



2025/2026 SESSION
of the
BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

21 MARCH 2025

(Sitting number 2 of the 2025-2026 Session)

(pages 15-146)

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

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**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
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21 MARCH 2025
10:04 AM**

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.
The Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Thank you.
Members, the session has now begun.

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 14 March 2025]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of the 14th of March have been circulated. Are there any amendments required?
None.
The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

[Minutes of 14 March 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGY

The Speaker: We have been informed that Minister Tinee Furbert will be absent from today's proceedings.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: We have quite a few this morning. The first is in the name of the Premier.
Premier.

**TAX REFORM COMMISSION (EXTENSION AND
OPERATION) ORDER 2025**

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.
Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Tax Reform Commission (Extension and Operation) Order 2025, as made by the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 3(4) of the Tax Reform Commission Act 2017.

The Speaker: Thank you. Would you like to do the next ones?

**ACTUARIAL REVIEW OF THE CONTRIBUTORY
PENSION FUND OF BERMUDA AS OF
AUGUST 1, 2023**

**PUBLIC SERVICE SUPERANNUATION FUND—
ACTUARIAL VALUATION AS AT MARCH 31,
2023, FOR FUNDING PURPOSES**

**MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE
LEGISLATURE PENSION FUND—
ACTUARIAL VALUATION AS AT
MARCH 31, 2023, FOR FUNDING
PURPOSES**

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Actuarial Review of the Contributory Pension Fund of Bermuda as of August 1, 2023; and final reports from Public Service Superannuation Fund Actuarial Valuation as of March 31, 2023, for Funding Purposes, and the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund Actuarial Valuation as at March 31, 2023, for Funding Purposes.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The next communication is from the Junior Minister.
Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE CONSOLIDATED FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2024

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Financial Statements of the Consolidated Fund for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next is in the name of the Minister of Transport.

Minister. Tourism and Transport.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

MOTOR TAXI (APPROVED TAXI METER) (CABMAN MDT) ORDER 2025

Hon. Owen Darrell: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Motor Taxi (Approved Taxi Meter) (Cabman MDT) Order 2025 as made by the Minister responsible for Transport in exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 8(1) of the Motor Taxi Regulations 1952.

The Speaker: Okay. You can do the second one. Then I have to go to the Minister of Economy and Labour.

MOTOR TAXI (APPROVED TAXI METER) (CURB DIGITAL METER) ORDER 2025

Hon. Owen Darrell: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Motor Taxi (Approved Taxi Meter) (Curb Digital Meter) Order 2025, as made by the Minister responsible for Transport in exercise of the power conferred by Regulation 8(1) of the Motor Taxi Regulations 1952.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The Minister of Labour, Economy and Labour, Minister Hayward.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

BERMUDA IMMIGRATION AND PROTECTION (PROHIBITION OF ENTRY) ORDER 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Immi-

gration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order 2025, as made by the Minister responsible for Immigration in exercise of the power conferred by section 26(1) of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

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

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: We have quite a few Statements this morning. The first Statement will be by the Premier, which is actually listed as the second item. But the Premier will do that, because the first item was going to be by the Junior Minister.

Premier.

ACTUARIAL REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT'S PENSION PLANS 2023

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to advise the Honourable Members of the completion of the actuarial reviews for the Contributory Pension Fund (which I will refer to as the CPF) for the year ended July 31, 2023, and the Public Service Superannuation Fund (which I will refer to as PSSF) and the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund (which I will refer to as MMLPF) for the year ended March 31, 2023 which were tabled in this Honourable House earlier today.

Contributory Pension Fund

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the main purpose of the 2023 actuarial review is to examine the financial condition and long-term sustainability of the [Contributory Pension Fund](#) and to investigate the potential financial implications of future social insurance contribution and benefits increases for the CPF. The actuarial review presents the financial status of the CPF and provides projections for the next 50 years to 2073.

Mr. Speaker, the CPF provides a first tier or basic pension, disability pension and non-contributory benefits to some 14,538 seniors and other beneficiaries, the majority of whom live in Bermuda. The maximum social insurance benefit payment is \$1,607 per month.

Highlights from the actuarial review are as follows:

- The financial performance of the CPF over the three years was above expectations mainly due to higher-than-expected investment and contribution income.

- The net assets of the CPF grew by 8.7 per cent over the three years, from \$1.97 billion to \$2.14 billion. This is 7.1 per cent above the projected value from the previous review.
- Contribution income in 2022/23 of \$135.8 million was 21 per cent higher than in 2019/20, and benefit expenditure of \$203.5 million increased 14 per cent over the three years since the last review.
- Since the last review, the number of contributors has declined, from 34,629 to 33,770. The number of beneficiaries has increased from 13,926 to 14,538.
- Benefit rates increased by 2.75 per cent and 4.10 per cent effective August 2021 and August 2023, respectively. No increases were made to the contribution rates during the period.
- Based on the population projection figures, the old-age support ratio has declined since the last review. The ratio was 3.1 in 2020 and is 2.8 in 2023. The comparative ratio using the actual contributors and beneficiaries of the Fund declined from 2.6 in 2020 to 2.4 in 2023.
- At current rates, the Fund is projected to decline steadily until it is exhausted in 2042 under the best estimate scenario. This is two years earlier than when compared to the previous review.

Mr. Speaker, the CPF is not designed around a policy of full funding, but one of sustainable funding, which is that contributions and investment income is sufficient to meet the benefits and administrative expenditure on an ongoing [annual] basis. The demographic changes in Bermuda, like most developed countries, with persons living longer require changes to ensure that the CPF will be sustainable to provide social insurance benefits into the future. I will speak more to these required changes later in my Statement.

Public Service Superannuation Fund

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Public Service Superannuation Fund (PSSF) provides contributory defined benefit pensions to Bermuda's public service employees and to employees of some public authorities. The purpose of the actuarial review is to determine the going concern financial position of the PSSF, to estimate the costs of the benefits being accrued during the period up to the next valuation date and to determine the adequacy of the PSSF contribution rate. The report includes a three-year projection of the funded ratio based on assets, actuarial liabilities and normal cost projected to March 31, 2026.

Items of note regarding the actuarial review are as follows:

- The total invested assets of the Fund on March 31, 2023, was \$606.8 million compared

to \$599.4 million on the 31st of March 2020. This represents a \$47.4 million, or 8.47 per cent, increase since the last review.

- Contribution income for the year ended March 31, 2023, was \$60.4 million compared to \$61.9 million in March 2020, and benefit payments and refunds totalled \$94.7 million in 2023 compared to \$86.2 million in [March] 2020.
- There were 4,212 active members contributing to the Fund as of March 2023 (down from 4,476 in March 2020) and 3,414 retirees who were receiving a benefit (up from 3,188 in March 2020).
- The PSSF is not fully funded on the going concern basis. As of March 31, 2023, the net fund assets were \$606.04 million, and the accrued benefit obligation was \$1.63 billion. The addition of the unamortised actuarial losses of \$192.2 million gives the pension liability of \$1.22 billion recorded and disclosed in the March 31, 2023, audited statements of the Consolidated Fund tabled in this Honourable House last year.

Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund [MMLPF] provides contributory defined benefit pensions to all Ministers and Members of the Legislature of Bermuda. Benefits in respect of service before April 1, 1988, are paid from the Consolidated Fund. The purpose of the report on the actuarial review is to determine the going concern financial position of the MMLPF; to estimate the costs of the benefits being accrued under the MMLPF during the period up until the next valuation; to determine the adequacy of the MMLPF contribution rate; and to estimate the future benefits payments under the Consolidated Fund for the Government of Bermuda. The report includes a three-year projection of the financial position of the MMLPF (excluding benefits covered by the Consolidated Fund to March 31, 2026).

Items of note regarding the actuarial review are as follows:

- There were 47 active members contributing to the Fund as of March 31, 2023, and 62 retirees or spouses of retirees and other beneficiaries who were receiving a benefit (up from 59 in March 2020).
- As of March 31, 2023, the valuation date, the main assets of the MMLPF consist of an amount due from the Consolidated Fund of \$8.85 million.
- The MMLPF is not fully funded on the going concern basis. The members and Government contributions do not cover the normal

costs of benefits earned each year under the MMLPF. The funding ratio at March 2023 was 23.7 per cent, and this was projected to decrease to 13.1 per cent at March 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members are advised that the next actuarial review of the CPF is scheduled for the period ending July 31, 2026, and March 31, 2026, for the PSSF and the MMLPF.

Ensuring Sustainability of Bermuda's Pension Funds

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the pension plan benefit payments are important to the ongoing financial stability and security, as well as health, of the seniors in our society. It is critical to ensure the long-term sustainability of the CPF and the PSSF. Addressing the challenges these funds face must be a priority of this new Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that important work has been undertaken by the consultants McKinsey & Company, the actuaries TELUS Health, in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance and the Public Funds Investment Committee [PFIC] on tackling these funds. Following consultations with the public sector unions, in 2024 Cabinet approved the recommendations for revisions to the PSSF to which the unions have given broad support. As stated in the Speech from the Throne last week, with your permission I will quote, Mr. Speaker.

“With the recent compensation agreement reached with public sector unions, it is now time to ensure that public sector pensions are sustainable for the future. Accordingly, the Government will introduce amendments to the Public Service Superannuation Act 1981 that will eliminate the growing unfunded liability to taxpayers and ensure the Fund's stability into the future.”

Mr. Speaker, the Government intends to table these amendments when this Honourable House returns in May, which will put the PSSF in a sustainable position. The Government continues to advance consultation regarding the necessary amendments that will make the CPF sustainable. The funding gap for the CPF is larger and a more difficult issue to resolve given the rapidly ageing population and persons living longer and drawing more benefits over time.

As stated in the 2024 Budget Statement, Mr. Speaker—with your permission I will quote again—“the topping up of this fund could be a prime candidate for revenues that may accrue to the Government from the Corporate Income Tax . . . a suggestion that has come to the Government as part of the ongoing consultation with our local and international business representatives. The rationale is a good one—that social insurance is for all persons in Bermuda and is a critical need for long-term stability.”

Mr. Speaker, the need to address the Contributory Pension Fund is an urgent one. Whether the

answer is future revenues from the corporate income tax, changes to contributions, or increases in the eligibility age for social insurance, the Government looks forward to a bipartisan consensus to advance the difficult but necessary changes to ensure that this fund is sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I wish to assure current and future pensioners that the Government is clear on the challenges facing Bermuda's pension plans. We have started to take the necessary actions to ensure that the PSSF is sustainable, and we will not shirk the responsibility to do the same for the CPF to ensure that the social insurance benefits that many Bermudians expect to rely on will be there for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next Statement this morning is from the Junior Minister of Finance.

CONSOLIDATED FUND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2024

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to advise Honourable Members of the completion of the audit of the [Consolidated Fund Financial Statements](#) for the year ended March 31, 2024, which were tabled in this Honourable House today. As Honourable Members are aware, the Consolidated Fund (CF) is the general operating fund of the Bermuda Government and is the Fund through which Government conducts the majority of its transactions. The CF financial statements report the financial position, operations, change in net debt and cash flows resulting from the activities of the Government. This includes the accounts of the Senate, the House of Assembly, all Government departments and offices, and all courts.

Mr. Speaker, in her report, the Auditor General highlighted that, with the exception of one matter that I will address later, the statements were deemed to fairly reflect the financial position and operations of the CF. This positive endorsement in almost all areas of work in relation to the financial statement is a testament to efficacy of our financial processes and operations, and the hard work of our teams to ensure that financial integrity is upheld.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has qualified her audit opinion based on insufficient support for the legal obligations associated with the eventual retirement of tangible capital assets as required by the Asset Retirement Obligation standard.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has undertaken considerable work since the introduction of this standard in the 2022/23 fiscal year, using its team of internal professionals along with the engagement of external experts, resulting in the Government's recognising a liability (so the Government *did* recognise the liabil-

ity) and the related expenses in the March 31, 2024, financial statements. The March 2023 comparatives have been restated to show the effect of the adoption of the standard. The Government will continue to work to identify all legal obligations associated with the retirement or disposal of its assets to ensure the completeness of the obligations recorded in the CF's financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, under the Audit Act 1990 section 6(1)(b) the Auditor General is able to include in her report any comments she considers appropriate. Accordingly, the Auditor General has, as in prior years, included an "Emphasis of Matter" paragraph to draw attention to the usefulness of the Financial Statements" and her view that the usefulness of the financial statements is limited because they are not "Summary Financial Statements. In other words, they do not represent the combined financial position and activities of all government entities, only the Consolidated Fund. This section of the report does not alter the Auditor General's opinion on whether the financial statements are presented fairly. The Other Information section is inclusive of the Financial Statement Discussion and Analysis which is included with the audited financial statements. The audit report date is December 24, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, liabilities related to pensions and other employee future benefits are included in the "Net Debt" amount disclosed in the Financial Statements and the Government has already started the review of these benefits to ensure their sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, financial highlights of the CF Financial Statements are as follows:

- a) The all-inclusive result from (both current and capital) on an accounting accrual basis for the year ending March 31, 2024, was a deficit of \$161.5 million, lower than the prior year's deficit of \$270.5 million. The modified cash all-inclusive results from government operations (on the same basis that is shown in the Budget Book) was a deficit of \$29.4 million. This compares to a deficit of \$43.3 million that was originally budgeted. Therefore, the actual overall deficit was down by \$14.1 million when compared to the original estimate. The decreased deficit is primarily a result of higher than budgeted revenues. This deficit reduction is part of the Government's Medium-Term Expenditure Framework [MTEF] strategy to achieve a balanced budget.
- b) The total revenue raised by the CF for fiscal year 2023/24 was approximately \$1.18 billion, representing an increase of \$45.6 million (or 4.0 per cent) from fiscal 2022/23's total revenue of \$1.13 billion. This exceeded original budget estimates by approximately \$21.8 million (or 1.8 per cent). The most significant generators of revenues for fiscal 2023/24 were Payroll Taxes, accounting for \$534 mil-

lion, or 45.5 per cent, of total revenue (2022/23 was \$488.1 million, or 43.2 per cent) and Customs Duty, accounting for \$227.6 million, or 19.3 per cent (2022/23 was \$225.1 million, or 19.9 per cent).

- c) Current expenses for fiscal year 2023/24 were \$1.28 billion (2022/23 was \$1.36 billion). The three largest components of current expenses were employee costs, grants and contributions, and interest on debt. Total employee costs were \$584.7 million, or 45.6 per cent (2022/23 was \$622.6 million, or 45.7 per cent) of total expenses. Grants and contributions were \$337.9 million, or 26.4 per cent (2022/23 was \$329.0 million, or 24.2 per cent) and interest on debt was \$129.2 million, [or 10.1 per cent] (2022/23 was \$136.5 million, [or 10.0 per cent]). Total current expenditure on a modified cash basis was \$1.1 billion (2022/23 was \$1.1 billion), which was \$6.0 million (2022/23 was \$22.8 million more) than original budget estimates.
- d) The March 31, 2024, total accounts receivable net of provision for doubtful accounts increased by 18.0 per cent to \$265.2 million, as compared to \$224.8 million at March 31, 2023. The most significant contributor to the accounts receivable balance before provision was the Office of the Tax Commissioner of \$376.1 million, representing an approximate \$41.4 million increase. This was in 2023 [in accounts receivable]. A significant portion of the gross receivable at March 31, 2024, \$242.2 million representing Payroll Tax which was due and payable on April 15, 2024. During the month of April 2024, the Government collected [approximately] \$170.5 million in Payroll Taxes (April 2023 was \$144.7 million).
- e) Interest Bearing Debt Net of the Sinking Fund increased by \$129.6 million to \$3.2 billion at [March 31,] 2024, from \$3.1 billion at [March 31,] 2023. This was mainly due to the withdrawal of \$79.4 million from the Excess Borrowing Fund for payroll funding and interest payments and the \$50 million of the 2023 BMD\$ Senior Notes which matured on December [16,] 2023.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Auditor General and her team, the persons in the Accountant General's Department and persons in other ministries who were involved progressing the audit. The 2023/24 fiscal result is indicative of the Government's ability to prudently manage discretionary current and capital expenditures. Further, I would note that the statements of the Consolidated Fund provide valuable information on the financial position of the Government, and I would encourage the public to examine these statements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Tourism, Transport and Culture.

Minister.

HERITAGE MONTH THEME 2025

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today I stand with great anticipation and pride to announce the theme for Bermuda's [Heritage Month](#) and the Bermuda Day Parade in 2025: "The Future is Now." This year's theme is both a call to action and a celebration highlighting the ingenuity, resilience and creativity of our people as we embrace the endless possibilities before us.

Mr. Speaker, Bermudians have always been dreamers. Bermudians have always been doers. And we have always blended our storied past with bold visions for tomorrow. The theme "The Future is Now" reminds us that our present actions shape the legacy we leave for generations to come. It invites us to explore how our culture and heritage evolve in tandem with the rapid advancements of our time.

Mr. Speaker, from the palm of our hand, we wield supercomputers capable of connecting us to the world, and the innovations that once seemed like science fiction—robots, artificial intelligence and smart technologies—are becoming an integral part of our lives. In this era of transformation, Bermudians are not merely participants; we are leaders, creators and pioneers.

Mr. Speaker, this year's Heritage Month will spotlight the intersection of tradition and technology, celebrating the countless ways our people are pushing boundaries. Whether it is the student developing a creative app through the Bermuda Coders Initiative, the artist fashioning immersive digital landscapes or the entrepreneur automating processes to enhance industries, Bermudians are demonstrating that innovation is woven into the fabric of our identity.

Mr. Speaker, technology is transforming the way we live. Technology is also transforming the way we work, and it is inspiring new forms of storytelling, problem-solving and cultural expression. Robotics is opening doors to new industries, while machine learning helps us uncover patterns and solutions that were once beyond our reach. These tools are not just technologies; they are extensions of our creativity and a testament to the human spirit's endless potential. Heritage Month 2025 will be a platform to showcase how these futuristic elements are already shaping our present and enhancing our cultural traditions.

Mr. Speaker, as we prepare for the Bermuda Day Parade, I urge our community to embrace this theme with the same passion and energy we have

seen year after year. I encourage participants to let their creativity shine, blending the timeless traditions of our Island with the forward-thinking innovations that define this era. Let us see floats that imagine Bermuda in 2050, costumes that merge traditional and futuristic designs, and performances that explore the dynamics between our heritage as well as technology. Of course, Bermuda Day cannot succeed without our participants, and I strongly encourage anyone interested in participating to visit www.culture.bm for entry details.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda Day Fund remains a vital part of these celebrations, enabling groups and individuals to turn their visions into reality. I encourage everyone to contribute, helping to ensure that this year's parade is as inclusive and inspiring as possible. Donations can be made through the Bermuda Community Foundation at www.givebermuda.org/BermudaDayFund.

Mr. Speaker, the theme "The Future is Now" underscores the idea that the innovations we see today are tools that empower us to honour our past, tackle present challenges and chart a bold course for the future. The creative community has always led this charge. This Heritage Month, let us explore how these advancements enrich our culture while celebrating the spirit of innovation that has always driven the Bermudian people.

Mr. Speaker, may this year's celebrations inspire us all to dream bigger, think creatively and act decisively. Let us come together as a community to honour our traditions, embrace new opportunities and showcase the brilliance of Bermuda to the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Would you like to do your second Statement?

Hon. Owen Darrell: I will.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

TRANSPORT CONTROL DEPARTMENT ADVANCEMENT OF DIGITALISATION

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, today I stand before this esteemed House to share an exciting and transformative development within the [Transport Control Department](#) (TCD) that will redefine how we interact with government services. As technology continues to evolve and reshape the world around us, the Government of Bermuda has made it a priority to ensure that our public services remain modern, accessible and responsive to the needs of the people we serve.

