Ministry of Finance and the way that things are in this country, that there is a maximum price for the sale of fuel. And so, fuel stations cannot sell that price of fuel. And I heard an Honourable Member say that they believed that their fuel prices have gone up since February. I would ask that Honourable Member to please share that information because any service stations that will be doing that will be in contravention of the law.

The fuel price has been set and it has not been increased since February of [2022]. So, anyone who is selling above that level would be in contravention and could be punished. So, I want to make sure that this is clear.

The final thing that I will say is that I know there was a question asked, Does this apply to BELCO, et cetera? And I explained to the Opposition Leader that the fuel price, this CPC (CPC 4712, which we will be debating), is a completely separate section of the Customs Tariff Act and [fuel] imports for the power station is under a different section. But as I just indicated, Mr. Speaker, we are going to be looking at all things because there is space to provide additional relief to the people of this country.

And finally, I know, and the Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour had spoken about it and certainly it was referenced by the Member for constituency 12, yes, fuels have been unregulated in this country. They have been unregulated. The fact that the only control, Mr. Speaker, that existed, as I said in this Chamber during the summer, was a letter from the then Financial Secretary David Saul in 1979 to [the] fuel companies, and that has literally been the mechanism of which has been used by agreement. [This] shows how needed it was to move to a place of the regulation of fuel sector. And when we come here next week, Mr. Speaker, we will be debating the regulation of the fuel sector. And I have no doubt that the

Regulatory Authority will be able to work with the retailers, work with the wholesalers, assess what is going on and render a fair price for services. And I have no doubt that the customers of this country will certainly ensure that they see relief.

I am certainly looking forward to that process because this is not the home for it inside the Ministry of Finance. The correct home is with an experienced regulator who has the ability and the technical expertise to go ahead and look through all of those various items. So, I look forward to that coming into place, Mr. Speaker, because I think it will certainly be helpful.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that I have answered all the questions that were posed to me. And I will ask that the Bill be now committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

I call on MP Foggo to take the Chair and take the House into Committee.

MP Foggo, you have the Chair.

House in Committee at 2:52 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (NO. 2) ACT 2022

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members.

Members, we are now in Committee of the whole [House] for further consideration of the Bill entitled the [Customs Tariff Amendment \(No. 2\) Act 2022](#).

Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I would like to move all the clauses, 1, 2 and 3, if I may.

The Chairman: You may.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, clause 1 is the citation and provides a title for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act by inserting a new end use relief, CPC 4712, with respect to fuel for St. George's Oil Docks customs area operators. The duty rate for 4712 will be prescribed by Minister by notice published in the *Gazette*.

Clause 3 provides for the Bill to have statutory effect from its date of first reading in this Honourable House which was the 15th of July 2022 in accordance with the Provisional Collection of Revenue Act 1975.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the clauses?

I recognise the Opposition Leader.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you.

I asked the Minister of Finance to address this during his general overview. And I would like for the clarity of the community if he could provide more details or the definition of new “end users.” Thank you. That is in the Explanatory Memorandum.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Premier, would you like to speak to that? Or are there any other Members who wish to pose questions first?

Premier.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: It is not “end users.” It is . . . Madam Chairman, if I may?

The Chairman: Yes, you may.

Hon. E. David Burt: It is not “end users” it is “end use.” It is “end use.” So, in the customs tariff nomenclature, its end use, and in this case is end use because the end use is only fuel that is going to fuel stations such as Esso and all the rest. So, it only applies to the fuel that is going to those particular places and locations not, for instance, to the massive cruise ships that fill up on our docks and all the rest. So, it's to make sure that because when fuel comes off of the ship it goes into the bonded warehouse. It is not taxed until it comes out of the bonded warehouse, and there are different areas of tax and amounts that are charged wherever it moves.

For instance, if it is going to a big cruise ship, then they are not going to get the end use relief. But if it is going down to the BIU gas station for you and [me] to fill up our vehicles, then that is where—

The Chairman: —the relief—

Hon. E. David Burt: —the BIU, Cole, , you support the BIU gas station

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: But I thought you were—

The Chairman: Realised the relief.

Hon. E. David Burt: But that is the definition of end use relief. So, it is a specific end use. And as you can see in clause 2, it does say for refilling stations.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you.

The Chairman: Member from constituency 12.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Under [clause] 2, amends the Fifth Schedule. The last category, “Goods of tariff codes” it mentions light oils, kerosene, gas oils, diesel, and the likes. I am just curious then. The \$6 million that the Premier mentioned, that rebate, does that include these other fuels as well?

The Chairman: Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Yes, it does. If the Honourable Member wants exact figures and if you have time, I can go ahead and pull them up. But the approximate figures are, it is about \$4 million for gasoline and \$2 million for diesel, given the adjustments and how that's been calculated. Kerosene, of course, is very minor. And you know that kerosene sales are small, so there is a little amount in kerosene, but the overall amounts are around \$4 million, and \$2 million, and I can bring up the exact figures for the Honourable Member as well.

The Chairman: Sure. And while you are doing that, perhaps there are other Members who may have questions regarding the clauses thus far.

There being none, Premier, when you have the figures.

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely, Madam Chairman.

The total amount for diesel is . . . you know, I was almost exactly correct, the total amount for diesel that is estimated, and of course, it is important to note that it is estimated because the price of fuel might go up and down. The price of fuel goes up again then it might go higher. If the price of fuel were . . . we projected this out that the price of fuel remains at where it was at yesterday's prices. Of course, it may change. It is around that level. Futures, when we project out the futures, they are showing a gradual decline over the next few months. So we just estimated it at this particular level. But it all depends. But the *estimated* price for diesel is \$2,054,474, and the estimated price for gasoline is \$4,014,119.88.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier.

Are there any other Members who wish to pose questions on the clauses?

There being none. Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

The Chairman: And before I could even ask you . . .

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm sorry.

The Chairman: No, that is fine. Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I move that clauses 1 through 3 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 3 be approved.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.
I move that the preamble be approved.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Yes, there are no objections.
Continue. It has been agreed.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 3 passed.]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.
Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?
There being none, continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.
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.

No objections.
Approved.

[Motion carried: The Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act 2022 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

The Chairman: We call on the Speaker of the House to resume his seat.

House resumed at 3:01 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (NO. 2) ACT 2022

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members.

Are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act 2022 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none. The Bill has been reported to the House.

That now moves us on to the next item which is the second reading of the Bermuda College Amendment Act 2022 in the name of the Minister of Education.

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning. Good evening . . . afternoon.

The Speaker: Afternoon.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I am trying to push the day forward.

The Speaker: I see that.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled Bermuda College Amendment Act 2022 now be read the second time.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.
Continue, Minister.

BILL

SECOND READING

BERMUDA COLLEGE AMENDMENT ACT 2022

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, this Bill proposes to amend the Bermuda College Act 1974 to allow the Bermuda College (the college) to appoint its own auditor. While amending the Bill is short, its effect will have significant implications for the college and its future. As our only tertiary level institution, it is critical that we continue to invest in the college and do what we can to protect this very special, unique and vital organisation of training and higher learning.

These amendments will help ensure that the Bermuda College maintains its accreditation status with the New England Commission of Higher Education Teaching [NECHE], which is, and I quote, "one of the seven regional higher education accrediting bodies in the United States." NECHE is a voluntary, non-profit, self-governing organisation whose primary purpose is the accreditation of educational institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Members should be aware that the Bermuda College received NECHE's accreditation in 2010. Accreditation is an intensive and demanding process. Its successful completion demonstrates that the college meets NECHE's *Standards for Accreditation* and complies with its policies. Accreditation by NECHE is invaluable. It gives confidence to the public, employers and other educational institutions that the college is operating at a high level of educational quality.

I concur with the college that accreditation status is a testament to its commitment and capacity

to deliver a level of education to students that meets rigorous North American recognised quality standards that are subject to external review and verification. Every five years, NECHE undertakes a review of its standards. Effective January 1, 2021, it adopted a new set of nine accreditation standards, including Standard Three, titled Organization and Governance, which requires an accreditation seeking body to have (quote) “sufficient autonomy and control of its programs and operations consistent with its mission to be held directly accountable for meeting the Commission’s *Standards for Accreditation*.”

As a condition of continued accreditation, Standard Three requires the following:

- a. The governing board is the legally constituted body ultimately responsible for the institution’s quality and integrity.
- b. Where the institution’s ownership or affiliation structure or other circumstances or requirements may involve more than one legally constituted body with authority, the institution demonstrates that the governing body with direct responsibility for the institution’s quality and integrity has sufficient autonomy and control to be held accountable for meeting the Commission’s Standards and to ensure that it can act in the institution’s best interest and that the legally constituted bodies with authority have an aligned understanding of their respective roles.

The Bermuda College must comply with all accreditation standards, including Standard Seven, Institutional Resources. This Standard states [the following]:

- a. The institution has sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission. Through periodic evaluation, the institution demonstrates that its resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future.
- b. Through verifiable internal and external evidence, the institution demonstrates its financial capacity to graduate its entering class. The institution ethically administers its resources and assures effective systems of enterprise risk management, regulatory compliance, internal controls, and contingency management.

In addition to ensuring the integrity of its finances through prudent financial management and organisations, as per Standard Seven, audits must be completed in a timely fashion.

Mr. Speaker, Members may be aware of the historical challenges to college experience regarding lack of timely completed audits. The issue began in

[2003] when the then Auditor General, the auditor, declined to audit the college’s accounts until a report was tabled in the House of Assembly on the Coco Reef lease. This resulted in delays and backlogs of the college’s audited statements and affected the tabling of its annual report for a number of years.

The college worked hard in this extremely difficult context, and I am pleased that in recent years it is now up to date and remains in good standing with its audits. However, issues still remain. That means it cannot fully meet NECHE’s revised accreditation standards.

Due to the many impacts of COVID-19 in 2020, the college needed more time to prepare for that year’s audit. However, this did not align with the schedule of the auditor. The college was advised by the Office of the Auditor that this would cause a delay of several months and that the audit would not be completed until spring 2021. Under the extensive responsibilities and priorities of the Office of the Auditor, the college requested the appointment of an external auditor so that the audit could be completed within the usual timeframe. As per her discretion, the Auditor General declined the request.

Based on this recent situation and historical challenges concerning its audits, it quickly became apparent to the college that it does not have sufficient autonomy and control of the preparation of its audits. Therefore, it cannot be directly accountable for meeting NECHE’s standards as it relates to the timely submission of audited financial statements. In order to maintain accreditation, the college cannot fall behind on the audit of its accounts. Doing so would put its accreditation status at risk. Therefore, the college requires the autonomy to comply with its accreditation standards.

The college initiated the proposed amendment for this purpose. This amendment will meet the accreditation standards because it will grant the college sufficient independence to ensure its audits are completed on time.

Mr. Speaker, in correspondence with the college in April of this year, NECHE welcomed the efforts to meet the required standards by developing a long-term resolution to ensure timely financial audits. The college is required to submit an annual report on finance and enrolment and demonstrate progress towards relevant standards in this regard. The next report is due to NECHE on December 1, 2022, for consideration for spring 2023.

Prior to pursuing legislation, the college consulted with the auditor on its intention to seek an amendment to the legislation. The auditor was responsive to the invitation and indicated her disagreement with the proposal. In reply, the auditor reminded the college that the office is the statutory auditor for the college as per the [Bermuda] Constitution Order 1968 and the Audit Act 1990, and that it is the auditor’s responsibility to audit the accounts regardless of

the appointment of any additional auditors through legislative amendment.

Mr. Speaker, after considering whether there will be any viable alternatives and after consulting with the auditor, it was determined that these amendments are the best way forward. They respect the role of the auditor, as per the Audit Act 1990, and do not interfere with the rights and statutory obligations of the auditor. They simply empower the college to appoint its own auditor so that the autonomy it requires is maintained to maintain its hard-earned accreditation.

The Bill requires the college to consult the auditor before the college selects an external auditor to ensure standards and audit process. Any auditor appointed by the college must be entitled to practise as a public accountant under the Chartered Professional Accountants of Bermuda Act 1973. The college will also ensure that a copy of the audited financial statements is provided to the auditor and will continue to work closely with the auditor in line with any and all requirements.

Mr. Speaker, some Members may wonder why this amendment is necessary. The answer can be found within the value that accreditation of the college brings to Bermuda and our people. Accreditation indicates that the college meets or exceeds minimum quality standards for educational institutions. It gives credibility to programmes for students, employers and overseas education institutions. According to the college, most employers prefer to hire job applicants with degrees or certificates from an accredited institution, and also look to see that employees have been educated at an accredited institution when making decisions about promotions within the firm.

Accreditation status is also often considered by employers who want to provide tuition assistance or reimbursement for those employees who desire or need to further their education. Accreditation keeps the college on a path of continuous improvement and one that is externally and independently assessed. It is a prerequisite for establishing transfer agreements with overseas educational institutions. These agreements allow college graduates to transfer into the third year of a four-year degree programme or into the second year of a three-year degree programme. And as Bermuda's only higher education institution, and as a two-year institution, it is critical that students are able to transfer their earned credits to overseas educational institutions.

Certainly, in the US and Canada, most Bermudians are international students and are most often subject to out-of-state or international fees. Transfer agreements mean that Bermudians can receive the first two years of their education here at a local rate, which is much more affordable than overseas colleges or universities. The college affords students the opportunity to grow and develop as post-secondary learners and opens up possibilities for additional education offered overseas. Success at the college also

attracts tuition assistance and scholarships to help support overseas study.

It is difficult to quantify the value for money that accreditation provides to students of all ages and their families. We know that without it many students would not be able to afford to travel overseas to obtain bachelor's and master's degrees or access fields of study not yet available or feasible to deliver in Bermuda, and we would be worse for it.

Accreditation also affords the college the ability to offer several professional certifications, programmes and courses through its division of professional and career education, otherwise known as PACE, for students at all stages of life who wish to pursue various passions, career enhancement or career changes.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to put these changes in place to protect and maintain the college's accreditation status. Our failure to do so would create unnecessary risk to the college and the benefits it affords Bermudian students and employers. The lack of accreditation would also cause Bermuda to lose critical personal and professional educational growth opportunities and result in a huge hit in the continuing development of Bermuda's workforce and our growth as citizens.

Mr. Speaker, while these amendments may duplicate efforts, understanding that an audit is an arduous process, the college hopes that duplication will be avoided and that the auditor would choose to work with the college and its external auditor to meet the obligations of the Audit Act 1990.

As per the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 and the Audit Act 1990 the auditor is not subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority. Therefore, the college cannot direct the actions of the auditor in this regard. As the body accredited by NECHE, the college shares esteemed company with colleges and universities in the US and internationally, all of whom met the requirement of accreditation. Some of these institutions include Amherst College, Berklee College of Music, Boston College, Clark University, Harvard University, Lesley University, Northeastern University, Tufts University, the University of Massachusetts [UMass Amherst], Yale University, Brown University, Johnson & Wales University, New England Institute of Technology and Dartmouth College.

I welcome my colleagues' support for this amendment for the critical reasons I have just shared.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon.

The Speaker: MP Jackson, you have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you. And I would like to thank the Minister for giving a fulsome explanation for the why behind changing or amending the Bermuda College Act.

The other piece as well is that I want to begin by saying that I certainly have nothing but positive messages and positive thoughts for the development and the future sustainability of the Bermuda College. The Board has done a good job. I have had an opportunity to sit on the Board and experienced the Chair, who is knowledgeable, he has got a financial background. Certainly, the president, Dr. Duranda Greene, and her deputy have done a wonderful job of continuing to sustain and develop the Bermuda College. So, whatever we can do to make sure that we keep it a five-star, high-quality, high-profile institution, I'm right there ready to advocate in favour.

But with this amendment, I just have a few questions. And of course, my first question, Mr. Speaker, was why? And the Minister has been very transparent, open, and given us all his reason being the accreditation. And that is a very important aspect, especially our ability to connect and network with other institutions of higher education overseas. So, [this is] completely understood and [I am] in complete agreement.

But I would like to just get down into the weeds a little bit. And my main reason for getting into the weeds a little bit is because the taxpayers in Bermuda give an awful lot of money to the Bermuda College every year in the form of grants. I mean, we are talking \$16 million. About \$300,000 of that \$16 million gets to go to the College Promise programme, which allows students to get some tuition support. So, the amount of money and the importance and significance of the money that the taxpayers in Bermuda are granting to the Bermuda College in order for them to provide a great education for our young people, we, the taxpayers, you know, need . . . we have got a pretty good investment in this institution. And I believe that we have a right to know with as much transparency as possible, what is going on with the financial accounts and making sure that they are audited, et cetera.

Now, it sounds to me, just listening to the minister, that there have been delays with the Bermuda College having a really hard time getting the documentation in place when they had to deal with the Coco Reef and the separation into a private hotel and such. So, they know the challenges of trying to get documentation, receipts, invoices altogether for an audit. And on the other side, the Office of the Auditor General has also seen challenges. COVID-19 came along. Everybody needs their audits done, and there are all kinds of challenges due to a global pandemic. So, this is a give-and-take situation.

But I guess the most important part for me, and again, I am speaking on behalf of the taxpayers

who are interested in the investment, is that there is a statutory obligation for the Office of the Auditor General in Bermuda to audit the financial statements of any institution in Bermuda that is receiving public taxpayer money. So then it begs the question . . . and I want to just add in there that the Office of the Auditor General can hire a third party as long as they are an established business in Bermuda to conduct third-party audits on behalf of the office of the Auditor General. So, I understand that third-party auditors are out there, and they do work with the Office of the Auditor General.

However, in this situation it sounds as though the Bermuda College would very much like to hire a third-party auditor, but that this audit report would then go back to the Board of the Bermuda College. And I guess at some point [it] would then go on to the Office of the Auditor General for sign off and then tabling to you, Mr. Speaker, in the House of Assembly.

But I guess this causes a little bit of friction because its new. This is setting a precedent. I do believe that just about every entity in Bermuda, all of the quangos and rest homes and sports associations . . . anybody who receives a grant from the government, as taxpayer money that is being spent, given out to other organisations, that no matter what, all of those are audited by the Office of the Auditor General because all that taxpayer money is attached to our big bank account, the consolidated fund.

The Bermuda College wanting to go off for the more autonomy is setting a precedent of which we have not had before. And for me, that could cause a little bit of a snowball. I don't know if there are other entities that are now going to want to follow suit. And then we are undermining the integrity of the Office of the Auditor General, in my personal opinion, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I'm just saying. I'm just saying.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I had to let it go.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Continue to speak to the Chair. Speak to the Chair.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, yes, Mr. Speaker.

So, with that in mind, we move on to the accreditation. And the accreditation has boosted the reputation of the Bermuda College by leaps and bounds. Absolutely no doubt about it. I mean, everybody should be excited to want to sign up and enrol, to even just take courses, even if just for the fun of it,

because there are some exciting programmes at the Bermuda College. So, we have got to keep that going. And accreditation is the blueprint for that.

However, just listening to what the Minister had mentioned, I did not specifically hear in the original definition of what the accreditation organisation, the New England . . . the New England Commission of . . . please remind me, the New England Commission of Higher Education.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: So, they, just generally speaking, just want to make sure that our programmes are good, high quality and they want to make sure the operations are good, you know, the maintenance care facilities, IT infrastructure, et cetera. I did not notice anything about the auditing.

But then the Minister today, just a minute ago, said that in 2021 they have added another piece that says that they want to see the audit. So now we know that we've probably . . . see, I don't know. I'm sitting here in the House and I'm speculating. But is there a desire to maybe hire some of the more high-profile audit companies and then that would maybe boost the look and recognition of the Bermuda College and accreditation? That if its PricewaterhouseCoopers or EY [Ernst and Young] or any of the high five-star audit companies that that would make a difference with our accreditation? I do not know. But I am asking the Minister if he might be able to shed some light on that, or whether the Bermuda College Board might want to continue the conversation with the Office of the Auditor General that there may be some other auditing companies on the Island that may be able to work together. I don't know.

Mr. Speaker, this is where it gets a little confusing for me. It is sort of why and who? Because the Office of the Auditor General will hire third-party auditors to come in. And I do not quite understand why there cannot be a conversation with the Board about seeing whether there can't just be an agreement and sort out a third-party auditing company and proceed together in collaboration.

My final point, Mr. Speaker, is that I am curious that the Minister did not mention anything about the Bermuda College Foundation, and this is a charitable organisation that was created based on alumni coming together. Part of the financial piece would be to accumulate funds so that there could be additional capital projects such as . . . I believe that right now they have got some investments in capital projects and providing financial aid, that there was a few million dollars that was donated for a career development centre, that lecture halls are being renovated, et cetera, and this is being funded by the Foundation. And I do not know if (or how) the Foundation and the funds that are donated or invested into the Bermuda College by private investors need a specific auditor.

And that might be another reason why the Bermuda College would like to have an independent auditor, because it would then include the donations and the investments that are made to the Bermuda College Foundation.

So, with that, I am going to take my seat and wait and see whether the Minister can provide some clarification on those issues. And finally, Mr. Speaker, I do just want to add as well, the cost of all of this. If the Bermuda College, through this amendment Act, is going to go out and make the investment of hiring a third-party independent auditor, they are going to have to pay for that. And then, in addition, there is the Office of the Auditor General who is going to audit the books because there is public taxpayer money that is being gifted and granted to the Bermuda College. So there are going to be additional costs for the Office of the Auditor General and any third-party auditor that they may hire to audit the Bermuda College. It could end up being quite a duplicated expense. And I am curious how the Minister hopes to make that as efficient as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Jackson.
Does any other MP . . .
Opposition Leader?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Opposition Leader, you have the floor.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Education Minister for his detailed brief and I want to get back to the accreditation side. As you will know, and most people in this room will know, Bermuda College has been accredited for a number of years. And I thought I heard the Minister say (and I could be wrong, so he can correct me), that this adjustment or this new criterion came up in 2021. My question is this: To maintain our requirements and qualifications to be part of NECHE and to be an accredited institution, I would have thought that we would have been sending financials to them, because the financials would give an overview of the operations of the Bermuda College.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, a point of clarification.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If the Member would allow that.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I think it probably started with the Member that spoke before. Audits have always been needed by NECHE to be submitted. And I know . . . I am going by . . . because the Member that spoke before you made it seem as if this is something new. This is not something . . . what they have done is strengthen the audit process that the college must go through, or accrediting institutions must go through.

So, I just wanted to know if that added some clarity. They have always been expected to submit audited financials. But this is just a strengthening of the process around the submission of those audits.

The Speaker: And it is not just for the Bermuda College, it is for all institutions that apply underneath it.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: [Yes], all of them.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Okay. So, that reinforces my question. So, if we have been always required to have an audited financial statement presented to NECHE on an annual basis, and historically they have been audited by the [Auditor] General up until now, are we saying that NECHE was not satisfied with our audit because it was being done by the Auditor General? And now they are saying this is not good enough, you have to have a third party, one of the big five order firms?

If that is the case, when were we aware of this additional change? And why weren't they satisfied with the Auditor General's assessment of Bermuda College? Because they have been satisfied with it for the past number of years. And historically—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again, Mr. Speaker, if I could offer some clarity, because it seems like we are going down a path that we could potentially avoid.

The Speaker: Yes. Go right ahead.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, there was nothing in my Statement talked about the audits being insufficient that are coming from the Auditor General. But what NECHE is saying is institutions must have sufficient . . . they have changed their criteria to say institutions must have sufficient autonomy and control over their entire operations.

What has come about in the last year was when the audit . . . because of COVID-19 the college was late. [They were] having issues getting their paperwork together. When they did get it together, they went to the auditor and said, *Well, here we go. Can we get it done?* And the auditor said, *We cannot get this done in the timeframe you need.* And so, the re-

quest was, *Well, can we use an external auditor?* Which is something that has been done in the past.

In that case, the Auditor General said, *I know we will not use an external auditor. You will have to wait until we can get to it.* And that is where it doesn't demonstrate that the institution has sufficient autonomy over getting some of this work done.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Opposition Leader.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes. So then will this be a temporary measure, or will it be final going forward?

The Speaker: Have you finished your presentation?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes, I have.

The Speaker: Okay.

Minister, that was the question that he put to you in the end. So, you may want to take note of it.

Would any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Famous.

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Let me first declare my unashamed interests. I am a Bermuda College alumnus and I have set on the Board of Governors for the last four years, Mr. Speaker. I won't get into the nitty-gritty. I am sure that the Minister is more than capable of sorting that out.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda College offers our Bermudian people an opportunity to get a world-class education for a fraction of the cost of going overseas.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda College has a majority Bermudian staff. Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda College has celebrated . . . it is near to 48 years. One of your former predecessors sits on the board with me. Your immediate predecessor sits on the board with me, Mr. Speaker. Also through, I want to say the Department of Labour, the Ministry of Labour offers a PACE programme for mature students wishing to come back and retool.

Why do I say all of that, Mr. Speaker? I say that because the narrative . . . I could be wrong. Feel free to point-of-order me. The narrative is that the board has made decisions that are not quite right. I won't get into that. But Mr. Speaker, I just want to emphasise what the college has done for this country and what it has done for many individuals. A young person coming out of high school at this point has the option to go to North America and fork up \$30,000 to \$40,000, go to England and pay \$20,000, or go to Canada and pay \$25,000. Or, they could go to Ber-

muda College and spend \$5,000. I think the options are clear.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to close and say that the Bermuda College, the students, the faculty and most importantly, the board operates with the highest level of integrity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to speak?
Opposition Whip, you have the floor.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask a question of the Honourable Minister. But I would first like to thank him for his efforts to communicate clearly his reason and logic for undertaking this course of action. And, of course, the Auditor General for her response to this proposed action.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to read from Standard Three of the materials we are working with—

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: —and I want to say NECHE, specifically relating to autonomy.