Mr. Speaker, as promised in the 2024 Throne Speech, the Transport Control Department will undergo a transformation, shifting all manual processes to fully digital applications, the Government is now em-

barking upon its commitment to digital transformation. We recognise that as technology advances, the expectations of the public do as well. To meet these expectations, the Transport Control Department has been diligently working toward the digitisation of its services, ensuring that we not only keep pace with change but also lead with innovation and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce a major milestone in this ongoing journey. Starting on 31 March 2025, the Transport Control Department will begin rolling out its digital applications while also marking a significant step toward reducing red tape and enhancing the efficiency of our service. As the department reviews its digitisation process, outdated and redundant steps are being eliminated to enhance effectiveness. This rollout is just the beginning as we strive to modernise and streamline the full range of services offered by the department. The applications set for digitisation include a wide array of permits, licences and services, including the following:

1. Project Ride Instructor application;
2. Exemption application for tint, seatbelt, signage and licencing fees;
3. Importation and Replacement of vehicles and vehicle parts;
4. Public Service Vehicle [PSV] Permit;
5. Sporting Association Trailer Permits;
6. Change Vehicle Category for Different Use application;
7. Registration of a Classic Car;
8. Commercial Vehicle Permit;
9. Learner's Permit / Driver's Licence; and
10. Public Service Vehicle [PSV] or Heavy Truck Licence.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, this digital transformation will begin with the following three applications:

1. Project Ride Instructor application;
2. Exemption application for tint, seatbelt, signage and licencing fees; and
3. Importation and replacement of vehicles and vehicle parts.

These will be available for online submission starting 31 March 2025 at forms.gov.bm/Online-Services. In the months that follow, we will continue expanding the digitisation process to include the additional applications as aforementioned.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative not only enhances convenience for the public but also strengthens the efficiency of the department's internal processes. The digitisation of these services will reduce unnecessary paperwork, ensure greater accuracy and allow applicants to access services outside of traditional office hours. This means that the public will no longer need to visit TCD in person as often, and they will be able to submit their applications at their

convenience, whether they are at home or abroad. In addition, applicants will receive regular updates on the status of their applications, ensuring that they are informed at every stage of the process. Clear service agreements will also outline expected processing times, managing expectations and enhancing trust in the department's ability to deliver.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this digital initiative is not just about improving efficiency; it is about generating greater communication, reducing the risk of human error and ensuring the Government's commitment to reducing red tape and improving services. In addition, by digitising services, we will reduce the environmental impact of paper usage and streamline operational processes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is just the beginning. As we move forward, we will continue to evaluate the needs of the public and explore opportunities to digitise additional services. The Transport Control Department's commitment to modernisation will contribute to the creation of a safer, more organised and more accessible transport system, providing a blueprint for further technological innovations in the future.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I now call on the Minister of Labour. You have papers . . . Yes, the Minister of National Security will do his later.

EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am pleased to introduce in the Honourable House today a Bill entitled the [Employment Amendment Act 2025](#) which proposes to clarify the calculation of paid leave for employees who receive gratuities and service charges (hereafter referred to as other gratuities) as part of the minimum hourly wage rate. Madam Deputy Speaker, prior to the enactment of the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023 on 1 March 2024, there was no definition for a gratuity or service charge in the Employment Act 2000 (which was the principal Act) and both were considered, in some industries, to fall within the general term of "tip" and did not constitute wages.

Madam Deputy Speaker, from the introduction of the Employment (Minimum Hourly Wage) Order 2023 (the Order) in June 2023 until 29 February 2024, employees who received other gratuities were remunerated at the minimum hourly wage rate of \$16.40 for all paid statutory leave entitlements. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023, which came into force on 1 March 2024, introduced the term "other gratuities" which differentiates tips

from gratuities and service charges, and as such, other gratuities now constitute wages. This means that the calculation of paid statutory leave entitlement for employees who receive other gratuities and those wages varying from week to week has fundamentally changed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, although the Order permits an employer to use other gratuities to supplement the minimum hourly wage rate, it was never intended for other gratuities to be included in the definition of “a week’s wage” pursuant to the principal Act. When the Order came into force, it was intended that all statutory leave entitlements be remunerated at the minimum hourly wage rate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it quickly became evident that the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023 had the unintended consequence of defining other gratuities as wages, resulting in the paid statutory leave entitlement for employees who receive other gratuities and whose wages vary from week to week being calculated by taking an average wage earned over the previous 12 weeks worked.

Madam Deputy Speaker, interpreting other gratuities as “wages” impacts the calculation of a week’s wages for employees who receive other gratuities in a way that is extremely unpredictable. It creates uncertainty and has presented an undue financial burden for businesses as it adversely affects the employer’s ability to calculate and budget for employee costs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recognising the challenge the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023 created, the Ministry sought advice from the Attorney General’s Chambers on the best way forward. A meeting was held with one of our industry partners, the Bermuda Hotel Association, whose members employ a large number of affected employees, and they too provided an independent legal opinion that they obtained highlighting the challenges described.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I convened a special meeting of the Labour Advisory Council [LAC] to discuss the concerns raised with the intention of reaching a consensus that aligned with the Ministry’s initial legislative intentions—to ensure that all persons are remunerated at at least the minimum hourly wage rate for all paid statutory leave entitlements. Madam Deputy Speaker, the members of the LAC agreed that the paid statutory leave entitlement for employees who receive other gratuities should be amended particularly where the other gratuities supplement an employee’s minimum wage rate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, although the definition of “a week’s wages” has been narrowed by the Bill to exclude gratuities, and such other gratuities previously received will not factor into the paid leave entitlement beyond the required minimum hourly wage rate still to be met by the employers in accordance

with the Order. Madam Deputy Speaker, it should be noted that the Bill will have retroactive effect to coincide with the 1 March 2024 enforcement date of the Employment (Protection of Employee Tips and Other Gratuities) Amendment Act 2023. However, the Bill provides that any payment of other gratuities which took place between 1 March 2024 and now shall not constitute an overpayment to which an employer is entitled to be reimbursed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is envisioned that the impact of the Bill will continue to build upon the values that the Ministry of Economy and Labour holds, which are to foster meaningful relationships with our industry partners while maintaining an equitable workforce.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, you do have another paper, correct? Yes?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, continue.

BERMUDA IMMIGRATION AND PROTECTION (PROHIBITION OF ENTRY) ORDER—BERMUDA’S VISA CONTROLLED NATIONALS LIST UPDATES

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise before this Honourable House to provide updates to the [Bermuda Immigration and Protection \(Prohibition of Entry\) Order—Bermuda’s Visa Controlled Nationals List](#).

Madam Deputy Speaker, Bermuda relies on the UK, US and Canada as principal gateways for commercial travel to and from Bermuda. As a result, access to and from Bermuda is impacted by the border policies of those gateway countries. While the US and Canada border policies are relatively stable and consistent, the border policy in the UK remains fluid.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the UK amends its Visa Controlled Nationals List from time to time; recent updates were in November 2023, February 2024, October 2024 and January 2025. In the November amendment, Colombia and Qatar were removed from the list and 10 countries were listed as [exceptions] so that certain categories of persons no longer need a visa before they travel to the UK as a visitor. In the February 2024 amendment, the UK removed Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and in October it removed Bahrain, Oman and the UAE from the list. In January, it added Colombia to the list again. Accordingly, the Ministry amended the Bermuda visa-controlled list.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Prohibition Orders are subject to the negative resolution procedure. Accordingly, the new Order was gazetted on 8 January 2025 and is laid before this Honourable House today. In accordance with the UK’s updated list, Bermuda has removed Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman

and the UAE from its Visa Controlled Nationals list and added Colombia.

Madam Deputy Speaker, with the fluidity of changes to the UK's list, more changes to the Bermuda Immigration and Protection (Prohibition of Entry) Order are anticipated. The Government notes that border policy has an impact on the supply of labour in Bermuda and visitors to Bermuda. As a result, in strengthening its border management system and tracking capabilities, the Government will seek to remove a number of countries from the Prohibition of Entry Order whose nationals have commercial travel access to Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the most recent changes to the UK's visa requirements impact Trinidad and Tobago nationals. Effective 23 April 2025, Trinidad and Tobago nationals will require a visa to travel to or to transit the United Kingdom, including short visits. In its announcement on 12 March 2025, the British Government advised that there will be a six-week transition until 23 April 2025, during which time visitors who booked their travel and obtained an ETA (electronic travel authorisation) before the changes were made can still enter the UK without a visa. There is also a transition period for passengers who are traveling via the UK to an onward destination.

In light of these changes, this Government will issue clear guidance to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago currently resident or visiting Bermuda without UK, US or Canadian travel authorisation to ensure that those nationals are not stuck in Bermuda without commercial travel access. Madam Deputy Speaker, looking ahead, the Department of Immigration will constantly review options in respect to visa-controlled nationals and Bermuda's border controls. The Government remains committed to the protection of our borders, while also ensuring that we can meet the workforce needs required for us to have a sustainable economy.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
I call on the Minister of Public Works.

PROTECTING OUR SHORES: ENHANCING LIFEGUARD COVERAGE FOR THE SAFETY OF ALL

Hon. Jache Adams: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we usher in a new administration, I rise today to address a matter that is both urgent and deeply important to the safety and well-being of our community—that is, the [lifeguard coverage](#) at our beaches. Over the last two years, tragic incidents have brought heightened attention to the critical role lifeguards play in ensuring the safety of those who enjoy our shores. These events served as a stark reminder of the importance of main-

taining a strong, well-equipped and properly staffed lifeguard service. With tourism returning strongly and cruise ships extending their season, the demand for lifeguard services is growing. While the Department of Parks remains committed to meeting this demand, the challenges we face in staffing our beaches with qualified lifeguards have never been more apparent. It is important to note that this is not just an issue of employment; it is an issue of public safety, and it requires our collective attention and action.

Madam Deputy Speaker, currently our lifeguard service consists of one full-time lifeguard, who serves as the Section Superintendent, and two categories of seasonal staff who work between April 1 and November 30. The key point here, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that almost all of our lifeguards are seasonal, thereby leaving our beaches underserved during the off-season. Coupled with this, since 2009, the Department of Parks has noticed a decline in lifeguard applications. It should also be noted that this decline in applications is despite the Government's increasing its budget to hire more lifeguards, demonstrating the issues we face are not merely financial. So therefore, we must reevaluate how we attract and retain personnel for these vital roles.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while lifeguards must pass a rigorous nine-day initial training course which is unpaid, monthly physical assessments and an annual 24-hour training course, starting lifeguards are amongst the lowest paid workers within the Department of Parks. Given the increased demands on these first responders, we must reflect as a society and as a government on how we value those in these critical roles.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, what is the Government doing to address these challenges? I am pleased to report that the Department of Parks has initiated an internal assessment of its current organisational structure in consultation with the Department of Employee and Organisational Development. Part of this assessment includes reviewing the lifeguard section, updating job descriptions, recommending new pay scales and exploring how we can transition seasonal positions into full-time roles.

Additionally, Madam Deputy Speaker, to assist with our effort to improve our lifeguard service, the Government has engaged the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (recognised as the RNLI), an international charity with extensive lifeguard experience providing lifeguard coverage to nearly 240 beaches across the UK and Overseas Territories. They have assessed Bermuda's lifeguard service and will make recommendations on how to improve our system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while restructuring will take time, we are also taking immediate action. In February of this year, the RNLI team assessed six of our busiest beaches, namely, Horseshoe Bay, Clearwater and Turtle Bay (counted as one), John Smith's Bay, Admiralty House, Warwick Long Bay and Shelly

Bay. The assessment will allow the department to better understand potential risks, map out hazards, and optimise equipment locations and operational areas for emergency responses. Outside of assessing Bermuda's lifeguard services and our busiest beaches, RNLI also consulted with key stakeholders including the Department of Parks lifeguard staff, the BTA [Bermuda Tourism Authority], the Ministry of Transport and the Bermuda Hotel Association.

As we await the fulsome report from RNLI, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Department of Parks continues to advertise for the seasonal lifeguard positions, and has already received over 20 applications, with hopefully more expected. However, Madam Deputy Speaker, as our tourism season extends year-round, we cannot continue to rely solely on a seasonal workforce. To ensure adequate coverage during the full tourism season, the Government is now advertising for eight full-time consultant lifeguard positions for a one- to two-year period, allowing for sufficient time for the MCS restructuring process to conclude.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in addition to our normal seasonal staff, these eight full-time lifeguards will suffice to cover high-traffic beaches throughout the year and during off-peak events such as the Bermuda Triathlon and various holiday gatherings on Elbow Beach, without overburdening the staff. Applications can be submitted online at www.gov.bm/online-services/lifeguardservice, or physical applications can be collected at the Department of Parks Headquarters in the Global House Building in Hamilton. The deadline for applications is April [4], 2025.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I must strongly emphasise that we are actively encouraging Bermudians with lifeguard experience to apply for these full-time consultant positions as we work to ensure adequate coverage throughout our tourism season. However, in light of the aforementioned recent tragedies, our priority is to save lives. If we do not receive sufficient applications from Bermudians, we will be compelled to seek qualified individuals from abroad to ensure the safety of all.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team within the Ministry of Public Works and Environment for their tireless work on this longstanding issue. I would also like to express my gratitude to our RNLI partners for their invaluable assistance in ensuring Bermuda is positioned to have the lifeguard coverage it needs. We look forward to building a long-lasting partnership with the RNLI.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I must acknowledge Mr. Nathan Trott, our sole full-time lifeguard and Service Superintendent. Since 2008, Nathan has been the backbone of the Bermuda Lifeguard Service, managing all aspects of the service from recruitment to training, equipment maintenance, scheduling and lifeguarding. He has done this without the support of an administrative team and has not had a substantive vacation since taking on this role. I am

sure all Members of this Honourable House will join me in expressing our sincere thanks to Nathan Trott and agree with me that it is high time we provide Nathan with the support he so greatly deserves.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, the safety of our community and the well-being of those who enjoy Bermuda's beautiful beaches must remain a top priority for this Government. As we continue to face challenges in staffing our lifeguard service, it is crucial that we take both immediate and long-term actions to address these issues. Through increased funding, restructuring efforts, and collaboration with expert organisations like the RNLI, we are committed to strengthening our lifeguard service and ensuring that our beaches remain safe for residents and visitors alike.

Madam Deputy Speaker, esteemed colleagues and to the listening public, if you or someone you know is interested in joining our lifeguard service to help protect our shores, we encourage you to reach out directly to Mr. Nathan Trott at njtrott@gov.bm.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I call on the Minister for Cabinet Office.

SALARY UPLIFT FOR PUBLIC OFFICERS

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to be here this morning, especially with the Statement I am about to read today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to share with this Honourable House the details of an agreement reached with our six union partners representing seven bargaining units in the public service regarding [salary adjustments for public officers](#). The union partners include the following:

- the Bermuda Public Services Union;
- the Bermuda Industrial Union;
- the Bermuda Union of Teachers;
- the Prison Officers Association;
- the Fire Services Association; and
- the Bermuda Police Association.

This negotiation process commenced in November 2024 with Interest-based Bargaining Training and concluded in February 2025 with an agreed framework that acknowledges the contributions of public officers and addresses existing pay disparities relative to the cost of living.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members may recall that in response to fiscal pressures over the past decade, the Bermuda Government adopted several austerity measures aimed at reducing public spending and improving financial stability. One of the most impactful measures was the implementation of salary freezes for public service employees. These freezes effectively halted salary increases, preventing wages from keeping up with inflation and the

rising cost of living. Specific actions have included the following:

- suspension of annual cost-of-living adjustments;
- freezing of salaries;
- introduction of hiring freezes, resulting in increased workloads for existing employees;
- changes to pension and benefits schemes, often resulting in increased employee contributions; and
- introduction of voluntary early retirement programmes.

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

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, austerity measures implemented in Bermuda have had profound impacts on the public service workforce. Collectively, these measures have created a complex and challenging environment for the public service employees. The unintended consequence of these strategic cost-saving measures is a heavier workload on existing employees. With fewer staff to share the responsibilities, employees have faced increasing pressure to meet their job requirements, leading to burnout and decreased productivity.

Mr. Speaker, the hiring freezes of the past have significantly impacted recruitment efforts in the public sector today. With the introduction of these freezes, the ability to attract and on board new talent at the pace now required has been severely hampered. The service is currently facing challenges related to recruitment activities. The lack of new recruits means that existing employees must fill multiple roles, which can further strain resources and reduce overall efficiency. Records show that there are currently in excess of 800 vacant funded posts within the service.

Mr. Speaker, austerity measures have aimed to stabilise Bermuda's fiscal health but have created challenges for public service employees. It is crucial therefore to address these impacts thoughtfully to maintain efficiency and morale in the service and to ensure fairness.

In recognition that public officer uplifts had significantly lagged the Consumer Price Index [CPI], the negotiating team entered negotiations with a mandate to achieve a fair and equitable outcome.

Mr. Speaker, the agreed framework for the cost-of-living adjustments for public officers will utilise the year 2014 as the baseline for determining annual pay award rates. This framework considers planned increases to pension contributions, planned increases to Government Employee Health Insurance (GEHI) contributions and the annual Consumer Price Index during the review period. The salary disparity adjustment represents the difference between the CPI and historical actual pay.

Mr. Speaker, the difference between the CPI and actual pay increases from the 2014 base year to

the end of 2023 will be distributed to staff over a four-year period. The fiscal years included in this agreement are 2024/25 through 2027/28. For the fiscal year 2024/25, public officers received an increase of 4.81 per cent. A payment schedule from April to August has been established, with each group receiving retroactive salary adjustments in line with the scheduled release of funds.

Mr. Speaker, in 2025/26 and each subsequent year of the agreement, the inflation uplift will be calculated based on the previous calendar year, estimated at 2.50 [per cent], along with a pay disparity of 2.31 per cent, an additional contribution to the Public Service Superannuation Fund [PSSF] offset estimated at 0.67 per cent per annum and a GEHI offset of \$50.00 per employee per month, equating to \$600.00 per employee per annum.

Mr. Speaker, the uplifts to offset additional employee contributions to the PSSF and GEHI are targeted to address the funding shortfalls, aligning with actuarial recommendations, and will help to support the longer-term sustainability of our public pension funds that the Honourable Premier addressed in his Statement earlier.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda Government is the largest employer in Bermuda. The decision to increase public officer salaries considers economic stability and social equity. Public officers play a crucial role in the functioning of the government and the delivery of essential services. Ensuring their salaries keep pace with inflation is important for maintaining economic stability. Fair compensation helps sustain purchasing power, thereby fostering consumer spending and stimulating economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, by providing an increase, the Government aims to address the effects of rising prices on its employees, ensuring their standard of living is not eroded. This approach reduces income inequality and establishes the public service as an employer of choice.

Mr. Speaker, competitive compensation packages are vital for attracting and retaining skilled public officers. Justifiable cost-of-living increases demonstrate the Government's recognition of its employees' efforts, resulting in enhanced performance and lower turnover rates. Sustaining a stable workforce benefits both the government and the public they serve.

The agreement with our union partners marks a further step toward recognising the contributions of public officers and addressing the financial challenges they face. It highlights our commitment to ensuring fair compensation for those who serve the public. Today marks more than a policy decision; it marks progress. Together with our union partners and the dedication of our public officers, we are not just correcting the past. We are building a stronger and more secure future public service. Let this moment stand as a testament to what can be achieved when collaboration meets commitment and as a signal that this Government

values, respects and supports the public service officers.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I inform this Honourable House about the work to modernise the job evaluation scheme and establish a new salary structure for the public service. This initiative aims for fairness, transparency and alignment with workforce needs and public expectations. PwC has completed its engagement, and implementation planning has progressed significantly. In the coming weeks, I will provide further updates on our advancements and next steps.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

And, Minister, before you get started, just let me ask for the indulgence of the House.