The Third Standard says that “The institution has sufficient” (this is looking at the Bermuda College) “autonomy and control of its programs and operations consistent with its mission to be held directly accountable for meeting of the commission’s *Standards for Accreditation*.” Further, it only speaks to Standard 7.17 relating to how an audit works. But right now, the logic for undertaking this course of action relates to the autonomy element, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it looks like the matter, or the problem, arose . . . the problem that arose leading to this Bill was a delay in the tabling of a report related to the attendant or related property for the Bermuda College. My question is, Why wouldn’t fixing that problem, which is the delayed report, the internal mechanisms that led to those financial delays . . . why wouldn’t that be the fix? Why would we have to fix the Bill?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

That is another question that I see you closed on, Member, for the Minister.

Minister Hayward, would you like to make a contribution at this time?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to have intervention into this debate. I, too, am a proud alumnus of the Bermuda College, and also a former member of the Board of Governors.

We are talking about this matter, Mr. Speaker, as is in isolation to other quangos who have had chal-

lenges with the auditing department and the timely submission of their audits. This is an organisation who simply wants to be audited and wants the autonomy to be audited in a timely manner so that they can meet their requirements underneath their accreditation. This must be looked at as a positive step; that organisations want to be audited in a timely manner so that they can meet their accreditation. And the Minister spoke about the importance of the accreditation.

What if the accreditation is compromised because we fail to act or because the internal auditor is not concerned with the accreditation but concerned with their work schedule, where they have many government departments and quangos to fulfil the same requirement for? This challenge is not an isolated challenge to Bermuda College, but Bermuda College is asking for proactive measures to be put in place so that they do not find themselves in that predicament, the awkward predicament that they found themselves in when they requested the assistance and were told, *You know, [you] have to go on a waiting list*. I commend the Board of Governors for reaching out to the Minister responsible for Education and requesting that this change will be done so that the audits can take place in a timely manner.

The other thing is if anybody who is auditing the books of the Bermuda College is certified we should treat those individuals with a level of respect. The “Big Four” are not the only set of companies that can provide quality audits in this country. There are a number of Bermudians who are well qualified to provide audits who have been recognised both locally and internationally. And so, I do commend the Minister for bringing this. And I do hope that other organisations who find themselves in the exact same place seek to take the exact same steps.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Is there any other . . . Minister Burch.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: I did not plan to speak on this, but we have headed down a road that suggests that this is a unique situation. It also suggests that some of those on the other side never served in government or never experienced, particularly quangos, being late with their audits.

There is a quango today, Mr. Speaker, that was years out of date of audit, and still is, when we came to Government in 2017. And this is a repeated situation. The suggestion in the public domain is that we do not want to be audited. Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to put the House on notice and the people of Bermuda on notice that I mentioned to the Minister of Education that he would be the first to be

going down this road. And we are likely to follow because the example and the situation is the same with the BLDC. It is the same with the BHC. It is the same with WEDCO. There is a legislative requirement for those entities to report to this House. There is an impediment for them to meet that requirement that is imposed upon them by the Office of the Auditor General. And I think it is even worse than that. Because on the rare occasion when the Auditor General agrees to use an outside agency, it is with the caveat that they must then audit the audit.

Mr. Speaker, apart from Berkeleyites, who in the main cannot count—

[Laughter]

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch:—everybody else in the country can do math. And so, Mr. Speaker, it is a source of significant frustration because the employees and those involved in those entities, go the extra mile to get an audit, are impeded in that process in terms of meeting the deadline, and they are publicly criticised because you got all these entities that have not been audited by the Auditor General.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, and I mean . . . and the indication that the Minister of Education gave as to her response was not helpful at all. *No, you cannot do that, hire your own independent audit firm to do the audit.* Well, that is not being cooperative. That is not being progressive. I will go this far and say that it is symptomatic of several Auditors General of late that have held onto this responsibility as if they are the only people on the planet who could do it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Pardon?

[Inaudible interjection]

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: I think there needs to be a wider look at the whole process of audits because we are going to be criticised again because BLDC is still three years out of date. And we have been five years trying to get across that line. So I think that there should be a wider look at this whole process of audits for government entities because it is in the public interest that you get the audits done. And we as a government would support anything that is going to accelerate and get us to the point where the Auditor General will be happy, or should be, if all of the entities are audited and the reports are in order, or any irregularities are brought to light.

This should not be a turf war. Because that is what it appears like to me. *This is my responsibility, and I am not going to take any help. And I am not going to take any suggestion from you people because my rules say I don't have to take instructions from anybody else.* Well, this is not taking instructions. This is

taking the responsibility away and putting it in a place where I think it will not only suffice to assist with the accreditation, but also with the comfort that the country can draw from taxpayer dollars being spent in an entity that have been audited by some entity that has that authority and expertise other than the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None. Minister of Education, would you like to wrap up here?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is actually a very small amendment, but we did know that it would generate some type of conversation. I will attempt to answer some of the questions.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think it will be helpful to clarify some things that, unfortunately, generated from the questions. But if there was some clarity in understanding on how they actually worked, we probably would not be facing those types of questions.

Just one thing I want to clarify for Ms. Jackson is the \$300,000 that we granted the college is not for the College Promise programme. That is for additional financial aid for students, to assist all students that attend the Bermuda College. It is also allowed to be used for PACE students, which is something that had never happened before. The College Promise programme, which you do speak about, is one of our flagship programmes which gives any student graduating from the Berkeley Institute or CedarBridge Academy with a 3.0 or above GPA, access to the Bermuda College, tuition free. But those costs are contained within the Ministry of Education, and they are paid directly to the Bermuda College once we are billed for them. So just to talk about the difference between those particular two items.

Also, in addition to that, you mentioned the Bermuda College Foundation providing educational monies as well. The Bermuda College Foundation (and I believe it was the Opposition Leader that mentioned that as well) is an entity that is separate and completely autonomous from the Bermuda College. It is a foundation that has been put together with the sole purpose of raising money to then give to the college so they can build or enhance some of the things that are there. They are completely separate, and they are governed by the Charities Act, which is an Act we all remember was strengthened by the former Senator Fahy. And so, their audits are required because charities that generate “X” amount of money require professional audits versus smaller charities that can just give their QuickBooks accounts. And so they do provide audits.

Their audit has nothing to do with the Bermuda College itself. But it is a requirement under the laws of the Charity Act. And I can also mention that the foundations such as that, or charities such as that, with clean audits and professional audits, tend to attract more funding as well because it shows that they are functioning in a way that they should be functioning.

To answer the question of the [Opposition] Whip, Mr. Richardson, when he said, *Why don't we fix the real issue?* It was mentioned in my brief that the Bermuda College audits were delayed for several years because of a refusal to table the brief. That actually points to some of the things that we are talking about. The Bermuda College could not table the brief in the House of Assembly. That had to be done by someone else. So, it actually speaks to how they had no control over what was going on. What NECHE is saying is they want their institutions to demonstrate that they are not at the whims of anything else when it comes to keeping their affairs in order. And so, it actually does speak to that. But it is ironic that the Coco Reef issue happened prior to them even achieving NECHE's certification as well. But I think it is important to point out that particular one.

One thing that MP Jackson did point out was a duplication of efforts. And I did mention in the brief that although this amendment will allow the Bermuda College to appoint an auditor and have their audits done, and those audits will be passed on to the Auditor General, it is hoped that common sense would prevail and that the Auditor General would not say, *Well, I'm going to do an audit all over again.* Because, as you are correct, the Bermuda College pays the Auditor General to do an audit. And ironically, when we were talking about this, the idea of the Bermuda College going to an external auditor, in all indications was that because it was the Bermuda College and they were asking, they would actually be charged less by external auditors than what they would normally pay. They actually pointed that out, that this is a very real possibility. And they have been told that as the college that they would be given special rates and they would actually end up paying less than what they would normally pay to the Auditor General.

So that is one thing that we are hoping. We are hoping that the Auditor General will not just duplicate the process because they can duplicate the process. Nothing in this legislation that we are proposing will take away the right of the Auditor General to audit, if that is what they want to do.

The sole purpose of this is to adhere to that clause that has now come into effect since accreditation was given that schools under the accreditation must have more autonomy over their operations. And simply put, and I thought I explained it in the brief, where this came to a head was when the Bermuda College said, *COVID-19 has come. We were a little bit late in getting you the information that you need, so*

can we go to an external auditor (which has been done before, which the Auditor General has referred to an external auditor because they could not do the work) . . . *Can we go to an external auditor to get this done? Because we need it done in time.*

And the answer was no.

So, this demonstrates lack of autonomy over the control of the operations at the Bermuda College, which is in direct conflict with the new accreditation standards that have only come to be within the last year.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hope I did answer all of the questions. I was looking down my list. I do not believe there are any additional questions that [were asked]. With this, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

MP Foggo, would you like to take the Chair and take us into Committee?

House in Committee at 3:47 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

BERMUDA COLLEGE AMENDMENT ACT 2022

The Chairman: Members, we are now in Committee of the whole [House] for further consideration of the Bill entitled [Bermuda College Amendment Act 2022](#).

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I would like to move all three clauses.

The Chairman: It has been moved that all three clauses be moved.

I am sure there are no objections.

Minister, you may continue.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, this Bill seeks to amend the Bermuda College Act 1974 in relation to the appointment of an auditor and to make provisions for connected purposes.

Clause 1 provides a citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 1 by repealing and replacing the definition of auditor.

Clause 3 amends section 5 by:

- a. providing for the board of the Bermuda College to appoint an auditor after consulting the Auditor General, and with the approval of the Minister;

- b. providing the criteria for the appointment of an auditor; and
- c. providing for the auditor to report the results of the examination of the accounts of the college to the board.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the clauses?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I have a question, Madam Chairman. Good afternoon.

The Chairman: Yes. Okay.

Member from constituency 20, is it? You have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thanks.

So my question is, Should the Bermuda College with this amendment be able to hire a third-party auditor, once those audits are signed off by the board of the Bermuda College, will those financial statements be the financial statements that will appear in their published annual report, so that we will all be able to see them? Or are we going to always depend on the audit from the Auditor General, which is tabled in the House of Assembly?

I am asking [this question] mostly so that, you know, taxpayers and people who are interested are able to see and look at the checks and balances, et cetera.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: What clause are you speaking to?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: It's all clauses. So, I am speaking to—

The Chairman: Excuse me. Members, Members,—

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Sorry, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: —please recognise the Chair.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes.

The Chairman: If you do have a query or question, Member, can you please refer to me so I can get the Member who is speaking to respond? And rather than just respond, recognise the Chair.

Minister, you have the floor, if there are no other Members who wish to ask a question.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: I just want to build on what my colleague has just said.

I know, historically, the Auditor General has subcontracted the audit to some of the audit firms. And when she subcontracts the audit to the audit firms, then when the final audit is completed, it still goes under the auspices of the Auditor General, despite the fact that it was subcontracted to one of the larger audit firms because of resource challenges in the past.

Now, what I am hearing today is this. They are not subcontracting anything.

The Chairman: Member, are you going to answer the question?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Yes. I'm leading up to my question.

The Chairman: Just a minute. Okay. Can you please ask the question?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: I am just setting in the context for the question.

The Chairman: Okay. Keep it extremely brief. Thank you. And this is in reference to which part of the clauses?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: All three.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: And I am just building on what the Minister said, in this case, the college, in essence, has engaged an audit firm to do the audit. The audit firm has the authority to sign off on it. Can the Minister please tell me, what sense does it make if we have engaged a professional, well-reputable audit firm to sign [off] on the financial statements and then send it back to the Auditor General when they finished? To me it makes no sense whatsoever.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Excuse me.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Because I asked him, *Can he give me the reason why it must go back to the Auditor General if a large, reputable, independent audit firm has already approved it?*

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to ask questions on that same line?

Member Richardson, you have the floor.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I rise to ask a question as it relates to clause 3. Specifically, I am looking at section 5, [new section] (1B). If I may read with your permission?

The Chairman: Yes, you may. Continue.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

“A person shall not be appointed as an auditor under subsection (1A) unless he is a member entitled to practise as a public accountant under the Chartered Professional Accountants of Bermuda Act 1973.”

Madam Chairman, as you are probably aware, not all things are alike. Public accountants vary both in expertise and resources. And so, to that end, typically in regulatory compliance, what we see as a qualifier in legislation that enables us to determine—

The Chairman: Member, can you ask the question?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Sure. The qualifier is the word “appropriate.” And we do not have that word in this legislation. So, my question to the Honourable Minister is, Will the proportionality or appropriateness of the audit selection be entirely dependent upon the college board? Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to ask questions?

Okay, Minister, you have your responses.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

Yes, it was interesting, the last comment. The purpose of us having a regulatory body is to ensure that those persons who are admitted into that regulatory body are able to conduct audits that are satisfactory. And so, anyone who is picked from that list you would do . . . the assumption is that they have gone through whatever accreditation, the Bermuda Accountant Act . . . I can't remember the exact name of it. They have gone through that accreditation, and they are an able person, able to do that audit or the work that they have been deemed appropriate to do.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The other question asked by the Opposition Leader does not make sense. You would have heard me speak on a few [occasions] to say that we are hoping that the Auditor General does not want to do the audit all over again. But because of the Audit Act 1990 they are responsible for government funds. And until we change that—until we change that [and say that] government bodies can appoint their own auditors and it does not have to be referred, it does not have to be sent to the Auditor General.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Then we are where we are with that.

The Chairman: Member, can you please refer your comments to the Chair.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The other question from Ms. Jackson is that the audit that would be done by a duly appropriate audit firm in Bermuda would be made public, just as any other audit would be. And as we said in the brief, that those audits will be forwarded over to the Auditor General to do what it is that she wishes . . . well, we are saying “she,” but what the Auditor General will wish to do with it at that time. But the audits that have [been done] that the Bermuda College will have as an external audit will be valid. And they will be used for the various reports that they need to be used for.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to ask questions?

I recognise the Member Richardson.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

Would the Minister consider adding the proportionality principle by adding the language of appropriate?

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, we will not be doing any amendments to this Bill. I'm presenting as presented today.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other questions as it relates to the clauses?

There being none, Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I would like to move that clauses 1 through 3 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 3 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There being none, Minister.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 3 passed.]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?
There are none, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam 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?
There are none.
Minister, thank you.

[Motion carried: The Bermuda College Amendment Act 2022 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

The Chairman: We call on the Speaker of the House to resume his seat.

House resumed at 3:57 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

BERMUDA COLLEGE AMENDMENT ACT 2022

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bermuda College Amendment Act 2022 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none. The matter has been reported.

This actually brings us to a close of the Order Paper today. So we can do our third readings now. Premier, would you like to do your third reading?

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 Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act [2022] be read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
There are none.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

The Speaker: Continue, Premier.

BILL

THIRD READING

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (NO. 2) ACT 2022

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act 2022 be 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 Customs Tariff Amendment (No. 2) Act 2022 was given a third reading and passed.]

The Speaker: Minister of Education.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended and enable me to move the Bill entitled Bermuda College Amendment Act 2022 be now read for the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections to that?
There are none.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

The Speaker: Continue, Minister.

BILL

THIRD READING

BERMUDA COLLEGE AMENDMENT ACT 2022

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill now be 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 Bermuda College Amendment Act 2022 was given a third reading and passed.]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Members.
Mr. Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Friday, October 7.

The Speaker: Is there any objection?

There are no objections to it.

Does anyone wish to speak to that?

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Mr. Famous. How are you, sir? You have your 20 minutes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I will not take that long. Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, it is so nice to be back in your House once again.

The Speaker: Yes.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY RETURNING TO IN-PERSON SITTINGS

Mr. Christopher Famous: It has been a long time—two and a half years.

The Speaker: It is nice to have you all back.

Mr. Christopher Famous: The last time we were in the House there were more people on this side.

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, firstly, I just want to thank the . . . it has been a long two years, two and a half years for us to be in this House.

And I want to thank those first responders, emergency services and so on that have—

[Inaudible interjection]

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah! Mr. Whip. Mr. Whip.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Yes. All right.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Stop my time. Stop my time.

The Speaker: Yes. We understand that it is your first occasion to sit here. We understand that.

Continue.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I will forgive the new Member. This is his first day.

Firstly, I want to welcome the new Members into the House, MP from constituency 23 especially, MP from constituency 19,—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: New Deputy.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes. Any new Members in the House?

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Beg pardon?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Continue on.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Sorry.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, just to say, listen, we have not been in the House for a long time. We have known each other mostly on Zoom for the last two and a half years, or whatever. What do they call that thing?

The Speaker: WebEx.

Mr. Christopher Famous: WebEx. Right.

I want to thank the HOA [House of Assembly] staff that have kept us in check even while we were online.

Mr. Speaker, we are at the point in our country where fake news seems to be the news of the day—people just making things up, putting them on Facebook, putting them on WhatsApp, putting them on other sites. I will not call any names. But, Mr. Speaker, this is what it comes down to—human relationships. All right? People can write all that they want on Facebook. They can write all that they want on *Royal Gazette*. But it is human relationships that build or break people's political careers. So, I just want to say to—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: I was going to call his name.

An Hon. Member: No, you weren't.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, I was. I called it yesterday.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: No. No. No. No. Today is a good day. Today is a good day.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yea, though I walk through the valley . . .

The Speaker: Just speak to the Chair.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Just direct your comments directly here. That way you will be safe.

GENERATING DIVISIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, one of the hallmarks of Devonshire politics is that we believe in relationships. It does not matter which team you are on, we believe in relationships. Last week, I saw . . . two weeks ago, I saw MP Caines take it upon himself to do something in his constituency. He went down to Happy Valley and cleared some bushes. A couple of months before that he went down to Deepdale and he cleared . . . I won't say "he," but he gathered a neighbourhood together to transform the ethos of that neighbourhood. That is about relationships.

I saw a lady in the store the other day and she stopped me and said, *How come you don't call me for my birthday?*

I said, *I'm not your MP.* She said, *Oh!*

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: She said, *You can still call me. Ain't I just across the street?*

And I said, *Well, you know, your MP is Mr. Dunkley.*

She said, *Yes. He calls me. He sends birthday cards. You know, if I need anything done—*

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: You don't call them?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Work with me! Work with me!

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: I think you caught him off guard with that compliment today.

Mr. Christopher Famous: I pranked him. But anyway, he is eating into my time.

Mr. Speaker, here's the thing. There are people who are on *Royal Gazette* who are at each other's throats every day. They are on Facebook at each other's throats every day. And they sort of paint this pic-

ture as if we are all at each other's throats every day. And we are not really. This is our first day. This is like the first day of school. We are back and everyone is all happy to see each other. You know, we will get into it now and then, but generally speaking—

The Speaker: I hope none of these students have to take a note home to their parents. Just be nice.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Or have to come—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Mr. Speaker, the point I am getting at is irrespective of whichever side you are on, or even with whatever side you are on, on a particular side, the point is that the people are looking to us for leadership.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: They have continued to look to us for leadership, not just through COVID-19, not just through a hurricane, not just through a financial crisis. They are just looking to us even if leadership means, *Listen, I do not know the answer. I will point you to the right direction.* If the right direction happens to be red or green, it does not matter. Just point them in that direction.

I say this to the listening public. Do not believe what you [see] [in the] *Royal Gazette*, in the comments section. (Let me be specific.) What you see on Facebook is just . . . these are individuals. These are not your politicians. People have this idea that we are like antagonistic to each other, we do not like each other and it's this camp and . . . well, it is kind of this camp and that camp sometimes. But the point I am getting at, Mr. Speaker, is that I am glad to be back in your House. I am glad to be amongst our brothers and sisters in here and I am looking forward to some very nice debates over the next couple of months. And once again, welcome to the new Members.

And whenever you see somebody talking, don't walk in front of them. Walk around the side or else you will end up in his office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Famous, for keeping it short.

Does any other Member wish to keep it short? MP Dunkley, you have the floor.

GENERATING DIVISIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I look for the reset of that clock. Although I doubt that I will be 20 minutes tonight.

The Speaker: There you go.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you.

Let me start off by first saying that I agree with what the Honourable Member from a neighbouring constituency said (constituency 11) about what you read on the anonymous blogs that we have. It is certainly toxic. And it does cause a bigger divide than there ever needs to be amongst colleagues and the political parties. Because quite often when I talk to people who do not know me well . . . the people who know you well know what happens in the House because you are talking about it on a regular basis. They are interested. But people who do not know you well, when they call you, or they stop you on the street or whatever, they say, *Man, is it really that bad up there?*

I said, *What are you talking about?*

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You say, *No; it's worse.*

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I said, *No.*

The only person who can get obnoxious at certain times is the Honourable Member who just interpolated from the back of the room.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: But even he has a sense of humour, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, one of the . . . and the Honourable Member touched on a good length when he spoke, because it is important that we recognise the fact that, unfortunately, politics throughout the world is becoming much more combative than it ever needs to be. Look at what has recently happened in jurisdictions around the world. Look how combative it gets. Look at the memes that people make up. Look how they talk so disrespectfully about the people they elected to serve them, without real facts to back up what they are doing, Mr. Speaker.

It is sad and unfortunate that, to me, too many people spend a lot of time on social media outlets who do not have the fortitude to actually stand up and say who they are. Because when you stand up and say who you are, then you are really interested in a constructive debate and to heal the divide, to deal with the riffs, and to move the country forward. But if you want to hide behind your assigned name, or whatever it may be, you are an armchair quarterback.

The Speaker: No accountability.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes. No accountability. You can say how bad Dak Prescott was last week, but it does not mean anything. So, Mr. Speaker, especially when we face real challenges in our country, we need all of us to try to row in the right direction. Not just when a hurricane comes. And that is why Hon-

ourable Member Curtis Dickinson, who now sits on my side, Mr. Speaker—

Some Hon. Members: Clarify that.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Well, we're short on numbers, Mr. Speaker,—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker!

[Laughter]

The Speaker: We all got the gist of it.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Well, we are short on numbers so they are trying to put some strength over here. We appreciate it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker!

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Honourable Member Caines sits right behind me, so I feel really strong right now, Mr. Speaker. But I don't want to digress from what I was trying to say.

The Speaker: Yes. Continue on.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, as we try to heal some of the challenges we have, as we try to move forward, we need people moving and rowing in the right direction. And as the Honourable Member Curtis Dickinson said, we should not just come together, row in the right direction when we have a hurricane. And most of the time, we do it because of our breeding. But a lot of times people pull together during a hurricane because they are afraid, right? Because we need people around us. We are afraid.

Misery wants company in this case, Mr. Speaker. So, I ask people . . . Yes, we can have our differences. We can be vehement about it, but let's be respectful in trying to get where we are going. Because automatically now, I think the vast majority of people, when they hear that loud noise of nasty criticism without being substantiated under a code name that no one knows, they just withdraw. The majority of people in the community just withdraw because they do not want to get involved in the fight. Most people do not want to be targeted. They just want to be able to help the members they elected or people who sit on boards or whatever it may be. They do not want to get shot at, so they withdraw. And then we have fewer people trying to go in the right direction.

So, I applaud the Honourable Member for bringing it up. And I would hope that the people would have some courage to stand up and push back at

those who do not want to contribute to growth; they want to contribute to the negative. And there is too much negative in the world. There is way too much negative in the world. If you just looked at what was going around us, we would think that we live in the worst place. We live in paradise. We have our challenges, and we cannot fix them by dividing more and more and more, Mr. Speaker.

EMERGENCY MEASURES AND THE TRAVEL AUTHORISATION FORM

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Now, one of the challenges I would like to spend my last moments talking about, Mr. Speaker, is . . . and I hope the Honourable Minister Wilson is doing well. The Honourable Minister is not here today, so I am going to be very careful where I go with this because this is under her responsibility, Mr. Speaker. But I have a couple of concerns that I talked privately to you about, and you said I could raise it on the motion to adjourn.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that close to a month ago, I wrote in questions to the Honourable Minister to answer in writing on the September 16 [sitting]. That was obviously pushed back, and then we had the tributes to Her late Majesty the Queen. And now here we are today. Those questions have not been answered.

Now, I understand that the Minister is not here today. And as I said, I hope she is doing well. But I would have thought that with having almost a month go by that those questions, which were tabled for a *written* answer, could have at least been given to the House, Mr. Speaker. Because after a month, two extra weeks to answer them, I would have hoped that they would be ready for tabling in the House. And Cabinet is big enough. There are a number of capable people in Cabinet who can table those questions, Mr. Speaker. And because they were written, they are not subject to a question-and-answer period, Mr. Speaker.

So, I say all of that because today the Honourable Minister had put forward to your good office, Mr. Speaker, to read a statement about the roadmap for ending COVID-19 measures. Unfortunately, the Minister is not here today so it was not delivered, but it was available for all Members to look at, Mr. Speaker. And obviously it is an important subject that I wanted to address because my colleagues and I are very concerned about it, Mr. Speaker. And I think you and Members of the House are well aware that this side, the OBA side, has disagreements and differences with the Government. And so, I will refer to the statements sparingly, Mr. Speaker, because the Honourable Minister is not here.

One of the Statements was tabled but was never read. I will refer to it sparingly because I believe the Minister gave two press conferences this past week. The latest one [is from] yesterday where the Honourable Minister did read a statement (which I

have a full copy of), and the Minister referred to a roadmap to end the public health emergency, Mr. Speaker. And I was looking forward to today understanding what that roadmap was, because the Honourable Minister had referred to it, but did not say anything about it in the press conference yesterday. So today the statement that was not read does refer to a roadmap out of it, Mr. Speaker, because one of the concerns that we have now is we had called for the elimination of many of the restrictions and the Travel Authorisation form for some months now. The Minister stated that the emergency measures are going to be extended to October 25 and then to the end of November and that there was some question of what is going to happen (my words, not the Minister's words) with the Travel Authorisation and the fee.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the Statement that was not read out today, the Minister did refer to reasons why to not end the public health emergency, and they basically (my words again) stated that there were concerns about public health officials, on what would happen this coming autumn and winter as far as the pandemic is concerned. And I can understand, and I can accept that, Mr. Speaker. However, I believe that perhaps our public health officials know something here that other public health officials in the rest of the world do not know. And why do I say that, Mr. Speaker? It is because the rest of the world—certainly our major trading partners, the countries we have direct air links with—are getting rid of all the measures.