The Minister has one Statement on the Order Paper this morning. He has asked for indulgence on the second Statement, which has a relationship to something that is very current that is happening right now. And so I am going to ask your indulgence to allow him to do the second Statement after his first Statement. Okay.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL PEER-LED REVIEW OF THE BERMUDA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, colleagues and listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide this Honourable House with an update on a key strategic initiative of the Ministry of National Security stemming from the 2022 Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members may recall that in that Speech the Government pledged to invite His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services to conduct a review of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service [BFRS]. Specifically, it was stated: The Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service serves as Bermuda's first responders, providing island-wide EMT expertise, firefighting capability, and specialist operations in support of critical infrastructure. To ensure the highest standards of fitness for role, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services will be invited to conduct a review of the Service—the first [time] since 2010. Upon completion, the Legislature will be invited to take note of that review and its recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, following the announcement in 2022, the Chief Fire Officer engaged the Inspectorate in discussions about such a review. From these exchanges, it was recommended that the Government

would derive added value from a peer-led review by the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) [NFCC] as a precursor to the formal review by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services. The Ministry of National Security concurred with this recommendation and directed the Chief Fire Officer to engage the NFCC to undertake the peer-led review at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security further decided that it would be prudent to conduct an internal review of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service in preparation for the NFCC's visit in early 2025. Consequently, the Chief Fire Officer commissioned Management Consultancy Services to conduct an internal organisational and staffing review of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service in November 2023. The findings of this internal review have been instrumental in assessing staffing levels and operational efficiency of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. The Ministry of National Security greatly benefited from these insights in determining the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service's resource needs. The MCS report was subsequently submitted as part of the discovery phase for the NFCC review and will be referenced in NFCC's findings.

Mr. Speaker, to give some background and context, the NFCC serves as the professional voice of the United Kingdom's Fire and Rescue Service with a mandate to improve and develop fire and rescue services across the United Kingdom. The NFCC's core objectives include the following:

- strengthening professional and operational leadership of the Fire and Rescue Service;
- enhancing national coordination;
- reducing duplication and increasing efficiency;
- supporting local service delivery; and
- providing greater influence for Fire and Rescue Authorities and their services.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that in February of this year, the BFRS underwent a comprehensive organisational review conducted by a four-member NFCC UK team led by Chief Fire Officer Neil Odin, Chair of the NFCC's Prevention Committee. Their report, which was received this week and is currently being reviewed, is intended to support the BFRS in planning and prioritising its resources to address evolving risks through to 2030. The scope of the NFCC review included, but was not limited to

- an assessment of the current organisational structure;
- staffing levels and shift patterns;
- the impact of the newly negotiated firefighter benefits package under the Collective Bargaining Agreement;
- training requirements; and
- technology and equipment needs.

Mr. Speaker, the review team worked under certain constraints. Due to the timing of their visit coinciding with Bermuda's general election, they re-

frained from engaging with elected Members of Parliament to maintain impartiality and to avoid the risk of perceived political influence. Their evaluation drew on comparisons with UK standards and best practices while remaining sensitive to Bermuda's unique context as an island country.

Mr. Speaker, it is anticipated that a review by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, which will be conducted later this year or early in 2026, will build upon the foundational work undertaken by the Ministry of National Security and the BFRS. This forthcoming final review will undoubtedly provide additional findings and recommendations to support continuous improvement.

Mr. Speaker, the ultimate objective of this phased review process is to modernise the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service in order to ensure that it remains effective, efficient and fully capable of meeting the needs of the Bermudian public.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security remains steadfast in its commitment to support the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. We will continue to provide the support and necessary resources to ensure that our Fire and Rescue Service remains modern, effective and fit for purpose, and are well equipped to protect our people and save lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, would you like to proceed with that second Statement?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your indulgence.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

RECENT YOUTH VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, there are videos circulating in Bermuda showing students from our schools, particularly CedarBridge, and including middle school students, engaging in violent and disturbing conduct toward each other. This Government is not taking this lightly.

Mr. Speaker, I contacted the CedarBridge Academy Board [of Governors] Chairperson, Senator Lindsay Simmons, who had already been in communication with Principal Kenneth Caesar, the Minister of Education, Senator Crystal Caesar, MP Leroy Bean, and the Bermuda Police Service. Immediate action is being taken to address this situation and prevent further incidents.

Mr. Speaker, we also witnessed an act of bravery and responsible citizenship on Wednesday afternoon from Deputy Principal Christopher Swan, who risked his life to tackle a young man armed with a knife. His quick response likely prevented serious harm, and we commend him for his courage and ded-

ication to protecting others. However, this should never have happened in the first place. No student, teacher or staff member should have to face this level of violence in a school environment or around Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, this antisocial behaviour among our youth is deeply concerning. We cannot afford to lose any more of our children to violence, crime and negative influences. Every life lost, every young person caught up in the justice system and every act of [youth violence](#) is a failure of society. This is not just a school issue—it is a community matter. And we must all work together to remedy this problem.

Mr. Speaker, this Government remains committed to curbing antisocial behaviour and ensuring the safety of our community. We recognise that this is not just a disciplinary issue but a deeper societal issue that requires a unified, multi-faceted approach throughout our country.

Mr. Speaker, we are also asking the public to stop forwarding videos of violent incidents involving our youth. Sharing these videos only amplifies the trauma, fuels negativity and encourages further antisocial behaviour. Instead, if someone receives such content, we urge them to report it immediately to the Bermuda Police Service so that the proper authorities can handle the matter. Our focus should be on protecting our children, not spreading outrageous content that could further harm them. We must all recognise that we are the village. We are the role models that our children need to see. They are watching us, learning from our actions and looking to us for guidance. If we want them to make positive choices, Mr. Speaker, we must show them what that looks like.

Mr. Speaker, we must also demand that the parents of these children take responsibility for their behaviour. These children are clearly recognisable in these videos, so it is right for us to expect that the adults in their lives take accountability for this unacceptable and egregious behaviour. Adults must play their role in training up our children and not tolerate this violent behaviour. Government cannot solve this problem without the proper intervention of parents and adults.

Mr. Speaker, our Violence Reduction Strategy is a comprehensive action plan that contains a multitude of proactive and preventative measures to address violence in our community. Our Gang Violence Reduction Team is heavily involved in delivering programmes and providing interventions that are helping to address this issue of youth violence. Mr. Speaker, as part of the Violence Reduction Strategy that was shared with this Honourable House last November, here are some of the programmes that we know are the solutions for the way forward:

1. Stronger Security and Prevention Measures
 - a. We shall continue the collaboration between the Bermuda Police Service and schools to ensure proactive

- measures are in place to detect and deter dangerous activities.
- b. Enforcing a zero-tolerance policy for weapons in schools, with clear, decisive consequences.
2. Mental Health and Crisis Intervention
 - a. Expanding access to counsellors to support young people before they reach a crisis point.
 - b. Identifying at-risk youth early and providing intervention programmes that address trauma, behavioural issues and emotional distress.
 - c. Strengthening partnerships with mental health organisations to ensure youth have access to the help they need.
 3. Parental and Community Engagement. Through the Violence Reduction Strategy, we are
 - a. launching educational opportunities and awareness programmes to equip parents with the tools to recognise warning signs of gang involvement, bullying and emotional struggles in their children;
 - b. strengthening connections between schools, churches, community leaders, sports clubs and local organisations to provide mentorship and guidance;
 - c. encouraging parents to take an active role in their children's lives—monitoring their activities, setting boundaries and fostering open communication.
 4. Empowering Youth with Positive Alternatives
 - a. Expanding community programmes and job-training programmes to give young people constructive outlets for their energy and creativity.
 - b. Partnering with businesses and professionals to create mentorship programmes that expose youth to career opportunities and positive role models.
 - c. Increasing funding for youth-focused initiatives that promote leadership, discipline and self-respect.
 5. Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice
 - a. Continuing peer mediation programmes and conflict resolution training to help our youth learn how to handle disputes peacefully.
 - b. Continuing a restorative justice approach where youth are held accountable for their actions but are also given the opportunity to reform and grow.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda must work together in this arena. The future of our children is at stake, and we cannot allow violence, peer pressure and negative influences to steal their potential. I have for some time now been advocating for a collective approach to the youth violence in our country. We are asking the entire community to look out for our children. If you see something, say something. If you know a young person who is struggling or heading down the wrong path, reach out and provide some guidance, advice or help. If you can be a mentor, a supporter or a protector, now is the time to step up and make a positive difference in someone's life.

Mr. Speaker, it takes all of us—parents, teachers, neighbours, faith leaders, law enforcement and the wider community—to ensure that our children grow up in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. This is not just about laws and policies; it is about our collective responsibility to protect and guide the next generation. We must hold each other accountable for the contributions we are making toward a safer and more secure future for our children.

Mr. Speaker, this Government stands firm in its commitment to doing our utmost in protecting our children. We will continue working with educators, parents, law enforcement and the community to create a safer and a brighter future for our youth.

Mr. Speaker, I hasten to reiterate that this is not a political matter. This matter is far beyond the cut and thrust of politics. This is a matter that demands our collective cooperation and mutual support, irrespective of political affiliations. Our youth deserve our collective efforts toward providing them with the guidance, discipline, structure and support they need to become productive and responsible citizens in our country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, there is one other further indulgence that I have shared with the Whips, that the Premier has an additional Statement that he would like to do.

Premier.

REMUNERATION OF MEMBERS AND OFFICERS OF THE LEGISLATURE

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present to this Honourable House the Government's position on the [remuneration of Members and Officers of the Legislature](#). This is a matter that requires careful consideration, balancing fairness with fiscal responsibility while ensuring that those who serve the people of Bermuda are compensated appropriately for the responsibilities that they shoulder.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will recall that in November, the Ministers and Members of the

Legislature Salaries Review Board Final Report (of August 2024) was tabled in this Honourable House. The board comprised representatives appointed following consultations with the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. The members of the Board were the Honourable Maxwell Burgess (Chair); Edward Ball Jr., JP; Donnie Francis; Steven Holdipp; Carl Neblett; N. H. Cole Simons, JP; and Jocene Wade, JP.

The Ministers and Members of the Legislature (Salaries and Pensions) Act 1975 requires that this board be convened every two years to review and report its recommendations to this Honourable House. Once appointed, the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Salaries Review Board operate autonomously and reach their conclusions without any direction from the Government.

Mr. Speaker, in my public statements after the report's publication, I expressed concerns about some aspects of the Board's report. One concern I raised was that the recommended increases disproportionately favoured the Premier and the Speaker of the House. As I did in November, I wish to make it clear that I do not support an outsized increase in the Premier's salary, and any adjustment should be applied fairly and consistently across the board to all officers and Members.

Mr. Speaker, there has been no salary adjustment for Members of the Legislature in over 15 years. Additionally, Ministers' salaries were reduced by 10 per cent in 2013, and those reductions have remained in place. Over this period, the demands and complexities of public service have increased significantly. Officers of the Legislature now operate in an era of heightened public scrutiny, faster decision-making cycles and increased responsibilities in a rapidly evolving governance landscape.

Mr. Speaker, the scope of work required to manage critical national issues, engage with the public and navigate modern governance challenges has grown substantially. The proposed adjustments recognise these realities and ensure that remuneration fairly reflects the workload and expectations placed on those who serve as officers of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, reasonable increases to compensation also serve as an incentive to encourage those in the community who may be interested in serving as a Member of this Honourable House. By ensuring that remuneration reflects the responsibilities of the role, these adjustments improve the attractiveness of public service, helping to mitigate the challenge of motivating residents to step forward and contribute to our country's governance.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet has reviewed the recommendations of the board and approved a final set of recommendations for adjustments to salaries for Members and officers of the Legislature. The resolution that will be tabled in this House later today aligns

with our principle of fairness while ensuring that these adjustments are balanced.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has accepted the board's recommendations for base salary increases for Members of the House of Assembly and Senators. The Committee recommended an additional \$7,000 increase for Members of the House of Assembly in addition to awarding a cost-of-living increase of 18.8 per cent. This additional increase was not initially supported by myself; however, in the interest of respecting the bipartisan consensus following the report's discussion of the Standing Orders Committee of the previous Legislature, the Government has accepted this recommendation.

The Government has also accepted the Committee's recommendation for a substantial increase for the Speaker of the House, recognising the role's importance to the operations and functions of the House of Assembly as the bedrock of this Island's democracy. The bipartisan Standing Orders Committee also supported this adjustment.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned earlier in my Statement, the remuneration for officers of the Legislature has not been adjusted since 2009. Consistent with the recommendation of the Standing Orders Committee, cost-of-living adjustments have been applied to all officers. The formula used to arrive at these adjustments was the approved increases for public officer salaries for 2022 (which was 2.25 per cent), 2023 (which was 2.25 per cent) and 2024 (which was 4.8 per cent), equalling a total of 9.6 per cent.

It should be noted that the Government did not take into account increases awarded to public officers in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2017 and 2018. The adjustment in remuneration for officers of the Legislature will be increased by 9.6 per cent from 2009 levels, which amounts to less than half of the 21.1 per cent that has been awarded to public officers over the same period, equating to 0.64 per cent per year. The Government felt this was reasonable considering the base rate adjustments recommended by the board and accepted by the Government.

This 9.6 per cent increase for officers will apply to the President of the Senate, the Vice President of the Senate, the Deputy Speaker, the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Attorney General, Ministers, Junior Ministers, Opposition Leader, Junior Ministers and Opposition Whip.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has made additional adjustments to two other officers of the Legislature, the Minister of Finance and the Government Whip. The Minister of Finance has an important constitutional role in our Island. Given the complexities of that role, it was felt that remuneration for that position should be increased. The resolution increases the remuneration for the Minister of Finance by \$10,923 more than the 9.6 per cent increase from the 2009 remuneration applied to other officers of the Legislature. Schedule 2 of the Ministers and Members of the

Legislature Salaries and Pensions Act allows for different rates to be paid to the Government Whip and the Opposition Whip. The resolution sets the remuneration for the Government Whip equivalent to that of a Junior Minister, which is \$4,177 more than the 9.6 per cent increase from the 2009 remuneration applied to all other officers of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, had salaries for officers of the Legislature been increased in direct alignment with the wage adjustments received by public officers, as some have suggested, the financial impact would have been more significant. Instead, the resolution tabled today reflects a more measured approach, keeping the adjustments for officers well below those seen in the public sector while ensuring that remuneration remains fair and appropriate for the responsibilities of these positions. The financial impact of these adjustments is \$283,343 per annum above the board's recommendations but ensures fairness across the board rather than large increases for a select few¹.

Mr. Speaker, the resolution proposes that changes will take effect on January 1, 2025, to ensure fairness in pension calculations for former Members. This approach guarantees that long-serving Members who recently left the Legislature are not unfairly impacted by the 15-year wage freeze in pension calculations. Former Members such as the long-serving Deputy Premier, Deputy Speaker, Minister of Public Works, and members of the Opposition, who dedicated years to public service, will have their pensions calculated on adjusted salaries rather than the 2009 rates. This decision ensures that those who have served Bermuda over many years receive fair treatment in retirement in line with [the adjustments being made] for those currently in the Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Premier.

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

We will now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: The Statements this morning are the only thing on the Question Period. There are no written [questions] this morning. So, we will start with the first Statements that were presented this morning.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to interrupt. If I may?

¹ The Honourable Premier corrected the sum of \$283,343 to \$123,877 in the *Official Hansard Report* 28 March 2025 at page 212.

I missed the last page, and it is important to read for the record. Do you mind if I read it? The last Statement. I am very sorry.

The Speaker: You are following on from somebody who did that last week.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Did not somebody miss a page last week?

[Laughter]

The Speaker: This is a new practice now?

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Do you mind, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Members, do we indulge the Member on his page that was left out?

Some Hon. Members: Yes, yes.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

REMUNERATION OF MEMBERS AND OFFICERS OF THE LEGISLATURE

[Continuation thereof]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, after the week we have had, I appreciate that laugh. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The last page of my Statement read as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I understand that discussions around salary adjustments for elected officials are often met with scepticism. However, it is essential that we collectively acknowledge that serving in public office is not easy. It is a demanding responsibility that requires personal sacrifice. Fair compensation helps to attract and retain individuals with the expertise, dedication and commitment required to govern efficiently and effectively. These adjustments are not about financial gain but about fairness and recognition of the evolving role and increasing demands placed on those who serve the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members, the Premier has included his last page.

QUESTION PERIOD

[Continuation thereof]

The Speaker: We are now at the Question Period. I will note the time and the fact that we will have 60 minutes per normal. The clock will start with the first question being put.

The first question this morning, Premier, is from your earlier Statement. MP DeCouto would like to put his question to you.

MP.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As these are my first words in this Chamber, I hope you will gently correct me should I make a mis-step.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Yes. Let me also state for the record, this does not constitute his maiden speech. This is part of the Question Period.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The maiden speech will come if he speaks on any other debate today.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And I also will be guided. I have four questions. Should I lay them out together or one at a time?

The Speaker: It is three questions—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Oh, it is three questions.

The Speaker: —three questions plus supplementaries. So put your first question.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Have you guys no schooling?

The Speaker: Members, Members, Members.

Put your first question, and then get your supplementaries in, and you can move on to the next.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: You will pardon my confusion, Mr. Speaker. There were multiple reports but of course one Statement. So I hope you . . .

The Speaker: Okay. So put your questions and field any supplementaries from that question.

QUESTION: ACTUARIAL REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT'S PENSION PLANS 2023

[Question disallowed]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

My first question is, the Statement on the pensions referred to the outstanding investment performance that led to some of the results. As you know, there is quite a lot of turmoil in our neighbours to the west, the United States, and some of the investment markets there are perhaps not doing as well as people would like. And I wonder if the Honourable Premier could venture an opinion on what that might do with the pension funds. That will be my first question.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Sorry. Were you asking for a direct question or opinion on it? Because the questions have . . . I am trying to quote the rule in my head, but it should not be opinionated. It should be a factual response, a factual based on the facts.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, let me disregard that question.

The Speaker: Okay. All right.

QUESTION 1: ACTUARIAL REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT'S PENSION PLANS 2023

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay.

With regard to the actuarial reports, Mr. Speaker, and to the Honourable Premier, I have searched the Hansard high and low for the 2020 reports for the public sector pensions as well as the Members' pension, and I wonder if the Premier can advise if the Ministry of Finance did indeed receive those reports? Because I have not found them tabled in the House as per law. That would be my first question.

My second question would be—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Sit down.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay. Thank you.

The Speaker: Yes, put your first question. Then he can answer, and if you have any supplementaries from his response, you get to ask two supplementaries. So let him respond.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, off the top of my head I would assume that the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Finance at the time do comply with the law, 2020. But I will . . . No, I am relatively certain that those things were tabled because that came in 2022. But I will go ahead and look, and if they are not, we will make the necessary submissions as necessary. But I know that Ministry officials in the Ministry of Fi-

nance are listening right now, and so we will go ahead and take a look at that.

The Speaker: Okay.

Do you have a supplementary question, or do you want to go to your new question? Once you go to your new question, you cannot come back to this one.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: New question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, go right ahead.

QUESTION 2: ACTUARIAL REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT'S PENSION PLANS 2023

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Will the Premier provide a general outline of the changes we might anticipate to see in the Public Sector Superannuation Fund pensions? Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: As has been stated in this House numerous times, recorded inside of the Hansard, especially from budget debates and discussions last year, the fact is that there are only a few changes of which you can make to pension funds, which I am sure the Honourable Member does know. You change either the reference year or the reference wage. You increase [what] the age of eligibility of receiving those benefits can be. Or you increase contributions. The solutions, as has been done previously when matters were dealt with insofar as pension funds, is a combination of all three. It would be premature for me to state the specifics, but we are happy to debate the Bill when it comes to the Legislature in May.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question now?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Statement did indicate a very specific set of agreements had been reached. So I guess my question would be, Of the menu of options that the Premier mentioned, which options were going to be undertaken? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I just answered that: a combination of all three.

The Speaker: All three. Okay.

Further supplementary or your third question? Third question?

QUESTION 3: ACTUARIAL REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT'S PENSION PLANS 2023

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The topic of the issues with the pensions has been a well-known topic in this House for at least five years on many, many Government and Opposition Statements. And so my question is, Can the Premier help us understand why it has taken so long to arrive at the changes needed in the public sector, public servant superannuation fund and the contributory pension fund? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

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

The Government engages in broad and fulsome consultation, and I am certain that the Honourable Member is aware of the consultation which had been outlined in this House on numerous times, probably in the other place where he used to sit, in the public and around these particular matters when it comes to the matter related to the public sector superannuation fund.

I am trying to start off on a good wicket, so I am going to do my best not to be too, I guess, parliamentary. But the reality is that governing is more than just press releases and statements. You have to actually get into the details. And the reality is, in an environment where you have to agree with public sector unions in spaces where they may have a reduction in pay, it is important that you reach a middle ground. The Honourable Minister for the Cabinet Office laid out the fact that we have come to an agreement with pay, recognising so these particular matters can move forward. Unless the Honourable Member from the Opposition is suggesting that we should make changes to compensation for public officers and reduce public officers' take-home pay, that is not where the Government of Bermuda is.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Point of order. Yes.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Honourable Mr. Premier is misleading the House as to my intentions on what I may or may not be thinking to which he has no knowledge, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, he was trying to respond. Okay. He was trying to respond with an interpretation of what he perceived.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, much to the chagrin to the Members of the Opposition, they are going to have 19 more months of this. So, they had better get ready.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: So here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. Here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that governance is difficult. For the Honourable Member to say, *What has taken this long?*, you have to work through the process. I think the Honourable Member would welcome the fact that we have an agreement with unions, that we have come to a historic pay agreement that we are actually going to move and fix the public sector pension fund, and the first fix that we put them on stable footing since changes were done 20 years ago. This is an accomplishment he has spoken about in numerous spaces. It is something that is particularly important. And I look forward for his support as Shadow Minister of Finance as we move and advance that. If he wishes a briefing on these particular matters, I will be happy to arrange one for him.

On the matter related to the public, the contributory pension fund, we do know, as was stated in the consultation, that the changes that were recommended by the committee were significant. There was significant concern in the private sector, there was significant concern in the international business sector and there was concern in the public sector. That is the reason why inside of my Statement I stated what came back from that level of consultation is that persons said that we should consider whether or not, combined with some of the increases which may be necessary in other changes, to look to see if there is space to supplement that from revenues from the corporate income tax. We await the report of the Tax Reform Commission of which the Honourable Shadow Minister was a former member.

But those matters, as I addressed in my Statement, are urgent and will have to be dealt with after PSSF, which is significantly important as it is a direct impact on the Consolidated Fund, shows up in our balance as a \$1.2 billion liability and is something that is consistently referred to in ratings agencies. We look forward to fixing that particular matter so that that contingent liability can come off of our balance sheet and we can look forward to more favourable ratings from the ratings agencies.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is of course a vital topic for the country and hence my deep, deep interest. And so my supplementary question is—

The Speaker: But this is a supplementary?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —to the Honourable Premier, May you confirm (yes, a supplementary) what date did you first present, did the Government first present a proposal to the unions and upon what date was the final agreement reached? Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: I can assure you I do not know the first date that it was presented off the top of my head, Mr. Speaker. But I am sure the officials of the Ministry of Finance have taken, but I can say these discussions have been going on for a number of times. These discussions predated my time coming back to Ministry of Finance, they have been long and ongoing, the work that has been happening, and we have been going back and forth. So from that particular aspect and instance, I cannot give a specific date. But the fact is that we are at a space where we have done the work so we can advance this and move it forward in the interests of the country.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary? Okay.

And you used your three questions. Thank you.

No further questions, Premier, for you on that Statement.

The next Statement that has questions is the Statement from the Junior Minister. And again, it is MP DeCouto.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: CONSOLIDATED FUND FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2024

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

With respect to the Junior Minister's Statement on the consolidated funds, it refers to \$79.4 million of payroll funding from the sinking fund. Could we be advised as to why it was required to take those monies from the sinking fund for the payroll?

Thank you, Junior Minister.

The Speaker: Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, funds are allowed to be taken out of the sinking fund to be—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That is right, to be used for other areas. It is allowed right now.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, supplementary.

My understanding . . . I am going to give the context so that he can answer it precisely, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is, we passed a law last March that enabled funds to be moved from the sinking fund into other funds. My understanding is that law, the Government Loans Amendment Act, came into effect at the end of last March. So, I would like to be advised as to what authorisation or laws enabled these funds to be moved from the sinking fund for the payroll without going through the regular budget process. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if I may answer?

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is referring to a different section of law. The matters relating to the excess borrowing fund able to cover deficits were passed, actually, by the One Bermuda Alliance when they were in office. And that is under the authority that was done. So sometimes when we are talking about payroll, et cetera, and different things, the fact is that sometimes the government's cash budget may run low and it gets topped up again. That is the way that those matters are used from the excess borrowing fund, which is set out inside of the Government Loans Act.

So that is the reason, and that is the explanation that we are giving at this point.

The Speaker: Okay.

Further supplementary? Your second supplementary or second question?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Second supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Go ahead.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Could the Junior Minister please advise when those funds were moved out of the sinking fund and if it was before or after the Government Loans Amendment Act came into force?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that information right now. I can get it back to the Member.

The Speaker: All right.

Do you have a second question? No. Okay.

Ministers, Members, that is the last question for that Statement. We will move on.

The next Statement that has questions this morning is the Statement by the Minister of Tourism and Transport on the matter of TCD. Minister MP Robinson would like to put his questions to you.

MP.

QUESTION 1: TRANSPORT CONTROL DEPARTMENT ADVANCEMENT OF DIGITALISATION

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker, and thank you. Good morning to colleagues and the listening audience.

My first question is, Will this digitisation affect the employment of any person at TCD or cause redeployment from TCD to other departments?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
The answer to that is no.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Or second question?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Second question, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

QUESTION 2: TRANSPORT CONTROL DEPARTMENT ADVANCEMENT OF DIGITALISATION

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Will the digitisation of this particular TCD department cause any increase in data collection so that TCD can assist the transport stakeholders?

The Speaker: Minister.

In a nutshell, with improved technology, will we gain more information?

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Basically, that is the nutshell of it.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think if the Honourable Member was listening carefully to the question and the Statement, he would have understood that I went through a litany of positive things that were going to come out of this new digitisation of services. I think the question that he is asking was answered in the Statement. Maybe he is a little excited today, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: So the answer is yes, it will be more information.

Do you have a supplementary? Supplementary? Or third question?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. One supplementary.

It is that data collection and data management were not included in the Statement. So, I would like for the Minister to expound on how that may be occurring. It was not mentioned in the Statement, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All right.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: The answer is yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

Is there a second supplementary or third question, or are you done with your question? Okay, thank you.

Oh, you are going to do a third question? Oh, yes, go ahead, I missed that. I thought you were done.

QUESTION 3: TRANSPORT CONTROL DEPARTMENT ADVANCEMENT OF DIGITALISATION

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Third question: Assuming that this digitisation will be brought in by probably a third party or outside force, just asking . . . if that is the case will we be told who is handling that particular work?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister. Minister?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Minister, direct your response this way.
Members.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
All of the work of this new process will be done internally, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary or no supplementary. Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, one supplementary.

Is there an estimated cost for this particular digitisation process from start to finish as it is set to start fairly soon?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

As I mentioned a moment ago, all works on this new project will be done internally. So the budgets that are already set will be used, and we will see advancements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary? None? Okay, that concludes your questions.

However, Minister, there is another Member who would like to put questions to you on that Statement.

MP King, would you like to put your questions?

[Crosstalk and laughter]

The Speaker: All right, Members. Members.

Mr. Robert King: They don't listen to me they listen to the lawyer.

[Laughter]

Mr. Robert King: Sorry. Good morning, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Honourable House.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: TRANSPORT CONTROL DEPARTMENT ADVANCEMENT OF DIGITALISATION

Mr. Robert King: Regarding the Ministry of Transport, what is the timeline for full automation of the processes? I know that there is going to be digitisation to improve efficiencies, et cetera. I am just wondering what the timeline is for full implementation. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Statement did say, we will be starting with three on March 31 of this year. As we get the three up and running, there were seven more that I did mention in the Statement that will come as the year goes on. So, we do not have a full completion date, but we will be rolling them out one after the oth-

er. But I can tell you definitively that the first three will be rolled out as of March 31.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplementary or second question?

Mr. Robert King: First supplementary, please.

The Speaker: Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Understanding that there is a strategic plan that would have been drafted, timelines for completion of certain phases would have been projected. I am wondering what those projected timelines are for full automation. Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I am not sure if the Member did not hear my answer a minute ago, Mr. Speaker, but I will repeat it.

We will have three that will be up and running as of March 31, and the others will follow subsequently. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Second supplementary or second question?

Mr. Robert King: Second question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Robert King: This question is for the Minister of National Security.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, no, no, no, no.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Oh, sorry, sorry, sorry.

The Speaker: Oh, oh, oh. We are still on—

[Laughter and crosstalk]

The Speaker: Okay. No problem, no problem.

Minister of National Security, at least you know you have a question coming; how is that?

We will move on to the next Statement.

The next Statement is actually the Minister of National Security in reference to his first Statement on the Fire Review. There are two Members, the first is the Opposition Leader. I will take him, and then we can go to your Member afterwards.

Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question?

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

Just a point of clarification, I had some questions for Honourable Minister Rabain on public salary.

The Speaker: Yes, that is further down.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Oh, that is further down? Okay, thanks.

The Speaker: Yes, the Minister of National Security did two Statements. Originally, he was on the Order Paper ahead of time.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Ah, okay.

The Speaker: That is why I am doing the first one. So, we will do his first one now. We will get to his second one at the end of the Order Paper. His first one was in this order.

QUESTION 1: NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL PEER-LED REVIEW OF THE BERMUDA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you and to Members and the listening audience.

Would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to the recommendations that came out of the NFCC 2023 report? He mentioned that the results were used as part of a further exercise, but I am interested to know what the NFCC findings were.

The Speaker: Minister.

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

I think I said in my [Statement] that those results are being reviewed, and once they are finished being reviewed I would make the findings known.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Supplementary or second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, please. What is the—

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: What is the anticipated delivery date for those findings being circulated to Parliament?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Probably not by the end of March but hopefully in our session sometime in May.

The Speaker: All right. Thank you.
Second supplementary or second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Second question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 2: NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL PEER-LED REVIEW OF THE BERMUDA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, actually, Mr. Speaker, I will move on to, When will stakeholders such as the public and/or high-risk infrastructure such as utility docks and ships, as well as front line personnel, be involved in these review exercises? We have not heard any mention of that.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Can you clarify that? I do not think any of that was in my Statement.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. The Honourable Minister had mentioned that persons who were not included as stakeholders during the general election, such as Members of Parliament. My question was in relation to other stakeholders, will they be involved, have they been involved? This again includes utility operators, dock operators, shipping, et cetera.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Thanks for the clarification. Relevant agencies and persons will be involved as is necessary. But the main report was done, an assessment was done by the constabulary of the UK. So that is the foundational report, and anybody else who needs to be involved will be as the report becomes finalised.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Another supplementary or third question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: End of questions for that Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, end of questions. Okay.
Minister, you have questions from MP King.
MP King, would you like to put your question now?

QUESTION 1: NATIONAL FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL PEER-LED REVIEW OF THE BERMUDA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Would the Honourable Minister of National Security please inform this Honourable House what the timelines are for the implementation of the recommendations of the Fire Service Review?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The recommendations for the implementation are pretty well immediate. Once the report is finalised and the recommendations are certain, then we will go about the process of putting those recommendations in place.

The Speaker: Supplementary or second question?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Supplementary.

Do we have an anticipated date for the implementation based on information received today?

Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, definitely, as soon as possible.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any more questions? Supplementary or second question? Second question, yes.

Mr. Robert King: Regarding the youth violence initiative, understanding the increase in violence—

The Speaker: Ah, ah, that is going on to the next Statement.

Mr. Robert King: Oh, yes, yes, sorry.

The Speaker: That is going on to the next Statement. Yes. No problem, we will move on. So there are no further questions on this Statement.

Members, the next Statement that has questions is the Statement by the Minister of Economy and Labour in reference to the Employment amendment.

MP Campbell, would like to put questions to you, Minister.

MP Campbell, you have the floor.

QUESTION 1: EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Honourable Minister whether the end results of this, just for clarity for the public's sake, will result in money owed to employees. Or is he just rectifying something that was brought to the attention of his Ministry that was causing a problem?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, the intention of the amendment is to ensure that every employee who receives a gratuity receives a minimum of \$16.40 for statutory leave. What happened inadvertently when we put the Act forward, the Act did not exclude gratuities, which meant in the total calculation one could have moved from being paid a base rate on statutory leave of \$5.75 up to almost \$25.00 if you include gratuities. But it was always the intention of the Ministry and the LAC [Labour Advisory Council] that the base would be \$16.40.

As a result of that, there could have been where employers would have paid an employee higher than the \$16.40 based off of the interpretation of the law. Now that we are clarifying it, we are clarifying it to ensure that the \$16.40 is the appropriate rate that should be paid when factoring in gratuities. As a result of that, the Act is actually saying that if an employee was paid above the \$16.40 for the period of time in which the law came into effect, then the employee does not have to reimburse the employer. I do not think there will be a case where the employer has paid less than what they were actually due in this particular circumstance.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary or new question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Supplementary.

The Speaker: Yes, go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Vance Campbell: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

So in the instance, it appears, Minister, that the employer may have paid more than they should have. Will the employer be required to recalculate payroll for the period in question, and will there be any refunds or credits offered to the employer for payroll tax and any other percentage-based deductions?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: In actual fact, how the law is written, the employer would not have paid more than they were due according to law. It was a misinterpretation in terms of the intention of the law. As a result of that, to head off this challenge we convened an LAC meeting many months ago to clarify this with employers. All of the major employers I had sent a letter to where they paid their staff gratuities. I sent letters also to members of the Chamber of Commerce for those who would not have been naturally part of the LAC or part of the Hotel Association or restaurant divisions to clarify this particular matter. And we all came to a

consensus that we will operate according to the intention of law until the law is rectified.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Further supplementary or new question?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, supplemental.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes.

So, as of the first of March, Minister, 2024, at what point was it flagged and was it flagged by the employer or the employee? Or another entity?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Actually, it was a combination of both. And I would not say the word was actually “flagged.” We assumed in terms of intention it was a natural bridge to the Minimum Wage Order. However, because gratuities were never defined separately from tips, the only thing that was included in law was tips. Once we separately defined “gratuities,” it kind of pulled gratuities out of the definition of “tips,” creating a new definition. And therein lies where the challenge came because the Order referred to gratuities. You would know then when we amended the legislation for the tips and gratuities amendments to the Employment Act, we actually created a new definition of “other gratuities.” And that is when the challenge actually arose because now that we carved out gratuities from tips, it removed the exclusion from the calculation of statutory leave.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary? Okay, next question, yes.

QUESTION 2: EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Mr. Vance Campbell: One final question, Mr. Speaker.

We have had a number of revisions to clarify matters as it pertains to the \$16.40 in certain circumstances. Does the Minister feel that guidance notes or additional training sessions for employers would help their situation?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Department of Labour does put out guidance for the Employment Act and all of the provisions which lie in the Employment Act. We went through a great effort in terms of putting out guidance. We will continue to put out guidance. But if anyone needs clarification as it pertains to the inter-

pretation of the Employment Act, the Department of Labour is the department to provide that accurate interpretation.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Vance Campbell: No, thank you.

I thank the Minister for his responses.

The Speaker: Okay, no further questions. Thank you.

Minister, those were the only questions that were listed for that Statement.

However, your next Statement also has questions. That is from MP Campbell again.

MP Campbell, on the second Statement.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA IMMIGRATION AND PROTECTION (PROHIBITION OF ENTRY) ORDER—BERMUDA'S VISA CONTROLLED NATIONALS LIST UPDATE

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to ask the Minister as it relates to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly those who are here in Bermuda working, there has been provided a six-week transition period. Just for clarity, will the nationals who are working here from Trinidad and Tobago have to leave Bermuda before the end of the transition period to obtain the necessary visa? Or is there some other provision going to be made for them to obtain the visa without leaving Bermuda?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, as indicated in the Statement, we are going to provide full guidance to nationals from Trinidad and Tobago who may not possess a visa who are currently in Bermuda. Why I did not provide the clarity in this Statement is because ongoing conversations with the United Kingdom are ongoing to determine whether or not there will be a pathway so that we do not interrupt our labour supply or residents and visitors who are currently here.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary or new question?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Vance Campbell: Supplementary.

As it relates under the same purview or area, as it relates to visitors, they will definitely be required to leave . . . or will they be required to leave before the end of the transition period? Again, just for clarity for the public.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I have sought to indicate that we will provide full guidance. I appreciate the ques-

tions that are coming from the Opposition Member. The guidance that we will provide will provide clear, concise answers to the questions that he is currently asking. However, I think it would be premature for me to provide those answers when we are still having conversations on the way forward.

The Speaker: Okay.

Second supplementary or second question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Second supplemental.

That guidance that the Minister has mentioned, will that be in person or by email or a combination?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: It will be through public notification.

The Speaker: Second question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: No, that is it.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you.

The Speaker: Members, that was the last question for that Statement. Thank you, Minister.

Members, we will move on. The next Statement that has questions this morning is the Statement from the Minister of Works.

Minister, you have questions from Members. The first Member is the Opposition Whip, who would like to put a question to you.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And let me just say, thank you for your indulgence with some of our new Members on trying to get up to speed. I have been in this House of Assembly for 13 years, somewhat, and I still see seasoned Members making errors. It is a daunting task, and so I commend them for this opportunity that they have.

[Inaudible interjections]

QUESTION 1: PROTECTING OUR SHORES: ENHANCING LIFEGUARD COVERAGE FOR THE SAFETY OF ALL

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: On page 1 of the Honourable Member's Statement it says, "It should also be noted that this decline in applications is despite the Government increasing its budget to hire more lifeguards." What I would like to know is, in this budget did it include also pay increases?

The Speaker: Okay.

Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Is the Member referring to the recently agreed pay increases?

The Speaker: Just clarify it for him, please.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. You say, "It is also noted that this decline in applications" on page 1, the third paragraph up from the bottom, "is despite the Government increasing its budget." So is the budget that you have come up with for getting lifeguards and dealing with all of the signage and all of these kinds of [things], does that include in that budget an increase in pay?

Hon. Jache Adams: No.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary or second question?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, supplementary.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, a budget has been established. But if we go back and look at former Statements that were made, it was clear in this Honourable House that pay increase was one of those issues, that lifeguards were well underpaid. This is going over plus-year on when we have been discussing this here. What is the new pay for the lifeguards then?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, in the Statement it referred to a process that the Government is going through, and part of the recommendation is a new pay scale. It is part of the process that is taking place, is the consideration of a new pay scale for these lifeguards.

The Speaker: Second supplementary or second question?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Second supplementary, yes.

The reason I am asking the question is because we are already in the process of hiring lifeguards, and we are going to hire lifeguards without having put the increase in place, which was flagged as one of the major issues that we are having. So, I am trying to understand why have we not come to at least hiring at a higher rate, because we are just exacerbating the situation by not having the pay increase already done.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, perhaps we are moving ahead of ourselves. We are hiring eight lifeguard consultants whilst we reconsider and reform the position of being a lifeguard in Bermuda. So what I am saying is, yes, we are hiring lifeguards. At the same time, we are in the process of reviewing what it means to be a full-time lifeguard in Bermuda. That means revamping job descriptions; it means updating and increasing the new pay scales and the like. So there are two separate things. We have our lifeguards, eight lifeguards that we are hiring, [which] is temporary whilst we address the full-time positions that we are looking for, which is a more long-term solution.

The Speaker: Further supplementary . . . no, second question?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Second question.

The Speaker: Second question.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

QUESTION 2: PROTECTING OUR SHORES: ENHANCING LIFEGUARD COVERAGE FOR THE SAFETY OF ALL

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Second question: considering back in May of 2024, and twice . . . and two Statements were done in May. You can see those in the *Royal Gazette* as well, which were copied. It spoke then of the fact that lifeguard pay was to increase and work permits to be fast-tracked. At this particular time, have we hired any new staff to this? And I have a supplementary to this; I know he is going to say he said it already.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: I said it already.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, my supplemental.