Right now, to go to the United States, all you need to do is fill out . . . when you travel, the airline will send you information and you have to show you are vaccinated. Canada has dropped a lot of them recently. The UK has dropped a lot of them recently. And when they have done that, Mr. Speaker, they have given notice on a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday, and on Sunday they are done away with, Mr. Speaker. So, what are our public health officials advising Government here today that we have to be concerned about this winter which other countries around the world do not seem to take seriously? Because they have opened up. They have relaxed these restrictions.

In fact, my brother came home yesterday, Mr. Speaker. He came from Boston and when he landed, Mr. Speaker, there was an announcement that when you enter the Bermuda airport terminal you have to wear a mask. And passengers were aghast. *We have to wear a mask?* Many of them did not have a mask. The interesting thing about it, Mr. Speaker, is that I was told by people that when they check in at the airport, they are not even asking for the TA anymore. And I myself was not asked for it two weeks ago when I came back from New York City, Mr. Speaker. So, we have restrictions and regulations that the airlines seem to not even worry about now.

So, that makes me ask two questions: Are they being effective? And secondly, what is the need for?

Let's get back to what the need for is, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there is an ongoing debate about where the pandemic goes from here. But, Mr. Speaker, if we had had this conversation four or five months ago, probably most parliaments throughout the world or governing bodies throughout the world, most of the public health officials would say, *In a year or two the pandemic will still be with us. We will still have a lot of challenges.* But, Mr. Speaker, I ask people to reflect on where we are now. And would those same people still say that? No. That is my belief, Mr. Speaker. Because suddenly the pandemic seems to have waned and disappeared.

Now, it does not mean that it will not come back. But, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we as a community, and communities all over the world, are in a much better position to deal with it because of what we have learned, what we have done, what is available to us. Vaccines play a part in that. Prescription medicine plays a part in that. And we are more aware about our health surroundings, Mr. Speaker. And now, I am not so concerned about COVID-19 because I feel comfortable in the space I am in and what I know about it, Mr. Speaker. I am more concerned about the seasonal flu which we have not heard a word from the Health Department about. But I know for a fact that it is prevalent in Bermuda just because of how I have seen it impact the circle that I am in every day. And it is a real bugger. Mr. Speaker, I had to be careful. I was going to use another word that starts with a "B," but I had to use another word.

The Speaker: Just remember where you are.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I did. I did. I remember and I am back here, not on Zoom. It's a real bugger, Mr. Speaker, because it comes quickly for 24 to 48 hours and it really, it takes you. It takes you to a place you do not want to be, sitting close to your bathroom, and you can't keep anything down. So, Mr. Speaker when we come to the fall—

An Hon. Member: What kind of flu do you get?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Luckily, I haven't had it yet. And you don't want to get it either.

But when we come to the fall and the winter, Mr. Speaker, I am more worried about the flu because a lot of people who used to get the seasonal flu shots are not taking them because they are tired of vaccines and things like that.

So, we need to step up the programme to make sure we protect ourselves from the flu. Because I think our bodies have been under a lot of strain over the past couple of years and we need to be very careful about the resistance we have built up.

But back to these regulations. We are pleased that Government has decided that on the 25th of October and the 30th of November they are going to relax them. We would like to know, when the Honourable Minister has the opportunity to tell us, what happens with the TA and the fee. And if it is all about the money, please just come out and say it is all about the money, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I hear Honourable Members say we have already said that, Mr. Speaker. But what I am hearing now and reading now in statements is that they are trying to justify it another day. *Well, we still have concerns.* That does not tell me it is all about the money. *We still have concerns with what has happened.* And you know, the Minister has said in the all the statements that we believe that the TA has helped us with border control, helped the BTA, helped the Immigration Department and helped the Customs Department.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And the Finance Ministry, as my famous interpolator behind me said, *the Finance Minister.* Yes, we know that, Mr. Speaker, \$22 million has been budgeted for this year. But if the TA is helping those departments, then why did we get rid of it before? And if that is the case, why do we not bring it back and it is not a Travel Authorisation form, Mr. Speaker?

It can easily be done when you get on a plane if they want that information, Mr. Speaker. Because, Mr. Speaker, I have said it over and over and over again, the pushback I get from Government Members, respectfully sometimes, is that . . . I am told and I have seen it and I am hit up by people all the time that the TA is a pain to fill out. And when I travel with family—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: And I hear Members already saying, *Oh, boy.* But you know, I can show you emails. I can give you recounts . . . And when you travel with a family, the amount involved . . . and, Mr. Speaker, let's not forget, if it is an aggravation to people, that is one thing. And it is important because, you know, now that the world is opening up to air travel, they can jump on a plane and go anywhere they want, and they are going to go to the areas of least resistance. And maybe that is one reason why our air capacity is weaker this winter. Maybe they are going to areas of least resistance, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Now he's making up fairy tales, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Now, Mr. Speaker,

The Speaker: Let him finish. Let him finish his point.
Develop your point, go ahead.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe it has hurt Bermuda financially as well.

An Hon. Member: Here we go.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Not only by cruise ship people who have said that, but, Mr. Speaker, by international businesspeople who . . . and the Honourable Minister has said, the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance said in his Statement this morning that international business is (my words, not his) carrying the Bermuda economy and stuff. And people want to travel to get back to business. And people want to come here to get back to business. These restrictions as they are being lifted for October . . . I hope they help this one company that wanted to have a big conference down here, but they were concerned about it because their people did not want to come with those restrictions, Mr. Speaker.

I say this, not to be critical of the Government. I say this because, like all colleagues in this room, I love Bermuda. I want to be healthy. Trust me, when the pandemic first hit, I did not know what that COVID-19 was. It was like a mysterious thing that could sneak into your room and get into you and put a funk in you for a while. And it put a funk into us for a couple of years, Mr. Speaker. But now we know how to deal with it. I think people are living their lives still with that background of knowing how to deal with it. So, let's have some faith in people.

The Honourable Premier says we need to get back to a more normal way of life. There is no valid reason in my view for these restrictions to continue until the 25th of October, the emergency measures to continue to the 21st through the 30th and have the TA, Mr. Speaker.

Loosen up!

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Can the Honourable Member please state what restrictions he is not in support of under the public health emergency? As the only restrictions that exist under the public health emergency as of Monday are masks to be required in health care facilities, hospitals and at the correction facilities. Please, tell me what he is saying. There are no other restrictions to the country. It is the same debate we had in July. So, he says he does not believe we should have these restrictions. He says he does not

support the public health emergency. I would like him to clarify what specific restrictions he does not support.

The Speaker: Continue.

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

Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. I am referring to the emergency measures that are carried on for two more months and the Travel Authorisation form, Mr. Speaker.

If the Government cannot see that this is an issue with people, I cannot help them. Because I heard Government Members all day today say they are listening to the people. Well, if that is the case, you have got to listen to this.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I came back a couple of weeks ago, as I said, from Atlanta, I was shocked because I had all my information on the phone. They never asked me for any information. And I was travelling with my son-in-law, and I said, *When we get to the gate, you are home free.*

He said, *No. They will ask us at the gate.*

I said, *No they won't. That was the place to ask you because once you are at the gate, you are already checked in.*

They never asked.

Then when I got to Bermuda, Mr. Speaker,—

An Hon. Member: Where is this?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I had it out, Mr. Speaker. Even whispered conversations with health officials down there were saying it was time to end, Mr. Speaker. I am not naming who they are.

An Hon. Member: Hearsay.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I hear Honourable Members say, *Hearsay*, Mr. Speaker. But why would they have a conversation with me, Mr. Speaker?

An Hon. Member: You named them. You just did. Everybody knows who they are.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: No. A name is saying "Zane De Silva." That's a name. Right? I don't need to name him.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask the Government, if it is all about the money, just stand up and say it is all about the money. We gave money in the fuel rebate which is laudable because it is necessary for people. Some people have to travel every day. They cannot take the bus and they cannot take the ferry. But, Mr. Speaker, if it is all about that, say *it is all about the money and until we get a certain amount, we are going to keep it on.*

People might accept the sincerity, Mr. Speaker. But right now, they do not understand why the

Emergency Order continues and the TA continues. So, I hope the Honourable Minister can find some opportunity to really explain the roadmap, Mr. Speaker. Because we stand strongly on our position that now is a good time. It could have been a good time a couple of months ago, Mr. Speaker, but now is certainly a good time to end it. And let's concentrate on some of the real and pressing problems that we have.

[According to the] last report by the Government, Mr. Speaker, there were 37 active cases in Bermuda. No one can remember a number that low for a long period of time. We have proven that our health care system can handle it, Mr. Speaker. Our health care system can handle it, Mr. Speaker, and so now let's drop that stuff. Let's move forward. Let's deal with the real challenges that we have, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP Caines.

Mr. Wayne Caines: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A COMMON CAUSE

Mr. Wayne Caines: Mr. Speaker, there was a murder—the first murder that happened. And the question was asked, *Cain, where is your brother Abel?*

And, Mr. Speaker, you know the response. He responded, *Am I my brother's keeper?*

The Speaker: My brother's keeper.

Mr. Wayne Caines: The question that I would like to pose this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is: Are we our brother's and sister's keepers?

We have heard from MP Famous and he, in his opening delivery, shared that there has to be a step change. The step change has to centre around this community coming together, working on problems, putting our shoulder to the proverbial wheel together and working on problems that plague this country.

Mr. Famous went on to mention and to give emphasis to those who seek to divide us using social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram and WhatsApp groups, with nameless, faceless people who stir, who mix up, who cause divisive action in our country without the accountability in this country of making or being agents of change. We have seen the Minister of National Security and his team go through this country and lament and cry and shake their fists in the face of what is going on with families in Bermuda as we suffer the plague of gang violence.

Mr. Speaker, we talked earlier about what we see in our community during a crisis, during a storm. I live on Lighthouse Lane as you know, Mr. Speaker. And coming down Lighthouse Lane, there was a massive tree that fell on our street. And when I say massive, I mean a massive tree. I drove across on my way to town and I stopped, and I said, *This tree will take at least three hours if it is cut down to pieces then to lug the actual pieces out of the road then to come back and take up the leaves and the shrubbery and the debris from this. This will be a Herculean undertaking.* And I said that this will have to wait for the Bermuda Regiment to come or we will have to wait for three or four BELCO crews to come. But the neighbours realised something.

The neighbours realised that this prevented the egress. This prevented the helping agencies. This prevented BELCO from getting to their neighbourhood. In other words, the neighbours realised that they were cut off from each other and our main Island because of this tree.

Now, the neighbours had a choice. (And I will tie this together.) The neighbours had a choice. The neighbours could either sit and shake their fists and say, *Oh my goodness, we have a tree in the street.* They could call all of the helping agencies. They could call BELCO. They could call the Bermuda Regiment. They could call Works and Engineering and lament that there was a tree in the street. But the neighbours had a choice. Mr. Speaker, what the neighbours did, they bandied together. The knocks went on the doors of the White, the Black, the middle class. Everyone saw that as a common problem for everybody in the neighbourhood that they could fix together. There was no committee. There was no alienation by race, creed or colour. There was a common cause.

I heard the chainsaws start going together. I watched as this neighbourhood came together in concert to solve a problem. I watched as the men—one, two, three—take the gigantic pieces of wood and throw it on the side. Together they did it in record time, Mr. Speaker. They were able to take what was a gigantic tree which presented a gigantic problem which was a gigantic hindrance to the people in the neighbourhood, and in a matter of an hour this problem no longer existed.

That very evening as I was driving, it made me contextualise this problem into a number of other challenges that we are having Island-wide, Mr. Speaker. And I thought about the way that people put it on the line. There is a risk in being out in the neighbourhood and trying to cut down a tree without the proper training, without the proper equipment. They knew that it was fraught with risk, mental and physical fatigue. But there was a common goal.

If we look at what is going on with gang violence . . . I watched a symposium that was done by the Minister of National Security who is doing it as we speak. The country is grappling with some challenges

that we have, and it centres around gang violence. It centres around the loss of life, the apathy of our young men. But I believe that this is a problem that we can work on together.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I would like to highlight an example of this.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Caines: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am blessed to be the MP for constituency 14. In our constituency we have an area called One Way Deepdale. One Way Deepdale was the epicentre for antisocial behaviour in Bermuda, Mr. Speaker. The neighbours were plagued with the selling of drugs, people coming backwards and forwards in the neighbourhood up that one-way when it was a one-way the wrong way, coming down to buy drugs. People in the neighbourhood . . . four shootings; murders in the last five years have taken place. And guess in what area? One Way Deepdale, Mr. Speaker. There were almost three attempted murders in that neighbourhood. If you look at the houses in the neighbourhood, you can see the bullet fragments going into the homes.