[Laughter]

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member was almost talking about the cart before the horse. Well, we are hiring people, and we need them urgently. Cruise ships are already here. And we are paying them at a rate that is well below the standard internationally. The question is, How are we going to get life-

guards of the calibre that we need and the numbers that we need, and we still have not worked what the issues are for the lifeguards? We are hiring lifeguards without the description. It is already out.

The Speaker: [INAUDIBLE]

Hon. Jache Adams: No, Mr. Speaker, I am with you. I am not even quite sure if that was a question. I welcome the Member to rephrase and put it into a better question.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Sure. At this point, how are we hiring . . . sorry, Mr. Speaker.

At this point, how are we able to hire new employees, new lifeguards, when we still do not even have a proper description or pay rate for them?

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, again there are two separate things. The lifeguards whom we are currently hiring have a . . . so that we are clear, the lifeguards whom we are taking on for a long-term description will have a job description. The eight whom we are referring to, whom we are hiring now, if you recall, we are calling them “consultant lifeguards.” So, they are consultants. That is why you do not have the level of job descriptions that you are referring to. They are consultants in comparison to our long-term solution, which is job descriptions. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary to that?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes. So, just to be clear . . . and I know the Honourable Member. I respect him and I know he is doing a good job to try and explain. So then, are we saying that we have employed these new recruits, consultants? Are we paying those consultants at a different rate than what we were paying before we made them consultants? They were actual lifeguards?

Hon. Jache Adams: So first let me be clear.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes.

Hon. Jache Adams: We are in the process of hiring.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes.

Hon. Jache Adams: They are not being hired yet; we are not paying anyone anything yet.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay.

Hon. Jache Adams: In fact, I believe that the advertisement went out today for that particular position. So

we recognise that there is a gap. We recognise there is a gap. We are hiring these individuals to sustain us so that we are ready for the season whilst we establish a more long-term position in terms of our long-term and full-time lifeguards.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: At the same rate? The consultants?

Hon. Jache Adams: The new ones in comparison to current? Sorry, we are doing a little bit of back-and-forth?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes. Just for clarification, I am trying to understand. So the consultants are being paid at the normal rate at this time? As of what was established before? Because that was one of the biggest problems of getting people. That should have been fixed.

Hon. Jache Adams: The consultants are actually being paid a higher rate. They are being paid a higher rate whilst we . . . okay, if that is the answer. Yes, they are being paid a higher rate.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Any further questions? No further question?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I am good.

The Speaker: You are good?

The Speaker: Minister, you also have questions that would like to be put to you by MP King.
MP King?

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, go right ahead.

QUESTION 1: PROTECTING OUR SHORES: ENHANCING LIFEGUARD COVERAGE FOR THE SAFETY OF ALL

Mr. Robert King: I am encouraged by the efforts to improve safety on Bermuda’s beaches. And I am wondering about the strategic plan regarding the lifeguards that you are hiring. Excellent. In the meantime, has provision been made for netting and safety equipment being stationed at the beaches to improve safety before and after the lifeguards have been hired? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: The short answer is yes. I would not specifically get into the specific equipment, but I

will say that we recognise the importance of safety, and so continued measures to improve our equipment, to improve safety on our beaches, is a priority and we will continue to do so. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

Mr. Robert King: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Given the Honourable Minister's comments, can the Honourable Minister confirm if there are lifeguards in situ now for the March 2025 cruise ships? And will there be in April 2025 as well, given that there will be 33 or so visits in April from cruise ships?
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: So that one is a bit difficult to answer simply because of, again we are in the process of hiring these consultants and the—,

Mr. Robert King: So, no.

Hon. Jache Adams: Now, we are not going to get off on a bad foot.

But the short answer is no, but it can change. And the reason that I say it can change is that it depends on, as you recall, many of our lifeguards are, for example, university students and things of that nature. So these university students may, by all intents and purposes, be able to come home a lot sooner than they currently predict. So the answer is no, but the answer can be yes. It just depends. That is part of the issue that we are having with the seasonality and the availability that we have on Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Supplemental to that?

The Speaker: Yes, go right ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. So considering the students coming back and the like, coming back potentially as consultants, what is then the consultant rate at this present time?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: The consultant rate at this time is \$30.60 an hour. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any supplementary? No supplementary.
Okay.

Minister, those were the last questions that were for you.

We will move on. The next Statement that has questions is the Statement from the Minister of the Cabinet in reference to the salary uplift for public officers. And the questions are from the Opposition Leader and others.

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

QUESTION 1: SALARY UPLIFT FOR PUBLIC OFFICERS

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

Would the Honourable Minister be able to describe the financial impact assessment that has been done on the long-term costs for the new compensation arrangements?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I will try to answer for the Minister of the Cabinet Office. I do not have those exact figures if they were not covered in the Statement. But I think it is important to note that they are variable, I think, as the Minister outlined, the long-term thing is difficult to impact as this is going to be inflation-indexed as well. So there are some set portions in it, but we do not know how much GHI we will need to change in the future. We know that PSSF is set to be a 2 per cent increase over a three-year period in order to balance the matter, so we understand that. But on the issue that is related to the total, overall cost, that is not exactly known. I will, if the Minister does not have it, get the exact figures for this year because we know what it is for this year. I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, it was covered in the Statement.

The Speaker: Okay.
Okay, supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.
Is the calculated increase going to be covered by ongoing revenue or require borrowing?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, there is no expectation of further borrowing that is going to happen under this Government.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary or second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Second question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

QUESTION 2: SALARY UPLIFT FOR PUBLIC OFFICERS

Hon. Jarion Richardson: The Honourable Minister mentioned that the PwC review job evaluation reform is being completed and implementation is being progressed. Could he speak to, or would the Honourable Minister clarify how the job evaluation reform will align with the digitisation and public service modernisation efforts?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you for that question. As I mentioned in the Statement, further comments on the job evaluation progress will come. They are now in the process of actually looking at exactly what the Member has asked, so there is no answer for that at this moment. But updates as that project progresses will come to this Honourable House for sure.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary or new question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Supplementary, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. I thank the Honourable Minister for that.

Will the reform process also address any inefficiencies, accountabilities and performance management in the public service?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Speaker: Ok. Yes.
Second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Second supplementary, thank you.

The Speaker: No problem, yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, what are the plans to reduce the number of vacant funded posts—I believe the Honourable Minister said over 800—while implementing a new structure?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member would recall from the Throne Speech and from the election

platform that just took place that more resources and additional things will be done within DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] to address the shortcomings.

The Speaker: Okay.
Further question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Next question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 3: SALARY UPLIFT FOR PUBLIC OFFICERS

Hon. Jarion Richardson: The Honourable Minister had just spoken about making further Statements to the House and further reports relating to the reform process, including addressing inefficiencies and accountabilities. When will that report be brought to this Honourable House?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if I may help on this one as well, as I know Ministers are transitioning, et cetera. On the particular matter the Honourable Opposition Leader will know that there have been previous Statements in Throne Speeches regarding Public Service Commission Regulation reform, which is dealing with the streamlining, and discipline and handling. Those matters have been through consultation and been signed off since by the Governor. Unfortunately, those matters have not been able to emerge from the Attorney General's Chambers. They are well overdue, and we are looking forward to them. And I am happy to arrange a briefing for the Opposition Leader to understand the changes to the Public Service Commission Regulations, as he does have an appointment-sharing role with me on that. And I am happy to have the draft changes, which the Cabinet has approved, which are progressive.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: No further questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister and Premier.

The Speaker: All right.
Minister, you have also have questions from MP Campbell.
MP Campbell.

QUESTION 1: SALARY UPLIFT FOR PUBLIC OFFICERS

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to ask the Honourable Minister, Were the agreed increases anticipated and therefore included or accounted for in the Pre-Budget Report?

The Speaker: Minister. Or Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member would know from the Pre-Budget Report that it is stated insofar as future increases where it made a specific provision for increases to public sector salaries, as we knew that negotiations were taking place and we understood the framework that negotiations were taking place. The Honourable Member would know that I think there was a provision inside of the Pre-Budget Report, I do not remember off the top of my head, but I think it was around circa \$20 [million] or \$30 million.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Vance Campbell: Supplementary.

Were the agreed increases in line with the provisions that were made in the Pre-Budget Report?

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Supplementary or second question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Nothing else.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Members, that brings us to an end of the questions for that Statement.

The next Statement that has questions is actually by the Minister of National Security. Your second Statement has a Member who wishes to ask questions. Your first is from the Opposition Leader.

Opposition Leader.

QUESTION 1: RECENT YOUTH VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

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

Would the Honourable Minister be able to inform this Honourable House when the Bermuda Police Service Schools Resource Officers programmes will be staffed?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, in answer to that question, I do not have that off-hand, but I will endeavour to get the answer for you.

The Speaker: Go ahead, Member. Second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Second question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 2: RECENT YOUTH VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Are the security arrangements at all of the schools being reviewed at this time?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Well, actually, that is an Education problem . . . not problem. I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. That is an Education *question*.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The answer to that is yes.

The Speaker: Supplementary or second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Supplementary, please.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to the extent to which he or the technical officers at National Security have been consulted in the process of a security review?

The Speaker: Minister.

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

The team at the Ministry of National Security is working closely with the schools and with Education in trying to provide the best security possible for our children.

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 3: RECENT YOUTH VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Fantastic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister.

When can we anticipate being updated as to the changes being made subsequent to these disturbing events?

The Speaker: Members, even though we have gone past the 12:30 mark, we have only got five minutes or so left on questions. So, we are going to finish that and then break for lunch.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The views are always ongoing. So as we move from one step to the others, obviously the relevant parties will be informed.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplementary or—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Second supplementary.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Are there any tangible or measurable impacts that we can see that are currently anticipated in this review?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Well, the measurable impacts, hopefully, Mr. Speaker, would be less school disturbances by our children.

The Speaker: Thank you.
That was all of your supplementaries.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: That was perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. You are all right. Good.
MP King, would you like to put your questions in these four minutes that we have left?

QUESTION 1: RECENT YOUTH VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am following on from what was said earlier.

Do we have a timeline on when these new protocols will be put in place to address the increase in youth violence? Thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, can I get clarity on that as to what protocols are we speaking about?

The Speaker: Could you provide the clarify for [the Honourable Minister]? Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Sure. Understanding that the issue of youth violence has been mentioned in the House on numerous occasions, I understand that there would be a strategic plan that would involve consulting with relevant authorities, local and abroad. And with that in mind, the same way that the Fire Service had a review with persons coming over, there would have been some recommendations that had been made as part of the national strategy and implementation dates for completion of said phases.

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

If I could hopefully be helpful to the Honourable Member, the National Anti-Violence Strategy, as we started implementing it in 2024, last November, is constantly being implemented. And our teams are there on the ground and fighting and trying to do our best to have a decrease in the youth violence that we are experiencing. So those protocols are in place. And they are constantly being reviewed to make them more and more effective.

The Speaker: Do you have a supplementary?

Mr. Robert King: I do.

The Speaker: Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Understanding anecdotally and as reported the current measures are not meeting their objective, which is decreasing the incidence of youth violence. So in terms of the strategic plan, what are the implementation targets, the specific measurables that we are trying to achieve, and what are those deadlines that we are trying to achieve? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I will start from the beginning, the back, and work forward. First of all, the obvious thing that we are trying to achieve is to eradicate new violence completely. And what we are doing now, we are trying to decrease new violence. And I feel that the teams that are in place in our schools and in our communities dealing with our youth are doing good work in trying to get to the bottom of the antisocial behaviour. And our constant struggle, our constant job is to try to decrease violence to the point of total eradication.

The Speaker: Okay.
Any supplementary or third question?

Mr. Robert King: No, I am finished. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Members, that brings us to a close of the Question Period for this morning.
So I am going to ask now that we stand, and, Premier—

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House do now adjourn for lunch and come back at 2:00 pm.

The Speaker: That is fine.

Hon. E. David Burt: Is it two?

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Two-oh-five?

The Speaker: Do you need an extra five minutes or do you want—

Hon. E. David Burt: It is up to you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Two-ten would be great.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, whatever your wish is.

The Speaker: It sounds like I have to do something now. We will come back at 2:05 pm.

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

The Speaker: Okay.

Members, the House stands adjourned until 2:05 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:36 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:06 pm

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members. The House will resume for the afternoon session.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: When we broke for lunch we had just completed the Question Period, and we now move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: MP Lawrence Scott, would you like to make a contribution at this time?

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Mr. Speaker, I would like the Honourable House to send a letter of congratulations to Mr. Tariq Lynch-Wade. He is the founder of Aviators Alliance Bermuda. They had a symposium this week, and I could only say that it was very heartwarming, heartfelt and exciting. Just to be around other people who . . . In a previous life, everybody knows that I used to travel around the world at nine miles a minute. Yes, do the math and you will figure out how

fast that is. But there are others who share that same enthusiasm for aviation.

And this symposium had about around 120 other Bermudians with a panel of about 20 Bermudians, all whom are in different phases of aviation. You had commercial pilots for JetBlue. You had commercial pilots for Southwest, corporate jet pilots, simulator instructors, all of whom are born Bermudians from here in Bermuda, all the way over to being based in China. So once again this shows that the aviation industry is alive and well in Bermuda and that there is another generation coming up to fulfil the seats and the areas in the cockpits that will be left open later on in life.

But once again, Mr. Speaker, just a letter of congratulations to Tariq Lynch-Wade for the Aviators Alliance symposium.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member?

MP Tyrrell.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good afternoon, colleagues and the radio audience.

Mr. Speaker, we have not had this opportunity to do this item for quite a while. So my congrats may seem a little dated; however, worthy of mention as they fly the Bermuda flag. The first one I would like congratulations to be sent to is one Kacey Scotland. She is the daughter of family friends, Cleon and Kimiko Scotland. And Kacey was given an internship with the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, in London. She was chosen out of thousands of applicants. So she is well deserving of our congratulations.

My next one is for Dr. Jessica Jones Neilson. Her family actually resides in my constituency in Jones Village. And Dr. Jessica is an Assistant VP and first Black woman at City St. George's University of London. What is noteworthy, Mr. Speaker, is that there are approximately 22,000 professors in the UK and only 70 of them are actually Black females. So, she is actually among some elite group of people there.

The next two I would like to ask have congratulations sent to are actually sportspersons. The first one is Mustafa Ingham, who was part of the crew in the last Sydney Hobart race. Sort of late—I think it was December last year. And his team did quite well. He is one of the sailors who came out of the US Cup. (I think that is what they called it.) He is doing quite well in sailing.

The other sportsperson that I would like congratulations to be sent to is actually my neighbour. His name is Oliver Betschart. Not only is he an academic student at his university, but he is also a junior golf champ on the Eastern Seaboard of Florida. And he is doing quite well. Some of us may know that he was in the championship here last year, or the year before.

So he is quite a golfer. But as I said, he is an academic as well.

So, I ask that congratulations be sent to all of them as they are Bermuda ambassadors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member?
Opposition Leader.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate, and I hope the House joins me in congratulating, Casa dos Açores, Portuguese charity, for its 10th anniversary gala which they had during our break. For 10 years they had been working to advance the interests of Portuguese-descended Bermudians and culture. And I wanted to congratulate them on their 10th anniversary.

Also, I would like to congratulate Wendy Davis Johnson, who finished and published her book, *Faith and Purpose*, on Brian Duperreault, the gross proceeds of which, some \$62,000, have been donated to the Bermuda College Foundation. I think we are all well aware of the involvement of Mr. Duperreault's contributions to Bermuda, most especially in insurance but also his social endeavours.

I also want to congratulate the Chair of the Verbal Victory Spelling Bee, Mrs. Norma Wade-Miller, who oversaw . . . I will associate the former Education Minister, who undoubtedly had known about it, and of course the current Education Minister, who sits in the other place. The winner of it was Jared Arnante, but there were 10 finalists and they were fantastic young people. The victor was from Somersfield Academy. And Somersfield Academy will be hosting next year's Verbal Victory Spelling Bee. So congratulations to them.

And last but not least, the Gina Spence programme on the inaugural Grief and Loss Awareness Day. And the Minister of National Security was there as well and made the proclamation. Bermuda now has a Grief and Loss Awareness Day, which is absolutely key to making sure that we are aware of what happens in violent and traumatic events and that we are able to understand, sympathise, console and have the ability to keep the people in our community. So again, congratulations to the Gina Spence Programme.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member?
MP DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to send my condolences to the family of Mrs. Eve Redford, her children Vivian, Judy and Graham, and I am sure some others will associate with that as well, and all of the grandchildren.

As well as Mrs. Janet Bento. I send condolences to her on the passing of her husband, Mr. James Bento.

I want to send congratulations to the Pembroke Hamilton Club. I had the pleasure of joining them at their gala celebration on the weekend, and it was a fabulous display of what makes that club so strong. And I learned—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Of course I will associate the Minister, Mr. Speaker—

An Hon. Member: The entire House.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And the entire House, if they so desire, of course. Now I must admit it was a learning experience for me. But I will just tell you I was blown away by the event and what I learned about that club and their community. I will leave it at that.

I also had the pleasure, Mr. Speaker, of popping by the 60th Annual Schools Art Exhibition last night at the Bermuda Society of Arts. And if you wish to be wowed by colour and creativity, I would urge everyone to go up there. And I congratulate the students and all of the art teachers who enabled that exhibition be put together.

It may be too late, but I of course would like to be associated with the remarks regarding Mustafa Ingham and Oliver Betschart, Casa dos Açores and the Gina Spence Programme.

Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you.

The Speaker: You have your three minutes, sir.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off on a sad note and offer condolences and ask if the House would send letters of condolences to the families of the three individuals.

The first is Mr. Craig Jones. Officer Craig Jones was a resident of Pembroke East. More specifically, 83 Glebe Road was his residence. And that is an historic residence in the Progressive Labour Party as our one-time leader had interest in that property. So Craig Jones, some of you would know him. He was a long-time security officer at the Fairmont Southampton Princess as it was called back in the day. So, I just want to send condolences to his family.

Also to the family of Ms. Marsha Carey, also a long-time Progressive Labour Party member.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. I would like to associate the other members of my party with that. She was a member of constituency 15. And specifically to her sister Simonette Carey, and all of her loved ones as she was laid to rest actually on the same day that we had the convening of Parliament.

And also to the family of Mr. Claredon George Burch, George Burch who was laid to rest last Sunday. Many of you would know that Claredon George Burch was the brother of Lieutenant Colonel, the Honourable David Burch. And may a letter of condolences be sent to his family as well.

Thank you. And I will associate the Premier with those condolences.

On happier notes, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate The Berkeley Institute on their win. I think there are probably successive wins at the interschool sports that were held last week Friday. I associate all of the alma mater and the Berkeleyites who are in this House. I definitely am for Green House, but we are not talking about that right now, Deputy. We are talking about the Berkeley Institute as a whole, who continue to show their sporting prowess on the sporting scene. And we look forward to all of their participants, some of whom are going to be representing Bermuda in the CARIFTA Games next month.

Also, congratulations to Ms. Serilina Fisher. She has a tremendous voice, as some of you would have seen last weekend, as she is the newly crowned Bermuda Idol.

I would also like to send congrats to artist Mr. Bill Ming. Some of you would know Bill Ming is a legend on this Island as far as his art. He grew up (I do not see MP Famous) in Devonshire on St. Brandon's Road. And he was a neighbour and friend of my father. So, I was very happy to be able to take him to that opening on Friday.

And I will save the rest of my congrats to another day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Minister Diallo Rabain.

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

Mr. Speaker, I would like congratulations sent to all of the participants in the [Minister of Education's Debate Challenge] that recently was completed. It was a journey of love. I know it started under myself, but it did finish. And I am looking forward to that debate competition coming back next year. Mr. Speaker, in the 10-to-11 category, the winning team consisted of Russian Thompson, Connor Faries and Xela Hall. And the 12-to-14 team consisted of Nylah Matthews, Rudy Puhekker and Etana Holdipp-Lynch. I attended a lot of the lead-up to the final, and I can say that all of those students learned a great deal from Mr. [Gladstone] Thompson and his team. So congratulations to Mr. Thompson and his team.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like congratulations sent to Ms. Lisa Reed, who was named Woman of the Year.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I associate the entire House, Mr. Speaker. She was named Woman of the Year by the Women's Resource Centre [HRC] and the International Woman's Day Committee. For those of us who do know Lisa and her role at the HRC, we know that she is quite a lovely person to get to know and actually talk with. And I do not speak out of turn because she is my cousin as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be associated with the congratulations for Serilina Fisher, who at 14 years old, two weeks before her 15th birthday, won the Bermuda Idol. And it was quite a sight to see her performance on that night, Mr. Speaker.

And on a sadder note, Mr. Speaker, I would like condolences sent to a former Member of this House, Mr. Jason Wade, whose father Russell Wade has recently passed. I remember Russell Wade as the Chief Engineer at Public Works when I joined as a fresh-faced youngster. And it was very interesting. I got a call from the Permanent Secretary of Public Works, and he went down the list of the trainees who came in under Russell Wade. And I believe he got up to about 12. So, it was just a testament of his give-back.

Lastly, but not least, and I am sure some other people will have more time to speak on this, condolences to the family of Eldridge Eugene James Woods, Mr. Speaker, the last founder of the Progressive Labour Party, who recently passed. I had the pleasure of talking to him during the election. He actually sat me down in his yard and we talked for about an hour. So, I did get a good insight. And I am happy to know that I had that opportunity to talk with him only maybe four weeks ago.

So I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.
Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Good day, Mr. Speaker. Good day to the listening public.

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a sad note to give condolences to the family of Carolyn Smith, mother to Wayne Furbert, Randall Furbert, Calvin Smith, Carolyn-Lynn Smith and predeceased by her son Collins Smith. She is greatly missed, and she is a great loss to her family, and I would say to the Bermuda Regiment, as she was the adoptive mother to the Bermuda Regiment. And I think most people would know because of the great involvement of her sons in that institution.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give condolences to young Mr. Lionel Thomas, who tragically lost his life

a few weeks back on the roads of St. David's. Definitely we can say *young man gone too soon*.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to give condolences to the Smith family in St. George's. And I will associate the Member from constituency 1 with these condolences. A well-known family in St. George's, Mrs. Sandra Smith, wife Sub Smith, who recently left us. Again, you can call her somewhat a matriarch. I would also like to associate Member Chris Famous, because I think her family did move to his constituency. And he is the Member who saw to her constituency needs.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: And I would like to associate the Member from constituency 2, Mr. Kim Swan, who would like any of us from St. George's to know how closely knit we are and why we mourn the loss of Mrs. Sandra Smith. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

MP King, would you like your three minutes?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

First off, I will start by extending my condolences to the family of Dr. Fulton. His sister Helen Ortiz died recently. To the family of Mr. Neville Trott, the family of Mr. [Colin Michael Hind "Dusty"] and also Eldridge Woods.

On a lighter note, I want to offer congratulations to Jordan Roberts, who recently started a film production company. She is a Bermudian and she started a film production company in California. So congratulations go out to her and her family.

And also, Shanna Hollis and Nahshon Hollis, who are two very accomplished artists in this community, who continue to do great works and gave a speech in Dockyard approximately two weeks ago to inspire kids to the art world. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Minister Weeks.

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

Mr. Speaker, I have a few congrats. I would like to first congratulate the Boulevard Blazers, they are my constituents, on their well-deserved promotion back to the Premier Division after a two-year absence. My phone has been ringing off the hook because they know that I love them, but my loyalties go a little further west.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: But hats-off to the Boulevard Blazers.

Congratulations also, Mr. Speaker, to nine-year-old Isabella Brielle Daniels. She is the daughter of former Senator Marc Daniels. She is a student at the BHS [Bermuda High School for Girls], and she won the Fire Safety Awareness Poster Contest, a creative, her name is Isabella Brielle Daniels. Her creative insight for interpretation of smoke alarms, *Make them work for you*, truly stood out and highlighted the importance of fire prevention in Bermuda. As a special thank-you, the Bermuda Fire Service actually put her winning submission on a fire truck. So that will be there for the next year until the next competition.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate the 26 dedicated Customs officers and different staff who were honoured with long-service awards in a special ceremony held last month. Their years of commitment, resilience and unwavering service in protecting our borders and ensuring national security are truly commendable. So a heartfelt thank you from myself and my team at the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Speaker, on a sombre note, I would like to acknowledge the passing of a few of my constituents. Mr. Michael Outerbridge, Jr., son of Michael Sr. and Brenda Outerbridge. I would like to associate the Minister Diallo Rabain with the loss of Mr. Outerbridge.

I would also like to be associated with the remarks for Mr. Claredon George Burch. He was a former employer of mine. And as it was mentioned, he was the brother of the former MP and Minister, [David] Burch.

And before I take my seat, I would like to also be associated with the condolences for one of the founding members of our beloved party, Mr. Eugene Woods.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

MP Pearman, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to start by being associated with the remarks by MP King in relation to the condolences to the family of Dr. Fulton, and also to the Hind family who lost Dusty Hind.

I would also like to offer condolences—I do not know if condolences have been offered already—for the passing of [Winifred] LaVerne (formerly Ming), now Lau. Mr. Lau is a restaurateur, and I would like to offer my condolences to her family and their daughters Jodi Virgil, who is of course the Secretary of Paget Parish Council, and Jill Virgil, who I believe is still at HSBC, although she may be at a different bank now. It was an amazing service. I do not think I have ever been in St. Theresa's when it has been so full. I note that there were some other MPs there as well, including former Deputy Leader Walter Roban, no longer in the House, and also I think MP Curtis Dickinson was there. And I am sure that they would join

with me in offering condolences and being associated with those remarks.

The eulogy given by the . . . well, actually the eulogy was given by the priest. But the further comments by Bishop Wieslaw of the Catholic Church there at St. Theresa's were very, very moving and very personal. But he pointed out all of the goodness that she had done very, very quietly in her own way. And it was a testament to a true Bermudian whom we have lost. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

MP Swan, would you like your three minutes?

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

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to be associated with the condolences to the Lau family, which is indeed the Ming family in St. George's in which our sister Cheryl, Johnny Ming, Darlene. I know how very saddened her sister Cheryl was. We were very close indeed.

And my condolences also to the family of the late Helen Ortiz. I believe someone mentioned the Fulton family, but that is the family. Helen, a St. George's girl, blue and blue, through and through. We offer condolences.

Also to the family of Nelson [Chesterfield] "Cap" Simons, whose son was a former Opposition Leader in this House, whose family I am very close to through the golf community.

Also to the family of musician extraordinaire, Mr. Rudy Commissiong, who did a great deal in the hospitality industry.

While I am on the hospitality industry, Mr. Neville Trott. I am very saddened to have learned of his passing. In my early days when I first came back home to Bermuda, involved in the tourism and hospitality industry at Castle Harbour, it was persons like Mr. Neville Trott that you would rely on in the Bermuda News Bureau who did great work communicating Bermuda's exploits of visitors on Island and their experiences within their communities up and down the Eastern Seaboard and Canada and the like. And I know he will be sadly missed by his friends and family.

Also condolences to [the family of] Johnny DeCosta "Fire" from Somerset, but came to St. George's. and like me, we are blue and blue through and through. May he rest in peace. He was funeralised up there at Beulah Tabernacle in Somerset.

And on a happier note, the Betschart family, whose children Darina and Oliver are enjoying great success in the game of golf, being coached by my childhood friend whom we played golf with in 1974, David Ogrin. These two young juniors, I am proud to have developed them in their formative years, are do-

ing quite well. And the best is yet to come for them, Mr. Speaker.

And finally, to be associated with the condolences to [the family of] Sandra Smith, her husband "Sub" and her family down there in St. George's, and around Bermuda with friends and family. They are well loved. They love sport. They supported St. George's Cricket Club through and through in both football and cricket. And I am sorry she is not going to be here when we lift the Cup in St. George's this year. Thank you.

The Speaker: Wishful thinking, but will not be delivered on.

MP, Deputy Opposition Leader.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be associated with the condolences for Nelson Chesterfield Simons, the father of our former Opposition Leader, Cole Simons. I did attend that funeral. It was well attended. Specifically, I would like to speak of the eulogy that was given by Colonel Lamb. I thought it was really well done. I did have an opportunity to meet Mr. Simons at Commonwealth Games, because he was actually a shooter for Bermuda. So I know I would like full condolences to be given to the family because I know that they are missing him at this time.

I would also like to be associated with the condolences to Eve Redford. MP DeCouto had already mentioned this, so I want to be associated with it. But for me, the specific connection is with her grandson, Philip Hagen, who is somebody whom I coached for about 15 years. I know that he is going to be missing his grandmother. So to him, to Judy Hagen and to Viv Redford, sincere condolences. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Opposition Whip, you have the floor.

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

Due to the timing, I was not able to be in the House while we were . . . Well, we were all on break. And I wanted to just give condolences to [the family of] Trudi Ann Pugh from Seabright Avenue. She was on my task team for our constituency. And I must say, very well-schooled in the art of politics. There was never a time when I heard her speak ill of really anyone. But she understood what it meant to canvass, and she understood what it meant to speak to the people within the community and understood their needs as well. So it was a great help to myself in understanding the pathway for me, going forward in constituency 12. Her husband, unfortunately, passed away a year before her. And in her 70th year passing away, we want to send condolences to the family. We

have lost truly a great family from Seabright Avenue. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

MP Scott Simmons, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you would not mind, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to be associated with the condolences that have already been sent to [the family of] Mr. George Burch, a faithful member of the Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist Church. I remember as a young man that Mr. Burch taught the Summer School class, and he also instructed us in a number of other things. And all of us appreciated him then, and we appreciate him as we have gotten older even more so now. So I send condolences out to his family, let them know that we are praying for them, and that he will forever be in our memories.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to send out condolences to parts of my family. Johnny DeCosta is my cousin. And I just wanted to send condolences to parts of our family who are mourning at this time at his passing. He was a phenomenal person. He was known in the Somerset community and he will be sorely missed.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention the wife of Mr. Joe Bailey, Mrs. Margaret Bailey who passed. And I want to send condolences, and I want to recognise the Speaker as well, in response to that.

And lastly, Mr. Speaker, if I may, the passing of Mr. Eldridge Eugene Woods, as a founding member of the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party certainly provides us with an opportunity to reflect on days passed. He was a phenomenal individual. He was quiet in spirit. He was a good conversationalist. I appreciated his history and with so many chairs from the Progressive Labour Party in the House, and having served, he provided us with advice, unfiltered advice, and we appreciate him as we appreciated him then. So, may he rest in peace, and we thank him for the contribution that has made the Progressive Labour Party as strong as it is today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Simmons.

MP Tucker, you have your three minutes.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Ms. Robin Tucker: I would like condolences to be sent to two of my constituents' families, Mr. David Barnes and Mr. Charles (Sonny) Charves. I would like to also associate myself with the condolences expressed for Mrs. Trudi Ann Pugh. She was actually one of my son's teachers at Mount Saint Agnes. And

everything that the Member said about her was absolutely true. I found the same thing.

I would also like to associate myself with the condolences expressed to the former MP Simons and his family on the passing of his father, Mr. Nelson Chesterfield Simons. And, as well, I would like to express condolences to the family of Marsha Carey. Marsha was a fellow member of my church, Better Covenant Christian Fellowship [BCCF]. I would also extend condolences to the BCCF family as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: MP Famous.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues and people of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, Devonshire has lost four persons in the last couple of weeks. At least four. I associate with Ms. Sandra Smith, she was one of the first people to say, *Hey, I'm from St. George's and I'm PLP proud*. Also, Mr. Ronald DeSilva of Sousa Estate. He had his birthday the week before the election, then something happened and he passed.

And for those of a certain era would know the name Alexander Arnfield. He passed as well recently. All from constituency 11.

And just across the street, I would like to be associated with the comments about Mr. Eugene Woods. Mr. Woods was the father of one of my best friends. And ever since I have known him he has always been a person to guide you, to direct you, not in a loud way, but in a very quiet way. I just want to give condolences to his wife, Ms. Whilma-Jean Woods, his sons Greg, Ryan and Paul, Andre and Janene, his daughter, and a multitude of grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the community of Loyal Hill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

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

MP Robinson.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to extend condolences to the family of Walter Carlington who was a man of faith and was one of my favourite conversations on the canvassing trail. He will be missed. His family is mourning his quite-sudden passing and I wanted to extend condolences to his wife Delores and their son.

For the congratulations, I would like to congratulate the South Hampton Parish Council. They had a very informative community security briefing last night that I think is an important topic for all of us in this House to consider, especially with the mounting pressures overseas. So, I would like to congratulate them for their efforts to educate people on that topic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Minister Adams.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to associate myself with the congratulations to Ms. Lisa Reed, for being awarded the Woman of the Year by the International Women's Day Committee. I met Ms. Reed on several instances on several different occasions and I have nothing more to add than it is certainly well deserved. And I will associate the Premier.

I also would like to associate myself with the condolences to Ms. Marsha Carey. In fact, it took me a while to even know that her last name was Carey because for my entire life I just knew her as Aunt Marsha. She and my grandmother were very good friends. And she was someone who was always a positive spirit in my life who supported and encouraged me in any capacity that I chose to take on. So she will certainly be missed dearly.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not also associate myself with the condolences on the passing of Russell Wade. Mr. Russell Wade is the father—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: I associate myself. I associate other Members.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: Exactly.

I will associate myself with the condolences for Mr. Russell Wade. He is the father of one of my very, very, very close friends, former Member Jason Wade. Even currently, as the Minister of Public Works, Mr. Russell Wade was the PS for what was then Works and Engineering. Certainly, it is refreshing to hear the impact that he had on particular infrastructure that we still utilise today, most notably Tynes Bay, and the impact that he had on the Tynes Bay plant, as well as Watford Bridge. Those are two significant projects that he was the lead engineer on, and that he certainly took pride in. But, no matter what he did in his career, I always just knew him as an exemplary father and an exemplary husband. So may he rest in peace.

Thank you.

The Speaker: [INAUDIBLE]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask the House to give condolences to Dr. James Brockenbrough. Mr. Speaker, you may know that he was a cardiothoracic surgeon who practiced in Bermuda from 1997 through 2004. He was a graduate of Howard University College of Medicine, and he was directly responsible for the sharp decrease in amputations at KEMH during his tenure in Bermuda. And he

is survived by his wife, Brenda, and his two sons. He will certainly be missed.

I would also like to associate myself with the remarks given to Mr. Eugene Woods, one of our founders, as you know, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes I think all of us, especially on this side of the House, when we have one of our founders or one of our longstanding members pass, I just think we cannot give them enough praise, Mr. Speaker. We just cannot. Way back when, when they decided that this is what they were going to do and this was what they wanted to do for the people of this country, look at what they achieved. It is just so really significant and it cannot and should not just be, *Well, you know, Mr. Woods passed.* So I think that we must continue to honour people like Mr. Woods for the significant contribution that he made not only to this country, but to our beloved party.

I would also like to, while I am on my feet, associate myself with the condolences for Mr. Russell Wade, whom I had the pleasure of working with on many different projects. I even flew away with him at one stage when we were going to do something really significant for the country. And we did. So, my condolences go out to his family and, in particular, our former MP Wade, who used to sit in this place.

The Speaker: [INAUDIBLE]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and good afternoon colleagues.

I would like to echo the sentiments of my colleagues who spoke before me and all of those who have passed and been praised for their accomplishments. But I would like to focus in on Mr. Woods. We do not often get the sad opportunity to praise a true national hero. And a true national hero who put not only his life and his well-being and his reputation on the line standing up for Bermudians against injustice with the Progressive Group, but also being willing to form a political party at a time when economic terrorism, racism and retribution was not unusual. So, there is a particular level of courage that is unique and represents a true national hero. And he will always be remembered and honoured for that.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to extend congratulations to the new spelldown champ, Mr. Jared Armante of Somersfield [Academy]. And I have to say that the last time this was held was in 2011. And my poor son Nasir has been holding the title ever since waiting for someone to take the crown.

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

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Undeafated!

[Laughter]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: So, I am glad to see that it has been resumed. It is a tremendous learning opportunity for young people. It is not an easy thing to do. And I congratulate this young man for his accomplishment.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend congratulations to Premier Washington Misick and the Progressive National Party for the successful re-election victory at the polls in Turks and Caicos, our sister islands. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, I did come back late from lunch so I am uncertain if anyone did anything for the family of Ms. Grace Eileen Simmons. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to lead there and ask that this Honourable House do send a letter of condolence, certainly to the family of the late Grace Eileen Simmons who, of course as you know, was the mother of one of our former Members, Ianthia Simmons-Wade, who passed recently. We certainly extend our condolences to her family, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to ask that the House of Assembly extend condolences to the family of the late Ashton Thomas, Sr. who passed away. I will associate the Deputy Premier. I did know Mr. Thomas for most of my life, as he and my father were in the Breakfast Club together. And certainly to his family who are left to mourn, but also one who is president of the Bermuda Public Services Union, Mr. Armell Thomas, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to associate myself with the condolences for the late Russell Wade, the father of one of our former Members. And I will agree with the comments of the Minister of Public Works and [Environment], who clearly knew Mr. Russell Wade better than I did. But he was a wonderful father and a wonderful person. So I would like to be associated with those remarks. And the Minister of Tourism, [Culture] and Transport did associate remarks to the late Mr. Claredon Burch. But I just want to make sure that I recognise those as well.

Finally, I would like to be associated with the condolences that have been offered by Members on this side, Mr. Speaker, to the founding member of the Progressive Labour Party, Mr. Eldridge Eugene Woods. As has been said by many Members, a very fitting tribute should be given here and also given by our party. It took courage to do what he did at that particular point in time. And certainly all of us must remember and recognise and support those persons who put their literal lives on the line to make sure to advance the cause of freedom in this country, equal-

ty, justice and democracy, Mr. Speaker. So I would ask that certainly a letter be sent from this House. And what I had said in the statement that I issued is that Mr. Woods was a giant in history and his courage and conviction helped to shape the Bermuda that we know today.

Mr. Speaker, I will just end if I may with being associated with the congratulatory remarks given by the Member of constituency 24 for the Aviators Alliance of Bermuda. Of course, MP Scott and I happen to share the privilege of being pilots. We went to this particular event and it was amazing to see the lecture hall of Bermuda College full of so many Bermudians who were into aviation. I did not actually know how many Bermudian pilots there were, but they were all on the screen. There were about 10 of them. It was amazing. I only knew one, but there were so many. So it was really great!

So, I just wanted to extend condolences [*sic*] to Bermuda's youngest pilot, Mr. Remy Donawa,

The Speaker: Congratulations, not condolences.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, sorry. Congratulations. I am a little bit tired, Mr. Speaker, as you understand.

The Speaker: Any other Member?

Any other Member?

No other Member. Before we move on, I would just like to add my name to some of those comments that were expressed, namely condolences to the following families: the family of Mr. George Burch. I have known the Burch family practically all of my life having had Somerset roots as they began in the west. And I would like to be associated with those remarks to his family.

The condolences for the father of our former Opposition Leader, Mr. Cole Simons' father. I have known Mr. Simons himself for quite some time. I know he will be sadly missed.

To the family of Joe Bailey on the passing of his wife. She was actually funeralised today, if I am correct. Had I not been in this place I probably would have been at the funeral today. So, I extend condolences to him.

And to former Member, Ms. Simmons-Wade, whose mother passed during the time we were out.

I would like to be associated with those remarks for Mr. Russell Wade. As many have said, I had association with him many times when he was the former PS when I was a Minister in Government back in the day.

And with the remarks extended to the family of Mr. Woods. Likewise, I have known Mr. Woods for many, many years. In fact, I knew his son from high school days as well. Mr. Woods was always one of those gentle giants. He was a quiet fellow but very committed to what he put his hands to, a real shaker and mover in helping to define the era that he fought

through and stood up and made a difference in back then when it was needed. And we recognise his contribution to what the country is today.

And lastly, I would like to be associated with the congratulations that were expressed to Lisa Reed on her accomplishment of being honoured as being the outstanding women of the year.