Children were not playing in the neighbourhood, Mr. Speaker. This was a neighbourhood where Mr. Arnold Francis . . . that's where his family came [from], Deepdale. [And] Ellen Douglas. When you talk about notable Bermuda families, ask them where they came from, where their homesteads were. On Deepdale. This became a proverbial war zone in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, these neighbours had a choice. They had a choice to call the *Royal Gazette* and do an anonymous post and blame the Government and say Pastor Bean was not doing what he was supposed to do. They had the responsibility to just shake their fists again and go on Facebook and say, *Look at the crisis we find ourselves in*. But do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They put together a neighbourhood watch. They put times down on a schedule. They got together. Everyone in this neighbourhood knocked on each door. And they first held themselves accountable.

But more importantly, this neighbourhood realised that this was a community problem, Mr. Speaker. They got together. They set up a neighbourhood watch. Mr. Speaker, this thing called a WhatsApp group that people use to send gossip and mischief, they used as a tool to stay together, to be together, to work together, every day sending texts, sending updates, sending motivational speeches, sending a little quip, encouraging each other, understanding that their minds were very important. They had to uplift each other. They had to band together.

Mr. Speaker, one day I came and the neighbours had gotten all of the neighbourhood together. There was a plot of land that was used to throw . . . where the drug dealers hid, where people came backwards and forwards. It was the bastion of the an-

tisocial behaviour as an effigy to what this neighbourhood had to do. They got trucks. And everybody came and they loaded up the trucks. They put on their gloves—the entire neighbourhood. The grandmothers who could not lift and could not be out there, guess what they did? They cooked the food that you would say “agrees,” Mr. Speaker. This neighbourhood came together, and they cleared away all the debris. They cleared away all the bottles. They got rid of all the weeds. Step one.

What had to happen then, Mr. Speaker? The neighbourhood had to look at what they could do based on what they had in front of them. What they had in front of them was a barren field, effigies of years and years and years of mismanagement, throwing bottles, not taking care of the land. The earth had to be tilled. Zane De Silva donated—

An Hon. Member: Honourable Member.

Mr. Wayne Caines: The Honourable Member, thank you.

The Honourable Member donated the soil, truckloads of soil. Other Members in this community, ATL, Wilmot Trucking, they came by. Tons of people volunteered. And guess what this neighbourhood did, Mr. Speaker? They decided to plant a garden.

Now, somebody would say that it is just a garden. And we will come back there for a minute. This neighbourhood needed hope. This neighbourhood needed hope! This neighbourhood needed something to bring it together. As they started to plant, everybody planted in the neighbourhood, Mr. Speaker. I drove by there one weekend. I did not see anything, and no one was in the neighbourhood, and no one was selling. And I looked, and they still had the meeting on Monday evening. And everybody came in the neighbourhood, and they shared their dreams. I asked, *Are people still coming in the neighbourhood on a regular basis?*

They said, *Mr. Caines, they are not coming in the neighbourhood as much.*

[I said,] *What do you need?*

They shared, Mr. Speaker. *We need speed bumps. We need better lighting. We need the CCTV camera up.*

I asked why. They said because the speed bump . . . People are using this as a thoroughfare. Our kids cannot play outside. The Minister of Works and Engineering got the speed bumps up. We got better lighting in the area. I knew somebody who could work on the lights, Mr. Speaker. And we got better lighting in the area, better CCTV in the area. Guess what happened, Mr. Speaker? The young men who were at the bottom of the hill were there no longer.

Now, we might be proud of the fact that the men at the bottom of the hill were there no longer. I was not. I knew that if we did not find opportunities for them, the problem would simply go to another neigh-

bourhood. We made it our business to find these young men, ask them how this community could work together.

Because guess what the next thing was, Mr. Speaker? They were sons and daughters and . . . God, my cousin. My second cousin was one of the young men sitting on the wall. How could I go and proclaim how great and how good we are doing when my second cousin was sitting on the wall? It now became all of our responsibly to find something for them to do, to give them encouragement to go to Bermuda College. So said, so done, Mr. Speaker.

Six weeks later, I went back. And I went into the neighbourhood, visiting their meetings every week. And, Mr. Speaker, I came in one day and it was quiet, deafly quiet. And I saw a young lady ride by on her bike. And her mom, [eyes] filled with tears, said, *Mr. Caines, my daughter, for the first time in years, gets to ride her bike in her neighbourhood.* She was riding and both legs coming, enjoying herself in the neighbourhood where heretofore she could not do that.

Two weeks later they called us back, Mr. Speaker, and they called the Premier and they said they wanted to share something with us. We went to the neighbourhood, and they had something called “first fruits.” The people who had no hope, the people who felt that this country was not a place to live, the people who were coming to me and telling me that they were considering relocating to the United Kingdom because it was unsafe, it was unhealthy, and it was a place where they could not live, they worked together. They put their minds together. Key community partners came in, KBB [Keep Bermuda Beautiful] as well, and worked as a unit. And this—one of the most adversely affected communities—had a community garden. And they gave away zucchinis, and watermelon and callaloo—all sorts of fruits and vegetables that they were able to [grow].

I looked at this . . . the Premier . . . I was full of emotion as I am right now when I think of it. Why? This was an example, not of lip service. This was not an example of people who did not have or did not have a spirit. These were people who found their voice together. These were people who needed people to invest in them, to help them in specific things and help them with their compass to find their way. This is a microcosm of where we are in Bermuda. And like that big tree in Southampton, this is an example of what we can do community-wide, community in this country, Mr. Speaker.

For too long we have sat back, and we have said that this is a Government problem, this is a Pembroke problem, this is something that the families in central Pembroke have to do, or this is something that is just affecting working-class families. The tree is the example of us working together for a common cause. The Deepdale scenario is an example of a community that found their voice, that held their community ac-

countable, that connected with key stakeholders, and together they solved a community problem.

The question that was initially posed is: Am I my brother's keeper? When we look at our social media, how easy it is for us to find ourselves so deeply ensconced in our political, our social circles that we forget what it is like to be a part of a community, the Bermuda community. If we are indeed to rise from the mire, from the muck that is besetting this community, the only way we can do it, Mr. Speaker, is to do it together in concert with each other, without fear, without favour, without being deeply ensconced into corners that are based on colour and creed. And that, Mr. Speaker, is how we tackle this scourge of violence together. That is how we tackle homelessness. That is how we tackle the problem of teen pregnancy. We attack it as a community, each one of us focusing on our area of giftedness, focusing on the area where we have been blessed and finding a void, a chasm, a lacuna in our community and putting our proverbial shoulder to the wheel.

I am sick, Mr. Speaker. I am tired of listening to people complain. I am sick, Mr. Speaker. I am tired of reading people's voices, their speeches, what they are saying. Our community needs people to roll up their sleeves to find a hole, and to help dig, to help fill. That is the challenge for the people of Bermuda. Everybody wants to be a part of the voice, to be a part of this voice that is growing in our community, to say your piece, to write your piece. We have enough of those armchair quarterbacks, Mr. Speaker, intellectual twerkers. We need people who are going to roll up their sleeves and work in our community clubs, in our churches, in our civic groups, in our fraternities, in our sororities, in our lodges.

We need people who are lying dormant and are sitting dispossessed and not doing anything to stop talking and to help us in this country to make this country a better place. It is time. The men and women in this room are on their posts because they believe this is how they make a commitment to change in this country. I implore. I demand. I cry out to Mr. and Mrs. Bermuda. Find a corner! Make a difference! Help somebody! Change somebody's life, Mr. Speaker. Because the question to be asked is: Are you your brother's and sisters' keeper?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Mr. Hayward.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A COMMON CAUSE

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, it is a shame that this Chamber is not full because if we, as politicians, were down on our motivation or we lost focus of what is required of us, I believe MP Caines certainly pro-

vided the food that we require to reenergise ourselves to get back on our horses and do the work of the people.

We talked about the cost of living crisis. The MP from constituency 14, MP Caines, touched on the social crisis plaguing communities. But there is another crisis that is amongst us, and it is this recurring theme about these major issues that are plaguing our society that we must combat. And that is the one of an ageing population.

Mr. Speaker, I was at a round-table discussion held last night at Bermuda College where we had health care professionals, where we had economists, where we had persons from the private sector all weighing in on this topic. This is a matter that will impact the Bermuda population gravely.

The population and the demographic shifts that we are experiencing are real and they require collective effort to address. And it is this continued theme of this collective effort because the Government cannot do it alone. Notwithstanding that persons blame the Government for all that is wrong in society. It is unfair. I cannot go to nursery school with somebody and then attend the same primary school, then attend the same high school, we both [went to] Bermuda College . . . I am now in politics, and you are not happy where you are with your life. And now it is my fault?

I do accept that when I signed up as an MP, I made a social contract with the voters to ensure that I would continue to strive to have them live in dignity in this country, maintain a quality of life for those individuals. I do not take my role lightly. What is asked upon me, I try my best to deliver in a professional manner, in an effective way that has meaningful outcomes. When I started as an MP, I said I do not want to squander my time, as a Member of Parliament.

I thank the Premier for giving me the opportunity to sit on the Front Bench and be effective in a ministerial role. I always grew up playing team sports. Most teams I played for I was the captain. But I was never the best player on the field. I played right- or centre-back. Most times, the most valuable player was a midfielder or attacker. The person that scores the goal to win the game is the person who gets most of the credit at the end of the day. A striker can make 10 mistakes; a defender cannot afford to make one. It may be too costly for the team.

I am comfortable with playing my position. And that is the exact same thing MP Caines was alluding to in a different way. If we all play our position effectively, we are able to move forward in a manner that we can see the results in this community. Famous gave the illusion of this *Kumbaya* . . . MP Famous.

The Speaker: Honourable Member. Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Honourable Member [Famous] gave this illusion of this *Kumbaya*. There is no unity

between us. One party is in power. And the other party is seeking to be in power and they will do all that they have to, including all of that social media stuff that was alluded to, to make us look bad for their benefit.

The Speaker: I would want to think that every Member in this room is above that fake news and stuff. So, let me just throw that out there for everybody's ears. I would think that we are all above that.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have personally felt it. And so I am now Minister of Economy and Labour. But if you go to the OBA webpage or blog, you will see their Members referring to me as "Union Thug" because up on Parliament I wore a T-shirt that said "Union Thug."

I attended a Canadian Labour Congress summer school in Port Elgin, Canada. In our welcome bags there were Union Thug T-shirts. The women all had pink T-shirts with Union Thug [printed in] blue and the men all had black T-shirts with Union Thug [printed in] white. I was one of the few of my skin colour. When they wear their Union Thug T-shirts, it is fighting for the working people of their constituency. When I wear mine, I am branded as something different.

I am who I am. And God knows who I am. So, you may say you believe things are above certain people, but they are not.

The Speaker: I said I *hope* they would be. You stressed the word "hope."

Hon. Jason Hayward: I have hope that I will be referred to as Minister Hayward while I hold this office, and that when I look at their blogs, they are saying why they disagree with the policy I put forward and not attacking me as an individual. But I have no problem with that.

Mr. Speaker, I have a constituency whose major concern is their health and well-being. BELCO is a major issue within the constituency and the smokestack emitting an undesirable level of pollution and soot. [BELCO's pollution] is not the fault of the current administration. But equally BELCO and the Government need to work together to find the solution for my constituency. While the Member is happy to clean up one constituency, I need his assistance with cleaning up another constituency.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Absolutely.

Hon. Jason Hayward: And just as his constituents desire from him a safe and healthy environment, my constituents require from him the same. Because I too have constituents who are seriously concerned about their health and well-being and are also looking to leave Bermuda because of that. I am pleased that the Minister responsible for the environment will be mov-

ing forward with some level of regulation to ensure that our communities are not polluted. But in every constituency clinic I have, this is the number one issue for the members of my constituency. Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. What these people have to endure is simply unacceptable. Simply unacceptable.

What is in their water, the fact that they cannot open their windows . . . and I can empathise with the fact that you cannot open the windows because I grew up on Parsons Road. And my backyard was the dump and that [Marsh Folly] pond. And on a hot summer day, you do not open your house windows. You would be looking in your trash thinking, *What is that sour thing?* You look in your toilet to see if somebody forgot to flush the toilet. You look under your bed to see if there is a dead rat. There is nothing in your house. It is what is across the street.

When I was in a meeting (and other Members can attest to this), a woman stood up and she did not harp on BELCO. She did not harp on the Minister responsible for Home Affairs. She said, *You're a Hayward. I'm a Hayward. Live up to your name.*

So, today, Mr. Speaker, I want to let the members of my constituency know that I will continue to do all that I can to ensure that they have a clean, safe, healthy environment that they can enjoy, where their kids can enjoy, and we can get back to a level of normalcy in constituency 17.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP Cannonier, you have the floor.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did not realise how much we missed each other.

As was pointed out by the Premier, you got two pictures up there. It might be time to change those pictures behind you.

The Speaker: They only just went up for the last sitting that we had.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay.

I was not quite sure if I wanted to speak.