With those remarks, we will now move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

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

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Speaker: There are Bills that we introduce at this time to be tabled. And I believe we have a further indulgence—no, that's under Motions.

Go ahead.

[Crosstalk]

FIRST READING

CORPORATE INCOME TAX (PENALTY PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT ACT 2025

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

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting, the Corporate Income Tax (Penalty Provisions) Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Okay. Minister Hayward.

FIRST READING

EMPLOYMENT AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting, the Employment Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Next, Deputy [Premier].

FIRST READING

MUNICIPALITIES AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting, the Municipalities Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Speaker: [There are none.]

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: Premier.

THAT THIS HONOURABLE HOUSE HEREBY EMPOWERS THE MINISTER OF FINANCE TO AUTHORISE THE WITHDRAWAL OF MONIES FROM THE CONSOLIDATED FUND

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

I hereby give notice that I propose to move the following resolution at the next day of meeting:

WHEREAS it is provided by section 96 of the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 that if the Legislature is dissolved less than three months before the commencement of any financial year, the estimates for that year may be laid before the House as soon as practicable after the commencement of that year;

AND WHEREAS it is expected that the Appropriation Act in respect of the financial year 2025/2026 will not come into operation by 1 April 2025;

AND WHEREAS section 97 of the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 makes provision for the authorisation, by resolution of the House of Assembly, of expenditures in advance of appropriation;

BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House, pursuant to the provisions of sections 96 and 97 of the Bermuda Constitution, hereby empowers the Minister of Finance to authorise the withdrawal of monies from the Consolidated Fund of the Government of Bermuda in an amount not exceeding 25 per cent of the total expenditure authorised by the Appropriation Act for the fiscal year 2024/25 for the purpose of meeting expenditure necessary to carry on the services of the Government and shall be effective from

1 April 2025 for a period not exceeding four months or until the coming into operation of the Appropriation Act 2025, whichever is the earlier.

The Speaker: And we seek the indulgence of the House on another motion that the Premier would like to introduce at this time.

**THAT MINISTERS AND MEMBERS
OF THE LEGISLATURE (SALARIES AND
PENSIONS) ACT 1975 BE REVOKED**

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

I hereby give notice that I propose to move the following resolution at the next day of meeting:

WHEREAS that previous resolutions of this House made pursuant to sections 2 and 15A of the Ministers and Members of the Legislature (Salaries and Pensions) Act 1975 be revoked;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that pursuant to section 2 of the Ministers and Members of the Legislature (Salaries and Pensions) Act 1975 the annual salaries payable to Members of the Legislature listed in Part A and Officers of the Legislature listed in Part B of the table that shall be set out in the table below with effect from 1 January 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That now brings us to the main item of the day. We now move on to the Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: The first item is the consideration of the Speech with which His Excellency the Governor was pleased to open the present session of the Legislature. Premier, Minister of Finance.

MOTION

**THAT CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN
TO THE THRONE SPEECH WITH WHICH
HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR WAS
PLEASED TO OPEN THE PRESENT
SESSION OF PARLIAMENT**

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the Throne Speech which His Excellency the Governor was pleased to open this present session of Parliament.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

Members, we will now have the Reply to the Throne Speech given by the Opposition Leader, and as with the Throne Speech that was broadcast live, the Reply likewise is broadcast live. And after the Op-

position Leader gives his Reply the televised live broadcast will cease, but we will continue on the air-waves.

So, are we ready with the cameras here?

Okay. Opposition Leader, once you get the okay that the cameras are ready to roll you can begin your presentation.

[Pause]

The Speaker: While we are waiting for the cameras to get resolved, the Sergeant-at-Arms is handing out the Reply to the Throne Speech so Members can follow along when the Opposition Leader starts his presentation. We have been given the go-ahead.

Opposition Leader, you can start your presentation.

2025 REPLY TO THE THRONE SPEECH

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

Mr. Speaker, there are certain moments in history when communities must pause, look deeply and honestly at their challenges, and choose their path very carefully. Today, Bermuda stands at one of these important crossroads. The choices we make now will shape the future not only for ourselves but also for our children and grandchildren. This moment calls for clear, bold, and decisive decision-making. Today, our island faces many difficult challenges. Families throughout Bermuda feel the pressure of a growing cost of living. They are struggling to pay bills and put food on the table. Many families are already forced into hard choices such as buying less food to pay for electricity, between health care or rent, and even between staying on the Island they love or leaving to find opportunities somewhere else. Our young people, who should see Bermuda as a place full of promise, too often see their futures elsewhere. Our seniors, who have worked their entire lives, worry whether they can afford basic medical care. These are real stories happening right now in homes across our Island—from St. George's to Somerset. These are our friends, our family members, our neighbours, and our fellow Bermudians

Mr. Speaker, in recent elections, Bermudians clearly voiced their frustration. Although the Progressive Labour Party remained in Government, most Bermudians voted for change. The message from our people was simple: they are tired of the word play, the games and the showmanship. They want action, they want accountability, to face our Island's challenges honestly and courageously. We recognise the PLP Government has tried to address some of these issues. Yet, many of the same old promises have been repeated. Bermudians have heard before that the economy will improve, that prices will come down, and that new jobs will be created. Yet, each year seems to bring more struggle, more hardship, and less hope.

This is why today, our message is straightforward: we cannot continue to repeat the same mistakes and expect different outcomes. We must acknowledge honestly where things have not worked, and we must urgently move towards real solutions.

Our role in the Opposition is to scrutinise and evaluate the Government's plans and offer effective alternatives. We come not just to criticise, but to offer a clear path forward—one that leads Bermuda towards greater prosperity and fairness for all. We believe deeply in our people's ability to overcome any challenge, but we also know that this cannot happen without a government truly committed to change. In our Reply to the Speech from the Throne, we will propose specific measures to ease the burdens on our people immediately. We will also propose longer-term actions that will help grow our economy sustainably, create stable jobs, and ensure our young people see their future here in Bermuda rather than overseas.

Mr. Speaker, in today's debate, Parliament must demonstrate that we are ready to face these challenges directly, or if we, as leaders, will simply continue down the same path of unfulfilled promises and missed opportunities. Do we stay the course? Or do we choose a new path?

As we discuss the state of our island today, let us remember why we are here. We serve the people of Bermuda. Their needs must guide every decision we make. The One Bermuda Alliance commits itself today to do precisely that—to listen carefully, to act responsibly, and to deliver solutions that improve the lives of every Bermudian. The storm may be upon us, but if we choose wisely, work together, and lead with integrity, Bermuda's best days are not behind us; they lie just beyond the storm.

Reducing the Cost of Living by Reviving our Economy

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda is at a critical juncture. The rising cost of living and stagnant economic growth are the most pressing concerns for our people. Families are struggling to afford the basic necessities of life. Many are barely making ends meet, while others are making the heartbreaking decision to leave their homes in search of relief overseas.

It is an undeniable reality that our seniors, who have dedicated their lives to this country, now struggle to afford health care and everyday expenses. Parents, despite working long hours, find that their pay cheques are not enough to cover rent, food, and essential utilities. This crisis is not merely economic—it is a test of our collective leadership, our policies, and our commitment to the people we serve.

Mr. Speaker, admittedly, no economy is immune to global pressures. The world is adjusting to new realities in supply chain management, trade, and individual national priorities. Never mind the ongoing wars.

But Bermuda's challenges are not solely the result of external forces. They are rooted in a series of policy missteps, failures in economic strategy, and a lack of urgency in addressing long-standing problems. Bermuda's economic model is increasingly fragile, and without decisive action, the cost-of-living crisis will continue to deepen.

Mr. Speaker, we must ask ourselves:

- How can it be that in a country as wealthy as Bermuda, families are being forced to buy less and less food to keep the electricity on?
- Why are retirees, who have contributed to our economy for decades, now rationing their medication? Or returning to the workforce to afford it at all?
- Why are so many of our young, skilled Bermudians choosing to leave the Island, believing that their future lies abroad rather than at home?

The facts speak for themselves:

- Food prices have increased by nearly 25 per cent since 2019.
- Electricity bills have surged by more than 42 per cent. Inflation continues to outpace wage growth, leaving middle-class families struggling.
- The working population has declined significantly, straining those of us remaining in the workforce, reducing the viability of businesses and the strength of the economy.

These are not abstract circumstances; they represent the daily struggles of real people—families forced to tighten their budgets, young professionals unable to find jobs, and businesses closing their doors due to unsustainable costs. The Government has acknowledged these problems, yet its response has been manifestly inadequate.

Mr. Speaker, what we have seen instead are pet projects and tweaking policies that do little to alleviate the [stress and the] crisis. Vertical farming, a national digital bank, fish processing plants, and a space industry was never going to put food on the table. Instead of pursuing proven economic strategies that generate growth, the Government has focused on experimental ideas that have not yet delivered tangible benefits to Bermudians.

Moreover, the suggestion of price controls as a potential solution is alarming. Around the world, history has shown that price controls do not solve economic hardship—they create shortages, discourage investment, and often lead to black markets. Countries that have attempted price control policies, from Venezuela to Zimbabwe, have seen disastrous consequences.

The solution to Bermuda's economic challenges is clear: We do not fix the cost-of-living crisis by controlling prices—we fix it by growing the economy. We do not lower costs by over-regulating businesses—we lower costs by fostering true competition,

reducing tax burdens, growing our population, and creating an environment where businesses can thrive. Thriving businesses mean more Bermudian jobs, lower prices and a stable future.

Economic stewardship entails more than moving ever shrinking pools of existing money around and around. It means figuring out how to actually pay for all the ideas; not kicking the can down the road.

The One Bermuda Alliance proposes a clear strategy, with real, actionable solutions, for restoring affordability, prosperity and economic growth. Our plan focuses on tax relief, reducing regulatory barriers, attracting new investment, and ensuring that Bermudians can afford to live and work in their own country.

Reducing the Cost of Living

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the cost of everyday necessities has skyrocketed, making life unaffordable for many. The OBA recommends immediate measures to address this crisis:

- **Repealing the Sugar Tax**—This Government's sugar tax has increased grocery costs without achieving its intended health benefits. Eliminating this tax will reduce the price of many essential food items and put money back in the pockets of families.
- **Expanding Duty Relief on Essentials**—We recommend broadening the list of food staples and essential goods that receive zero per cent import duty, ensuring savings are passed directly to consumers.
- **Promoting and Investing in Farming**—A country with one-in-three people suffering food insecurity ought to be using more than half of its agricultural land, with only a handful of farmers. We need to make farming widespread, increasing home gardens as well as traditional farming.
- **Lowering Energy Costs**—Bermuda has some of the highest electricity rates in the world. By introducing fair competition into the electricity market, enhancing regulatory powers, and investing in renewable energy sources, we will bring down power bills for households and businesses alike.

These policies are backed by economic research, including the Fiscal Responsibility Panel's 2024 Report, which highlights excessive taxation as a driver of economic stagnation. Reducing these burdens will stimulate economic activity and improve household financial stability.

Supporting Small Businesses and Job Creation

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, small businesses are the backbone of Bermuda's economy. They provide the jobs and services we all need. And

yet they are choking on red tape and stumbling over obstacle after obstacle. We recommend:

- **Cutting Red Tape for Business Owners**—We would streamline processes for starting and operating a business, taking a cue from the current business owners themselves, making it easier for Bermudians to become entrepreneurs and create jobs, without time-consuming, bureaucratic interference.
- **Introduce Targeted Payroll Tax Relief**—To encourage hiring, we would provide tax relief for businesses that hire and retain Bermudian workers, helping to reduce unemployment. This will require careful monitoring and enforcement to prevent abuse.
- **Expand Access to Business Loans and Grants**—Many small businesses struggle due to a lack of financial support. The OBA would work with regulatory authorities and financial institutions to ensure consistent, genuine access to capital for entrepreneurs.

The Economic Development Strategy has repeatedly stressed that encouraging small business growth is key to long-term job creation. Our plan directly supports this goal by removing barriers and providing financial incentives.

Attracting Investment and Strengthening Key Industries

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, economic growth depends on investment. Yet under this Government, investors have been deterred by uncertainty, excessive regulations and poor execution. The OBA would:

- **Revitalise International Business and Financial Services**—We would ensure Bermuda remains competitive by modernising regulations, ensuring they are fit-for-purpose and offering incentives for firms to establish operations here.
- **Diversify the Economy**—We would insist that emerging sectors such as FinTech, the blue economy, and medical tourism create new, tangible opportunities with on-island presence, job creation and direct participation in the local economy.
- **Revive the Tourism Industry**—The Bermuda Tourism Authority Culture Assessment highlights significant mismanagement in tourism promotion. The OBA would remove politics and politicians from the BTA while outlining clear, public performance measurements, to give an independent BTA a fighting chance to live up to its potential. This would ensure that tourism once again becomes a pillar of economic growth.

Expanding the Workforce and Addressing the Ageing Population

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's workforce is shrinking, placing immense pressure on younger generations to sustain the economy. The Position Paper on Addressing the Ageing Population outlines the urgent need to attract and retain workers. The OBA would:

- Implement a sensible Immigration Policy—We must attract skilled workers and encourage young Bermudians to stay and contribute to our economy. This must be balanced with effective, persuasive enforcement of the law, ensuring that abuse is detected and eradicated.
- Offer Incentives for Returning Bermudians—Many talented Bermudians have left due to limited opportunities. We would introduce programmes to encourage them to return, bringing valuable skills and experience back to the island.
- Strengthen Workforce Training Programmes—Our education system must align with the needs of the job market. The OBA would ensure that training programmes equip Bermudians with the skills for today's economy. This will specifically incorporate the feedback from industry on the sufficiency of current training programmes.

A Plan for a Prosperous Bermuda

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's economic struggles are not inevitable. They are the result of global circumstances smacking into our fragile economy, fragile due to failed policies and poor leadership. The OBA's plan is based on sound economic principles and is designed to deliver real results. Our plan would lower the cost of living, empower small businesses, attract investment, and expand our workforce to ensure long-term prosperity.

Bermuda's best days are still ahead of us—but only if we have the courage to embrace real change.

Ensuring Quality Education for Every Child

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, education is the foundation upon which our future is built. It is the key to unlocking opportunities, strengthening our economy, and ensuring that every Bermudian has the chance to succeed. Yet, for far too long, Bermuda's public education system has suffered from inconsistent policies, underfunding, and a lack of clear direction. If we do not take urgent action to improve education, we risk failing another generation of young Bermudians.

A well-functioning education system does more than prepare students for careers; it shapes engaged citizens, fosters innovation, and provides a pathway to economic mobility. Every child in Bermuda deserves access to a high-quality education that equips them with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the modern world.

Challenges Facing Bermuda's Education System

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the challenges in our public education system are well documented:

- Unclear Reform Strategy—The Government has proposed multiple education reforms, yet parents, teachers, and students remain unconvinced. Constant changes without meaningful consultation have created confusion and uncertainty.
- Underperformance in Core Subjects—Many students are not achieving proficiency in basic literacy, mathematics, and science. Without strong foundational skills, they will struggle in higher education and in the workforce.
- Lack of Technical and Vocational Training—Not every student will pursue a university degree, yet our system does not offer clear, effective pathways for students interested in trades, technology, or entrepreneurship.
- Inadequate Support for Teachers and Schools—Teachers are working tirelessly, but many feel unsupported. A lack of resources, professional development, and clear policies hampers their ability to deliver high-quality education.

These issues are not new, Mr. Speaker. They have persisted for years, despite promises of reform. If we continue on this path, we will see more students leaving school unprepared for the challenges ahead. It is time for a new approach.

A Comprehensive Plan for Education Reform

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance believes in a public education system that offers a world-class education. It provides students with the tools and opportunities necessary to succeed. Our vision for education is grounded in real solutions that address systemic issues and ensure our students receive a world-class education. Our plan includes the following key initiatives:

Establishing an Independent Education Authority

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, as highlighted in the Review of Public Education in Bermuda, political interference has resulted in inconsistent policies and poor execution of reforms. An independent Education Authority will remove politics from education,

allowing experts and educators to drive long-term improvements based on evidence and best practices. We cannot overemphasise this point—politicians should not be involved in the design and implementation of education programmes. We should be focused on holding those experts accountable for the results of their design and implementation.

Countries with independent education bodies, such as Finland and Singapore, consistently outperform others in global education rankings. By allowing professionals to make data-driven decisions, we can ensure better outcomes for Bermuda's students.

Prioritising Core Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the National School Survey Report 2023 revealed a lack of proficiency in reading and mathematics at appropriate grade levels. Addressing this crisis requires immediate intervention.

The OBA would implement early screening and targeted support for struggling students. Investing in literacy and numeracy programmes in primary schools will provide children with the foundational skills they need to excel in higher education and the workforce.

Studies show that students who master core subjects early are far more likely to graduate from high school and pursue higher education or technical training.

Enhancing Technical and Vocational Education

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's job market is evolving, and we must prepare our students for a range of careers, not just those requiring a university degree. It's clear we need stronger vocational and technical training programmes, closely connected to industry needs.

The OBA would expand and modernise technical education, working with industry leaders to develop apprenticeship programmes in trades such as plumbing, electrical work, hospitality, and IT. This will create direct pathways from education to employment, reducing youth unemployment and strengthening our workforce. While such efforts have been attempted by the Government, our understanding is it is underperforming and is not matching industry expectations. These programmes will need better oversight including professional quality assurance.

Investing in Teacher Training and Support

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, no education system can succeed without motivated, well-supported teachers. We've heard constant reports that many teachers feel overburdened by bureaucratic requirements and underappreciated in their roles.

The OBA would establish ongoing professional development programmes for teachers, ensuring they have access to the latest teaching methodologies and technologies.

By reducing administrative burdens, increasing classroom support and recognising teaching excellence, we can allow teachers to focus on what truly matters—educating our children.

Modernising School Infrastructure and Technology

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, many of Bermuda's public schools are in disrepair, with outdated facilities that do not support modern learning. The Review of Public Education in Bermuda highlights inadequate school conditions as a barrier to effective teaching.

The OBA would prioritise school maintenance and renovations, ensuring that every student learns in a safe, well-equipped environment. We will also invest in technology, providing students with digital learning tools to prepare them for the jobs of the future.

Research from leading education institutions has shown that students in modernised schools with access to updated resources perform significantly better academically.

Strengthening Special Education Services

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the National School Survey Report 2023 identified gaps in Bermuda's special education services, leaving students without the support they need.

The OBA would expand specialised programmes and ensure that students with disabilities receive tailored support, allowing them to thrive in the education system.

By integrating special education resources into mainstream schools and providing adequate training to educators, we can create a more inclusive and equitable system.

[A Future-Focused Education System]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's children deserve a world-class education system that equips them for success. This Government has promised reforms year after year, yet our schools remain under-resourced, our teachers unsupported, and our students unprepared for the future. The One Bermuda Alliance is committed to delivering real change.

By removing politics from education, prioritising literacy and numeracy, expanding vocational training, supporting teachers, modernising school infrastructure, and strengthening special education, we can build an education system that gives every child the opportunity to succeed.

The future of Bermuda depends on the quality of education we provide today. We cannot afford fur-

ther delays, and we cannot continue with failed policies that leave our students behind.

Improving Health care and Protecting Our Seniors

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, health care is the foundation of a thriving society. Every Bermudian, regardless of age or financial status, should have access to affordable, high-quality health care. Yet, for far too many, health care has become an expensive privilege rather than a guaranteed right.

Seniors, who have worked their entire lives contributing to this island, now find themselves rationing medication or skipping doctor's visits because of high out-of-pocket costs. Young families struggle to afford private insurance, while working-class Bermudians are forced to reduce necessities even further to afford their increasing health premiums.

For years, this Government has promised a universal health care system that would lower costs and expand access. However, like many of their other promises, this initiative has been plagued by delays, lack of transparency, and rising health care expenses for Bermudians. The Bermuda Health Strategy 2022-2027, introduced by the Ministry of Health, outlined vague goals for affordability but has yet to result in any real change in the cost of care, insurance premiums, or prescription drug prices.