An Hon. Member: You don't have to.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: And therein lies the problem.

An Hon. Member: Why would that be a problem?

The Speaker: Speak to the Chair. You'll be all right. Just speak to the Chair.

THE NEED TO GROW BERMUDA'S ECONOMY

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: You know, the Premier spoke (quote) "relief now and more relief to come." And I am very much appreciative for the fact that we see these certain relief packages coming. If you listen to the blogs and if you listen to whomever, after an article is written and the likes, of course you are going to hear all kinds of things. So, I appreciate Honourable Member Famous coming out and saying everyone has been saying this *Kumbaya* moment.

I have listened very clearly to what has been said. There is another side to relief. And this reference and quote is in reference to the fact that we are going to give more. If you take a look at where we are today, all of us are hearing it. All 36 of us in the House are hearing the same thing. People are frustrated. They are concerned. You know, there are sparks of hope in different conversations. But the sentiment across the Island seems to be a bit of fear. They do not know exactly where we are going from here. And that is a fair assessment. I heard that before when we were Government. We are hearing it now [with] a PLP Government.

So, the other part of that is, we have got to grow the economy. It is fine for us to give. And we should be giving. But part of that giving is a thriving economy. And I have spoken about this from day one. We have got to do more. There needs to be more fervour, more effort put into growing the economy and, more importantly, growing the local economy.

So, I am hoping to hear more as we go forward with this new session from our Premier and Cabinet about the things that they are going to do that is going to grow the economy. We would all know that you can give, but if there is not something that is filling the cup back up, we are going to soon reach a point where, even today, people are basically saying, *Well, you are giving us something.* But they are still leaving.

There is still an alarming [number] of people who are emigrating from the Island, and we have to find a way to get our Bermudians to come back. It is no secret that Minister Hayward (the former speaker) is looking at the issue and challenge of the number of people that are here on the Island. That is something that we preached and talked about when we were Government. We needed to find more of those who could create and bring about a thriving economy to Bermuda.

This was never an intent to say we were just going to bring in (for lack of a better word) gardeners, or that kind of thing. No, we needed to bring back those who are wealth-creators, those who know how and have the means to be able to buy a Southampton Princess so that we can put hundreds of Bermudians back to work. And there are plenty of those around the world who are looking for an opportunity to do just that.

I listened intently as Honourable Member Brother Caines spoke about the rumours and the blogs. And I think Honourable Member Famous spoke

of it as well. It is tough being a leader. Tough. And it does not matter whether you are Government or the Opposition. Those of us in the OBA recognise both sides of it. Many of those who are in the House (maybe not all of them) know what it means to be in Opposition as well as Government

There is no easy road here because the difficulties that we find ourselves in today will take collaboration. And if we are going to take to heart what some of the former Members have had to say, then we need to take to heart the fact that we as leaders have set the tone. And the reason we have so much rumour going around is because we have said it amongst ourselves, all 36 of us.

So, enough has been said about the public. But not enough has been said about us within these four walls—the 36 of us—and how we have conducted ourselves through the rumour mill. And I am sure that many of us . . . the Honourable Member Zane and myself . . . he has been around longer than I have. But we certainly know what it means to come under the spotlight. And I mentioned some time before that I'm not your friend; I'm your brother. And that is what I was hearing from Honourable Member Caines. We are in this together. And somehow and in some way, in this particular House we have got to find the means and the way to show that because, quite frankly, at the end of the day, the rumours are being spread by Honourable Members in this House as well. Not just the public—in this House. And that is tough! That is tough!

My colleagues in the OBA will tell you that with all the WhatsApp'ing that they have, and everything, I do not say a word on them! I do not go on them because just typing something can be misunderstood. Being able to understand someone . . . I used to tell them when I was the general manager of People's Pharmacy and the *Royal Gazette* wanted to do an article and things, I said, *No, you're not just going to write. You need to come down here and you need to experience a day here to see what it's like to be in the retail market before you start spouting off your mouth.* And we could very well say that to the public. *You're not up here.*

I can tell you a number of times I would meet up guys on the street and [they would] have a whole lot to say. I said, *Well, come up here and do something about it, then. You got all that mouth. Do something about it.* You want to know the truth, Mr. Speaker? We got too many punks in this Island, okay? They want to say they want to get up there and they tell you this, *Oh, well, you know, if I was in the House of Assembly, I'd be doing this and I'd be doing that.* I have seen grown men in this House of Assembly cry because of the pressure, crack because of the pressure. Now some pressure—not needed. So, if the PLP Government thinks that people like me are going to roll over and just accept a *Kumbaya* moment, then show me, because I have seen enough.

I have been in all kinds of positions. I've seen it first-hand. And I certainly want to be like Honourable Member Caines, who said, *Well, we all worked together and we went down and we got this garden going.* Yes, I want to see that. But the other side of the coin here is not just giving more away. We have got to find a way to get this economy where it needs to be. Because if we don't, we will give and give, and Bermudians are going to continue to find somewhere else to live. And that is our challenge—get our people back.

And the whole rumour about the OBA just wanting to bring a whole bunch of people in here, you know, just willy-nilly, as they say, and get folks here . . . hold on a second. When we were bringing immigration to the table, it was all about bringing people who could create opportunities and wealth for Bermudians. Many moons ago the reason why this economy thrived was because wealthy people from abroad came here and guess what they saw? They saw us working together. *These people say 'good morning,' and 'good afternoon' to each other. They are working together in the communities.* And that's why they wanted to be a part of Bermuda! We have gone a long way from flipping the coin now to where we are chasing away the very people that we want to help create wealth.

Just the other day when we were doing tributes to [Her Majesty the late] Queen Elizabeth II, I was parking at the House of Assembly (and hopefully, we will get back in there one day)—

The Speaker: All in time.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: An Honourable Member came and he said, *Look, look* (in his Bermuda vernacular). And I just love the way we talk, and we need to keep that going. *Hey, look, boss. Listen, man, I'm hearing that man Bob, the former Finance Minister, and all these byes, they made millions of dollars off the airport.*

I said, *What? What?*

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: And therein lies the problem. You are hearing it here in the House of Assembly.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Personally! Now is not the time to joke because we got people out there talking about us as leaders in this House and we need to get serious. So, if we are going to get serious, we are going to follow what Honourable Member Caines is saying. There is no time for joking. People are hurting, people are crying and rumours are going.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

And I hate the fact that the rumour is, *Oh, it is the OBA perpetuating that*. I want to tell you something, Mr. Speaker, when I heard that, you know what I said? *Go down and ask him*.

Don't come to me. Go down and ask him.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I don't know what he is buying and selling.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Come on, Craig. If you are going to be honest—

The Speaker: Talk to the Chair. Talk to the Chair. Talk to the Chair.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Unbelievable!

Now, if he lets me finish the story and stops interpolating (right?), the fact is that by the time we got to the end of the conversation, I said—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Talk to the Chair, talk to the Chair.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: By the time we got to the end of the conversation, I said, *Do you understand how foolish you sound?*

If I had all the money that people said that I got, I would not be in this House of Assembly, I can tell you that right now! Why would I be up here having to deal with my friend down there interpolating every five minutes?

Why?

It doesn't make any sense! And I know that all 36 of us feel that way. We are here to hold to account, and I am going to say that that TA form has got to go.

It's got to go!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It's going.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Because too many people are complaining, *It's going in phases*. I heard that it can go tomorrow. That's when it can go. It is affecting. I spent I don't know how many days trying to help people out. And Honourable Members in here, I called them for help in Government. *Hey, listen, we've got this, this, this and this*. It's got to go.

I mean, you have got a travel agents on . . . and this is not blogging, they are on YouTube complaining. Guys who all they do is cruise and this and that, and they are complaining. So, it was good to hear that we may be coming to an end with this thing, but certainly, certainly, if you listen to some of the fair comments, I think the majority of the people are now frustrated and they are tired of it. We need to find another revenue stream, something that is going to help.

And so, I am extremely appreciative. On the one side, we want to give back. And on the other side, we need to grow the economy. And one of the challenges that the OBA had was that it was so busy trying to grow the economy, because it recognised that it was a challenge, there were not enough rebates coming.

The challenge today is this: Bermuda is screaming right now for something to change. I don't know if it is deep down inside they want the politics to change, or if they want, in addition to that, their situation—not being able to find a job, not being paid enough—they want *that* to change. I would bet that it is a combination of all of that, because people are tired of fighting. I certainly hear today in this Honourable House that people are tired of fighting. We hear it in the public. People are tired of fighting.

And now that we have this wonderful *Kumbara* moment to finally be in the House, to be able to see each other . . . let's see how this goes, Mr. Speaker. Let's see how this will last. And I know the Honourable Member Hayward when he spoke he almost referenced that it was OBA Members saying stuff on the blogs. Okay, fair enough. Just understand there are PLP bloggers there as well saying stuff. Okay?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I'm not admitting to anything.

He made an assumption, and I am going with his assumption. And there goes the unfortunate circumstance, Mr. Speaker, playing right out in front of this House, why we have a challenge, because somebody's always got something to say. *Always!* My point is being even more magnified.

So, yes, we got a problem in PLP, as you snarkle (or whatever you want to call it). You have got some issues that you got to deal with. Okay? Not the OBA. The OBA is Opposition right now. You got some challenges in front of you. Let's see how this plays out. I assure that when you leave these Chambers and you go out there into the public, it ain't going to be no fun and joke, because people are angry and upset, and they are trying to find a way. I recognise that.

So, when the Honourable Premier brings forth a Bill like the Fuels Bill, I'm all on it, and I gave other areas where they could make revenue that I thought would be helpful. So, I don't want to hear this where-are-the-solutions stuff. If we listen, I am sure you will hear them, because the people are upset. And we—all 36 of us—are responsible for where we are today. And if we are going to fix what's happening today, it is going to take the 36 of us, regardless of the history—regardless of it—to stand up and do what is right for the people of Bermuda.

I am with the Government in all those areas, that I believe to be true going forward, and right for the

benefit of the people of Bermuda. But the interpolation—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: It's no help.

When it is the right time, yes. But right now, people are hurting. We got to get serious, put our glasses on, sharpen our pencils, and if somebody needs advice or wants to hear, *What do you think about this here?*

I remember many, many, many, many . . . I don't know how many years ago. But Honourable Member Famous came to me and said, *What do you think about this here?* I thought that was very honourable of him. He ain't done it since; but I thought that was very honourable of him.

An Hon. Member: I wonder why.

[Laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes. Why is that? Yes, it continues on, Mr. Speaker.
Thank you.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, thank you for your contribution.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Opposition Whip, you have your 20 minutes.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A COMMON CAUSE

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

I was recently invited by a journalist to give a one- or two-word answer about the governing party, and I thought it was a really interesting question. I know a lot of people in the governing party as a wider body. I have a lot of family in the party. I respect a lot of people in the party. I have issues with other people in the party. But it is a big organisation. Right, Mr. Speaker? And I thought, that is a really interesting question that you think that we could simplify something like that.

Mr. Speaker, I rise really because I wanted to reply to the Honourable Member, the Honourable Minister Hayward because he referred to the One Bermuda Alliance as seeking to be in power and willing to engage in a number of practises to undertake that exercise. And, Mr. Speaker, as a Member of the party, as a Member who tries to make sure that the party conducts itself in a manner that is fitting with the dignity of, not only this office, but of the people of Bermuda, I could not leave that unanswered. So, in reply to that, no matter what happens or has happened, there is a degree of conduct that is acceptable in our politi-

cal discourse, and we should stick to this at all times. And that goes [for] both sides, Mr. Speaker.

When we meet, Mr. Speaker, when we start our sessions, we start with a prayer, a very specific prayer. And there's a part in it that says that we hope our trespasses are forgiven just as we forgive the trespasses of others.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Indeed, indeed.

And, Mr. Speaker, we are now a body that is challenged with probably the greatest challenge that Bermuda is ever going to face. I mean, if World War II, rationing, and the Great Depression and other aspects challenged Bermuda, our cost of living crisis, added with our inflation, added with our ageing population, as the Honourable Minister mentioned, added with, I would say, the falling apart of our social institutions . . . the Honourable Member Caines spoke to a very specific community. And when I was a police officer, Mr. Speaker, I worked in Central Patrol, so, I know that area well. But I was very lucky. I got assigned to the Community Beat office, which is the successor unit, Mr. Speaker, to the Parish Constables.

To address the problems that are faced by our communities, Mr. Speaker, it requires a great deal of the-devil-is-in-the-detail kind of work. The Honourable Member mentioned going door to door. He mentioned, you have got to go get sponsors. You have to go get donations. You have to go get bodies. You have got to cut back on the hedges. You know, one of the things he didn't mention, but on another project we worked on in another community we had to get rid of derelict boats and cars, bottles, bricks, half or [incomplete] construction.

You have got to get all the neighbours involved. You know, it is not easy to fix these problems, Mr. Speaker. And anybody who thinks that . . . I'm going to borrow from (I'm not sure who started it) this *Kumbaya* statement. But anyone who thinks that this is an easy thing to do simply has not actually done it. This is not hard. We are for all intents and purposes, trapped in the consequences of our history, and we have to work our way out of it. The Honourable Member Caines mentioned shoulder to the wheel. I would say bear the cross. We have got to pick up the heavy load and bear it individually.

I am not sure why, Mr. Speaker, our society lost the necessity for every person to become a contributing person, someone who is capable of bearing the load of their community, of serving others before they serve themselves. I am not sure where that got lost in the mix, but One Way Deepdale, amongst many other communities is one of those places where we are seeing the old Bermuda come back, where in the neighbourhoods the *neighbours* decide what their neighbourhood will be. And we need to be very careful. We have to nurture that, Mr. Speaker. We have to

take that and replicate it community to community. And it does not matter who that community elects to come to this Honourable House, it has got to be *all* of them.

So, with that being said, Mr. Speaker, I would also want to add that unity, especially in Bermuda, is not going to be easy. It's funny because when we think of a word like *Kumbaya* we think of a sleepover camp or something like that on one of the islands where everyone is hanging together and, you know, singing songs and holding hands around a campfire. And certainly, I'll speak for myself, Mr. Speaker, as I matured into adulthood I learned that unity was not easy, especially in the various charities and community organisations I worked in.

Bermuda is made up of a lot of different people, a lot of different kinds of people, just like our political parties are made up of a lot of different kinds of people. And if we are going to advance this country, this community, this people, then it is not going to be easy. We are going to have to, at some point, scrap. At some point things will be adversarial. But, Mr. Speaker, I hope that we always stand on the same level, because I think that we would go far in this Honourable House to work with each other, to understand each other, as much as we can anyway. This House can be and probably should be, a moral compass, because I am not sure where else in Bermuda that will come from.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Looks like none other.

Mr. Premier.

MPs ENCOURAGED TO DISCUSS POLICY AND NOT ATTACK THE PERSON

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what I would say is that certainly it is great to be back in the House of Assembly. I think that's probably the third time I have said that today, but I certainly missed this interaction and a little bit of—

The Speaker: We welcome all Members back.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

—and a little bit of camaraderie as well. And certainly, during this motion to adjourn we have heard a number of contributions from Honourable Members, passionate contributions, speaking to their truth and sharing certainly their views and their opinions. And the tone has been okay.

But the one thing I want to say is that I agree that we all have our part to play, and certainly, we are playing our part up here. And I think if there is one

thing that I want to take from Minister Haywood's contribution, [it] is let's discuss the policy and let's not try to attack the person. Because at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, that is our job here—to make policy, to make law, to change laws and policies, and to implement such things for the country. And whether or not you agree or disagree with the policy, that is the nature of governance, that is the nature of politics, that is the nature of Parliament, that is the nature of our system of democracy. The challenge, of course, which we have is people like to get personal.

Now here is what I will say, Mr. Speaker, because, you know, I listened very carefully to what Minister Hayward said. And you know, I listened very carefully to the Deputy Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance. And the only thing that I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that when the Deputy Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance says that, you know, he would hope that those are not the types of things coming out of his organisation, when Members that sit in this House that represent his party put out press releases insinuating the fact that I, myself, Premier David Burt, am personally benefiting from government contracts, it feeds directly into the same narrative of which the Honourable former Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance is saying that we need to get away from.

And that is the problem, Mr. Speaker. You cannot have it both ways. Because you and I know, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member knows, the Deputy Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance who works in compliance certainly knows, that Bermuda is one of the most regulated international financial centres on the planet. And everyone knows in this House, not only our bank accounts, but our families' bank accounts, our extended families' bank accounts, all those things are subject to continued monitoring to ensure that we do not have corruption. And if anyone thinks that if that was the case, that would not be on the front page of the *Royal Gazette*, or I would have had a knock on my door from Nick Pedro. They are making things up, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the facts. But we like to press the innuendo. So, I will call for the Deputy Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance to rein in his party to stop with the innuendo. You can disagree with the Travel Authorisation policy. That is fine. But when you decide to state and put the innuendo out—which will be reprinted by the *Royal Gazette*—*we need to know who is benefiting from this*, it does not meet the standards of which our public discourse should be, Mr. Speaker.

And I know and the Members [in the] Opposition know, and I know Members in this House know, that this just does not affect the person who sits here. It affects wives. It affects children who go to school. It affects mothers and brothers and fathers too. Let us disagree on the policy, but if we want to set that tone for the country, then we must make sure that we are straying away from the personal, Mr. Speaker, because that is important.

PLP GOVERNMENT CONTINUING TO REDUCE THE TAX BURDEN AND PROVIDE RELIEF FOR WORKING PEOPLE

Hon. E. David Burt: Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on another matter because certainly, working inside of our communities is particularly important, and I commend MP Caines. I commend my Members for making sure that we continue to remain in touch in our communities, continue to canvass.

Tomorrow morning, throughout the Island [there] will be PLP clinics, whether they be in Somerset, whether they be in Warwick, whether they be in Pembroke, whether they be in Devonshire, whether they be in St. George's, whether they be in Hamilton Parish. All around we will be doing our items to make sure that we connect and hear back. And yes, the temperature is hot, Mr. Speaker. The temperature is hot because people want to fan the flames. But here are the facts, Mr. Speaker.

Despite the noise, despite the innuendo, despite the false WhatsApp forwards, despite the personal attacks on people's families, despite all of those items, Mr. Speaker, this Government continues to progress the issues that matter to the people of this country and to keep its promise to do as much as we can to reduce the burden on the working class.

The number-one issue in this country right now, Mr. Speaker, of course, is on the broad aspect of the cost of living. There are certain things that we can control and certain things that we cannot control. We know that we cannot control the global price of food, and we know that we cannot control the global price of oil. I have said that here. But what we *can* control is how much help and assistance and taxpayer money we give back to them. What we can do is control our system of taxation and make sure that we provide relief as much as we can, Mr. Speaker. And whether it's fuel relief, whether it's payroll tax relief or whether it is Customs duty relief, that is what this Government is doing.

But, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Progressive Labour Party is in our communities. And so, I appreciate the Honourable former Premier for his comments about saying things are hot out there. I know. Yesterday when I attended the Gang Violence Workshop that took place, seeing Members of the Government and Members of the Opposition and members from a cross section of the country working together (just as MP Caines said, *working together*) to update our approach, I went out back to have a phone call right quick, and I spoke to a young man whom I recognised. I am not going to call his name.

He told me, he said, *You know, Mr. Burt, people are really frustrated.*

And I said, *Why? Go on, please explain to me.*

And he explained the fact of how he is working, how his girlfriend is working, how they just had a

child and how difficult they are finding it to make ends meet. That story has been replicated in many cases, in many instances, Mr. Speaker.

I had a mother making \$72,000, a single mom with the challenges of which she was having because she has a young child. And the Minister of Economy and Labour and I have discussed how we need to reform the matters of how we provide assistance for young parents with children when it comes to day care because it is an incredible expense. And it is something that we put in place in 2007 after the Progressive Labour Party won that election, and it is something that came back and we need to make sure that we update that.

But here is what I will also say, Mr. Speaker. The biggest concern that I have in this country right now is housing. It is housing. I know you, Mr. Speaker, and many others have heard the challenges that our people are facing getting access to housing. And that is why I said earlier in my Statement today that the Cabinet has approved significant additional investment to the Bermuda Housing Corporation. Next week we will be discussing the matters of which we are going to deal with, not just the BHC but in other ways. Because the real fact is that because of the strong performance of our economy, because of the successful execution of Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, we have seen international business growth at the fastest level since 2007. And that is putting pressure across the board on issues of housing.

So, if anyone wants to ask me what my number-one concern is, Mr. Speaker, it is housing in this country. Because we can all look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and we know where that falls and it is vital, and it is important, Mr. Speaker, and I look

But, Mr. Speaker, I also want to touch on another issue because we know people will see things in isolation, will say certain things. And someone had sent me a comment from someone who, you know, I consider a friend. Someone who has sat in my house, has had a conversation with me, has spoken to me, spoke about tax reform in Bermuda and spoke about the fact how the middle class continues to be taxed and we are not taxing other sources of income in this country. And I will personally remind that person when I speak to him, but I want to remind this country that in 2018, when the Progressive Labour Party was returned back to Government in 2017, in our first Budget Statement, Mr. Speaker, we taxed local company dividends for the first time in this country's history. And though the Tax Reform Commission recommended an additional tax on dividends which has not been implemented, that change generated over \$15 million a year for the government's coffers. And since it has been in effect, over \$100 million has been able to be put in place to invest more in education, to invest more in health care, to invest more in the training programmes, the Honourable Minister spoke about, to invest in so many different places, Mr. Speaker.

We have persons who own large stores who did not have to pay a mortgage because they own the building, who were not paying rent, extracting millions of dollars of profits out of their company every year tax free. We put an end to that, Mr. Speaker, because we believe in fairer taxation. We continue to reduce the tax burden on those who are making the least in this country and will follow through with our election manifesto pledge to eliminate payroll taxes for those making under \$48,000 a year, Mr. Speaker. Those are the facts.

So, Mr. Speaker, I get it. I hear it. And it is not easy governing a country [going] from a pandemic to a global inflation crisis. It is not easy. This job is not easy at all. But the people of this country should know that the Government of Bermuda does not make decisions to benefit us. We make decisions to benefit the people who come and see us every Saturday at our clinics, the people that we go and see after a storm, when there is not a storm, throughout the week to make sure that we are doing what we can to take care of the concerns of which they have.

So, if there is one message, Mr. Speaker, that I want to leave, it is that we have started this work, we will continue this work and we are going to continue to make sure that we provide more and more relief for the working people inside of this country to deal with the impact of global inflation.

You heard me make the statement earlier, Mr. Speaker, about the state of Government finances. The approach of the Government is to ensure that we make investments, to ensure that we can control the cost of living so that our economy can continue to grow because we know what happens when growth runs unchecked and is not supported by the other things inside the economy which are necessary, such as housing and other things. We end up with an imbalance and this creates a problem. We are in a far better place, Mr. Speaker, than we were two years ago. But now we must make sure that we place the investments which are necessary, that will help and benefit the people of this country who have been challenged.

This Government will not be afraid to take on the thorny issues which are necessary to reduce the tax burden for the persons in this country who can afford it the least and ensure that we have a fairer system of taxation so those who are working one and two jobs trying to make ends meet will be able to have more money in their pockets. That is the philosophy of which I have. That is the philosophy which this Government has.

Those are the policies which we are putting into place. And we look forward to outlining more of those policies as we continue to go on, Mr. Speaker, because that is the hope that the people need, the hope that their Government is listening to them, understands the concerns that they are facing, understands the pressure that they are under, how difficult it

is when you are trying to figure out when you are going to be able to make those ends meet, keep on the lights, everything else. We are continuing to press on with that, Mr. Speaker, and we will not be daunted.

So, the only thing I would say as we are back in this House again is for the people of this country to continue to communicate. Continue to press your representatives, continue to state the policies of which you agree with, the policies of which you disagree with, the changes in policies of which you would like to see. But let's remember we are all Bermudian. We all have families. And personal attacks have no place inside of our politics. If we keep to that level, Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt whatsoever that we can take this point where we are right now to continually, to successfully execute Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan to continue to bring jobs and growth, to see raising incomes and to tackle the cost of living by making sure that we have a fairer tax burden in this country.

So, I look forward to the next time that we are in this House and I wish everyone a wonderful weekend as they go home. Thank you.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

PARLIAMENTARY SESSIONS TO BE TELEVISED LIVE

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Members, as you know the close of motion to adjourn brings a close to the House. Before I put the gavel, I would just like to make one comment I intended to have made earlier this morning. There were technical improvements we were trying to do to this Chamber that Members were aware of while we were on the virtual space. That time has passed us on, doing the hybrid system that we were hoping to do, we have passed that in the movement of the country of being able to come back into the facility. However, the equipment will not go to waste.

The equipment, and you know technology moves pretty quickly, the technology that we sought to bring has the ability for us to be able to do something that we have talked about for a long time and that is to have our sessions covered live, televised. Meaning we will be able to take that system, yes, we will be able to take that same system and be able to broadcast live on our Facebook page. So, hopefully, in a very short order, when we come into these Chambers, people will not only be able to just listen to us, but they will be able to see the proceedings. I say that to caution Members.

I say that to caution Members—that your behaviour will be watched as well.

So, as you leave from here today, take that as you walk out and think about how we conduct ourselves when we get to that point. But I just wanted to assure Members that we were forward-thinking when

we purchased the equipment that it would be able to be used *after* we came out of the need for a hybrid system. Even though that has passed us now, the system still will serve the purpose of this House, for those who were concerned that we had spent an investment that would not get used. It will be used and I think the public will benefit from the way we use it when they will be able to watch the proceedings as well. So, we look forward to that day.

Again, I welcome everyone back to this Chamber. I think it has been long overdue for us to be here. And Members, I encourage you to encourage everyone to return back to this Chamber.

Thank you. Enjoy the weekend and we will see you next Friday.

[Gavel]

[At 5:36 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 7 October 2022.]

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