Mr. Speaker, the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2023 further reveals that Bermuda's health care expenditures continue to rise while public satisfaction with the system has declined. This Government's approach has not only failed to reduce costs but has also failed to improve efficiency. Emergency rooms are overcrowded, mental health services remain underfunded, and specialist care remains out of reach for many.

The One Bermuda Alliance recognises that health care reform must be practical, evidence-based, and focused on delivering real affordability without sacrificing quality of care. We believe that rather than focusing on bureaucratic restructuring with no results, the priority must be to reduce costs for patients, improve service delivery, and ensure seniors are protected.

Our health care solutions will address these issues through the following key measures:

Expanding Access to Affordable Health care

Hon. Jarion Richardson: The current system allows costs to spiral out of control, placing too much financial burden on the insured while failing to ensure universal access. The OBA would:

- Reduce the cost of prescription drugs by negotiating bulk pricing and targeting unnecessary markups. Recently established pharmacies have demonstrated that modern purchas-

ing strategies can significantly reduce prices to consumers.

- Enhance primary care services as given by general practitioners and urgent care centres, reducing dependency on emergency room visits.
- Expand preventive care initiatives, including free annual health check-ups for seniors and vulnerable populations. Prevention saves lives and significantly reduces long-term health care costs. This seems to be an area of mutual agreement with the Government.

The 2016 National Health Accounts Report shows that preventable diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, account for a major portion of Bermuda's health care spending. Investing in early intervention programmes will reduce future medical costs and improve overall public health.

Protecting Seniors with Sustainable Health care Solutions

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, our seniors deserve dignity in their retirement, but the cost of health care continues to eat away at their pensions. The OBA would:

- Expand FutureCare by increasing the coverage for seniors while reducing co-pays and prescription drug costs.
- Create a long-term care support fund, ensuring that seniors in need can access affordable nursing and home-care services.
- Improve elder care facilities by investing in public-private partnerships to increase the availability of assisted-living spaces.

The Ministry of Health's 2020 Roadmap acknowledged that Bermuda's ageing population presents a growing financial challenge, yet the Government has done little to implement concrete solutions. The OBA will take decisive action to protect our seniors from financial hardship caused by health care costs.

Strengthening Mental Health Services

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, mental health is often overlooked but a critical aspect of public health. The Government has underfunded psychiatric and addiction services, leaving many families and individuals without proper care. The OBA would:

- Increase funding for mental health clinics and psychiatric services, ensuring timely access to care for those in crisis.
- Introduce school-based mental health programmes to support young people dealing with anxiety, depression, and stress.
- Expand addiction treatment and rehabilitation programmes, reducing the social impact of drug and alcohol abuse.

In the Health in Review Report (2016)—that report confirmed that mental health cases in Bermuda have steadily increased, yet the funding for these services remains insufficient. A proactive approach to mental health will not only improve individual well-being but also reduce strain on emergency services and law enforcement.

Investing in Health care Workforce and Technology

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, health care is only as good as the professionals who deliver it. Yet, Bermuda faces a shortage of doctors, nurses, and specialists, forcing patients to wait longer for appointments or seek expensive treatment overseas. The OBA would:

- Introduce incentives to attract and retain health care professionals, ensuring that Bermuda has sufficient doctors and nurses to meet the demand for services.
- Improve and streamline nursing and medical training programmes to develop local talent and reduce reliance on imported expertise.
- Implement electronic health records (EHRs) across medical facilities to improve efficiency, reduce paperwork, and streamline patient care.

The Bermuda Health Strategy 2022-2027 itself acknowledges that the island's medical workforce is shrinking, yet this Government has done little to address that issue. Although there have been expedited work permit processing for overseas nurses, we understand that this is not sufficient, and we are still losing medical professionals due to work permit processing times.

The OBA's targeted approach will ensure Bermuda retains top-tier medical professionals while making the system more efficient through technology.

Holding the Government Accountable

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the Government has failed to deliver on its promise of universal health care. Instead, it has burdened Bermudians with rising costs, failing facilities, broken systems and an underfunded hospital. Health care is not just about political slogans—it is about ensuring that people can afford to live healthy, fulfilling lives.

The One Bermuda Alliance is committed to real health care reform. We would take action where this Government has failed, ensuring that every Bermudian—young or old, employed or retired—has access to quality, affordable health care.

Bermuda deserves leadership that does more than talk about solutions—it delivers them. The OBA stands ready to build a healthier, more affordable, and more compassionate health care system for all Bermudians.

Addressing Housing Needs and Social Challenges

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, a safe and affordable home is not a luxury—it is a fundamental right. Yet under this Government, Bermuda faces a growing housing crisis. Rents have surged beyond affordability, homeownership is increasingly out of reach, and homelessness has risen to unprecedented levels. Instead of addressing these issues with the resources this Government already has access to, it intends to impose further bureaucracy on private land.

The OBA plan outlines clear, practical steps to tackle Bermuda's housing crisis and address social challenges. Our plan prioritises increasing housing availability, making homeownership accessible, and ensuring that no Bermudian is left without shelter. Our approach is based on sound policy, economic sustainability, and compassion for those in need.

Increasing Housing Supply and Affordability

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's housing crisis is largely a supply issue. Too few homes are available at reasonable prices, forcing rents and property values to soar. The OBA would:

- Audit and Mobilise Idle Government Properties—Bermuda has numerous vacant government-owned buildings that could be repurposed for housing. We would conduct a full audit and convert properties into affordable housing or transitional shelters.
- Expand Public-Private Partnerships for Housing Development—The OBA would incentivise private developers to build affordable housing units by offering long-term government land leases at reduced rates. In return, developers would be required to allocate a percentage of units at below-market rates for middle-income workers such as teachers, nurses, and hospitality employees.
- Introduce a Rent-to-Own Programme—Homeownership should not be an impossible dream for Bermudians. The OBA would implement a structured rent-to-own programme, allowing families to gradually transition from renting to ownership, giving them a path to build equity and stability.

These policies align with the recommendations in the Home Annual Report 2025, which highlights the urgent need for innovative solutions to Bermuda's housing shortages. The OBA's strategy directly addresses these concerns by unlocking new housing opportunities.

Addressing Homelessness with Immediate Action

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, homelessness has surged with over 1,100 people now lacking

stable housing. This is a national crisis that demands leadership. The OBA would:

- Establish an Emergency Shelter and Safe Zones—No one in Bermuda should be left without a roof over their head. The OBA would repurpose existing government buildings into emergency shelters, providing immediate relief for the homeless.
- Create Transitional Housing Programmes—We would fund charities like HOME to develop structured transitional housing, where individuals can stay for a set period while receiving employment assistance, counselling and support to regain stability.
- Implement a Coordinated Case Management System—Currently, homelessness services are fragmented. The OBA would create a single access point for individuals at risk, ensuring rapid placement in appropriate support programmes.

The Consultative Draft Plan to End Homelessness in Bermuda provides a framework for reducing homelessness through targeted interventions. But we have yet to see if this plan is finalised and what, if any, results have been generated. But we are encouraged that solutions can be both humane and effective.

Reforming Rental Protections and Housing Laws

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, for many Bermudians, renting has become a financial burden with little protection against unfair practices. The OBA would:

- Reform the Landlord-Tenant Act—We would strengthen tenant protections while ensuring landlords can operate fairly. Our reforms would streamline dispute resolution and introduce clear guidelines on rental increases and lease agreements.
- Implement a Rent Assurance Programme—Many vacant rental units remain off-market due to landlord concerns about tenant reliability. The OBA would introduce a programme where the government provides limited financial guarantees for rentals to vetted tenants, increasing housing availability without burdening landlords.
- Encourage Development of Secondary Rental Units—We would provide incentives for homeowners to create and rent out secondary suites or apartments, expanding affordable housing options.

These measures will create a balanced and fair rental market that benefits both tenants and landlords.

Addressing Domestic Violence and Safe Housing for Victims

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Safe Lives November 2022 Report stated that approximately 7,000 women have experienced intimate partner violence during their lifetime and in 2022 approximately 3,000 women reported being the victim of intimate partner violence during the 12-month period. Domestic violence victims often face an impossible choice: stay in an unsafe environment or become homeless. Bermuda currently lacks a dedicated shelter for survivors. The OBA would:

- Fund and Establish a Domestic Violence Shelter—We would ensure a secure, confidential location for victims and their children, providing counselling and legal assistance to help them rebuild their lives.
- Accelerate the Domestic Violence Court Initiative—The Government promised a specialised court to handle domestic violence cases but has failed to deliver. The OBA would fast-track this initiative to ensure swift justice for victims.

[A Commitment to Housing and Social Stability]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, housing is more than just shelter—it is the foundation of a stable and thriving society. This Government has failed to address Bermuda's housing crisis, allowing rents to rise, homelessness to increase, and homeownership to become unattainable for many.

The One Bermuda Alliance is committed to real action. We urge the Government to immediately create affordable housing, support those in crisis, and implement fair rental protections to ensure that every Bermudian has a place to call home. This is not just policy—it is a moral obligation, and we are ready to support strong, deliberate action in this crisis.

Restoring Public Safety and Order

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, every Bermudian deserves to feel safe and secure in their community. Whether it is walking the streets, driving on our roads, or simply relaxing in our homes, public safety is fundamental to our way of life. It is also critical to our economy—if Bermuda is perceived as unsafe, we risk losing foreign investment, tourism, and the confidence of our own citizens.

To this Government's credit, the National Violence Reduction Strategy provides a framework for tackling crime through community engagement, social services, and enhanced law enforcement coordination. However, while well-intentioned, it has not yielded the meaningful reduction in crime Bermudians had hoped for. The strategy lacks strong enforcement measures, suffers from slow implementation, and fails to adequately address Bermuda's gang violence problem. The official Crime Statistics Report shows that

violent crime is a pressing issue, with gun-related incidents and burglaries rising.

Mr. Speaker, additionally, comments from the Hansard debate on the strategy reveal concerns that the plan is largely reactive, instead of proactive, in dealing with crime. Members of Parliament questioned the lack of specific metrics for measuring success and pointed out that without significant changes in job creation and education, the strategy alone will not deter criminal activity. This Government has failed to make the necessary investments in law enforcement, community support, and economic opportunity to ensure the success of its own plan.

The One Bermuda Alliance recognises that public safety is not just about policing—it is about fostering a society where crime is discouraged through opportunity, enforcement, and community engagement. We would implement clear policies to address rising crime, road safety issues, and cybersecurity threats.

Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement Enhancement

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the BPS Cultural Review highlights that morale among law enforcement officers is at an all-time low due to funding shortages, outdated equipment, and a lack of political support. The OBA would:

- Increase Police Manpower and Equipment—Recruiting additional officers and investing in modern crime-fighting tools, including surveillance technology and forensic analysis capabilities.
- Enhance Community Policing—Reintroducing visible neighbourhood units to deter crime and build stronger relationships between officers and the public. Further, these patrols need to be provided with statistical intelligence and administrative support, to enable them to proactively tackle crime in their specific areas.
- Expand and Strengthen Gang Prevention Programmes—Implementing early intervention programmes that identify at-risk youth and connect them with mentorship and vocational training to deter gang involvement.
- Reform the National Violence Reduction Strategy—Ensuring measurable benchmarks for success, greater accountability, and a more aggressive stance on crime deterrence.

Cybersecurity and Data Protection

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, the recent Government Cybersecurity Breach demonstrated Bermuda's vulnerability to digital threats. The OBA would:

- Establish a Cyberattack Commission—It is clear that the previous Joint Select Committee

is entirely dependent on Government, who have not demonstrated a willingness to tell Bermuda what happened in the cyberattack. An independent body must establish the facts and equip Parliament to hold the Government to account to remediate our vulnerabilities.

- Implement Mandatory Cybersecurity Protocols—Requiring government agencies and businesses handling sensitive data to meet strict cybersecurity standards.
- Invest in Cyber Education—Creating training programmes to develop local expertise in cybersecurity, reducing reliance on external consultants.

Road Safety and Infrastructure Renewal

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's road conditions continue to deteriorate, with potholes, poor signage, and reckless driving contributing to accidents. The OBA would:

- Launch an Emergency Road Raving Initiative—Targeting the worst-affected areas with long-lasting repairs instead of temporary patchwork.
- Improve Traffic Enforcement—Deploying more officers to enforce speeding, reckless driving, and impaired driving laws. This includes reforming the traffic laws and offence processing to enable quick, easy enforcement of traffic laws instead of the hours-long process currently prohibiting enforcement measures.
- Expand Public Transport Reliability—Ensuring bus and ferry services are reliable so that Bermudians have safer commuting options for longer hours during the day and night.

Addressing the Root Causes of Crime

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, crime is often a symptom of deeper societal problems, including unemployment, lack of educational opportunities and social inequality. The OBA's economic and education policies would contribute to crime reduction by:

- Creating More Jobs for Young Bermudians—Providing vocational training and apprenticeships to give young people legitimate career paths instead of turning to crime.
- Expanding After-School Programmes—Keeping at-risk youth engaged in productive activities and off the streets.
- Strengthening Social Services—Offering mental health support and family counselling to address the underlying causes of criminal behaviour.

[A Commitment to Safety and Justice]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, public safety is not an issue that can be ignored or downplayed. The Government's failures in crime prevention, road safety and cybersecurity have left Bermudians feeling vulnerable. The One Bermuda Alliance would restore security by equipping law enforcement, improving infrastructure, and addressing crime at its root causes.

Bermuda's people deserve a government that prioritises their safety—not one that merely reacts to crises after they have already happened. The OBA stands ready to lead with a proactive, results-driven approach to public safety, ensuring that our Island remains a secure place to live, work, and thrive.

Demanding Good Governance and Accountability

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, underlying all these specific issues—the economy, education, health, housing, public safety—is a more fundamental issue: a crisis of governance and accountability. Government's first job is to govern well: to manage public affairs competently, keep its promises, and be accountable to the people. Unfortunately, this administration has too often been long on talk and short on action. Bermuda's people are losing trust that their leaders will do what they say. And the Throne Speech, with its recycled promises and lack of introspection, does nothing to restore that trust.

Mr. Speaker, let's reflect on some history. The Premier loves to repeat the slogan "Promises made, promises kept." It's catchy, but is it true? Look around at our island. Look at our infrastructure, our economy, our social fabric. Do they reflect a government that has kept its promises and delivered results? The cracks in our roads mirror the cracks in the promises. For years we've heard commitments—to grow the economy, to diversify industry, reform education, reduce the cost of living, fix public transport, create jobs, end gang violence, and so on and so on. And yet, here we are, many years and Throne Speeches later, with those problems largely unresolved and in some cases worse. The people of Bermuda can see this. They live it every day. They know that "promises kept" is more of a slogan than reality.

Mr. Speaker, the Government must put aside the pet projects. Instead of a music studio, pave the roads. Instead of traveling to Dubai, fix the bridges. Instead of new ministerial cars, get more trash trucks. Government must focus on fixing the big ticket, hard issues, like pension and immigration reform.

Mr. Speaker, credibility matters. When a government loses credibility, it loses the consent of the governed in all but name. People start tuning out official announcements or greet them with cynicism. People disengage, giving even more space for incompetence and inaction to grow. That's dangerous in a democracy, because solving big problems requires public buy-in and shared sacrifice at times. How can

the public buy in if they don't trust what they're being sold?

Accountability means taking responsibilities for failures, not just patting oneself on the back for perceived successes. I listened in vain for any acknowledgement in the Throne Speech of where the Government may have fallen short and how it plans to improve. There was no *mea culpa* on, say, the mishandling of the cyberattack aftermath, or that the infrastructure is crumbling. Instead, we got self-congratulation on things like cost-of-living and economic management. Good governance would have been to say: "We recognise we haven't made enough progress on X, and here's how we will do better." That kind of honesty earns public respect.

Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance holds itself to a higher standard of accountability. We believe leadership is about service. We believe service is transparent, accountable, and above all competent. That means:

- **Regular Public Reporting:** We would institute specific, measurable goals with regular public progress updates. If we promised to, say, create 100 jobs through an employment programme or build 20 affordable housing units by a certain date, we will stand up and tell you exactly how many have been done each quarter. And if targets are not met, we will explain why and how we will get back on track.
- **Financial Responsibility:** We would publish clear, on-time no-gimmick financial statements and budgets, so the public can see where every dollar is going. And if belt-tightening is needed, we as leaders will tighten ours first – that means scrutinising travel, consulting contracts, and any unnecessary spending in Cabinet's own operations. We cannot ask the people to sacrifice if we do not lead by example.
- **Integrity in Office:** We would enhance codes of conduct for Ministers and MPs, to include clear enforcement and consequences. Recent years in Bermuda have seen too many questions around conflicts of interest and the handling of public contracts. Under an OBA administration, any Minister or official found violating the public trust would be swiftly removed. We do not tolerate any abuse of power or corrupt behaviour. Bermuda's reputation, internal and external, depends on clean governance.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** Accountability also means listening to others. We would actively engage with the Opposition (if we are government), with unions, with business associations, and with citizen groups on major initiatives. No one party has a monopoly on good ideas. For instance, if a future cyber crisis hit, we'd invite tech experts to stay involved; not

just offer initial response and then be pushed aside. If an education reform is contentious, we'd be willing to go back to the table with teacher representatives rather than bulldozing ahead. That is the mature, responsible way to govern in a small community.

Bermuda used to be a model of effective governance. We had balanced budgets in the 1990s, social harmony improving in the 2000s, and even in the early 2010s under an OBA government, we saw return to growth and big projects like America's Cup that lifted confidence.

Mr. Speaker, it saddens me to see how far we have drifted from that. We are now at risk of being seen as a jurisdiction that lost its way. We have an oversized, expensive government struggling to get basic things done, an economy that's stagnant, and a population that is understandably frustrated.

I want to stress that holding the Government accountable is not just about criticism; it's about guiding us all back to a better path. When we demand accountability and better governance, it's because we love this country and know it can be better. That's why I say to the Government: take responsibility for your lacklustre approach. We are no longer leaders in the world in many areas where we used to be. Bermuda's star has dimmed when it should be shining bright. It is time for this Government to either dramatically raise its game—or go. If those in power cannot meet the expectations of the people, then make way for those who will.

There is a Better Path Forward

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, this Reply to the Throne Speech has highlighted a number of shortcomings in the Government's agenda—but more importantly, I have tried to sketch out a vision of hope and solutions. It is easy to feel discouraged when year after year problems persist and promises are broken. But we should not lose heart. The very fact that so many voters do not support the political status quo is proof that there are still Bermudians with an alive and strong spirit. They have not given up on this island; on the contrary, they care deeply and are willing to fight for a Bermuda that works for all of us.

This Throne Speech may be disappointing, but our destiny is not defined by one speech or one government. Bermuda's story is defined by us, her people—by our resilience, our innovation, and our commitment to each other. When times are tough, Bermudians pull together. We've seen it in hurricanes, we saw it during COVID-19, and we see it every day in small acts of kindness in our neighbourhoods. That is the foundation upon which we can build a better Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda can be safe, affordable, and full of opportunity for every Bermudian. Bermuda can have a strong economy that provides good

jobs and fair wages, where the cost of groceries, healthcare, and electricity isn't a constant worry. A Bermuda where our schools are top-notch, and every child can fulfil their potential. A Bermuda where our seniors live comfortably and with respect, and where no one is forgotten in their time of need. A Bermuda that once again leads the region in good governance, transparency, and innovation—setting an example that others follow.

Mr. Speaker, some will say this is ambitious. Yes—it is. But Bermudians have never been afraid of ambition. Our ancestors navigated the Atlantic and built a thriving society on these small rocks through ambition and hard work. In more recent memory, we transformed our economy from shipbuilding to tourism, from tourism to international finance, by being bold and forward-thinking. And we can do it again.

Mr. Speaker, as Leader of the Opposition, my role is to hold the Government accountable—and I will continue to do that vigorously. Yet, I also believe in offering a hand in partnership when possible. Bermuda is bigger than party loyalty. If the Government today were to implement some of the proposals we've laid out—be it cutting the sugar tax, implementing an independent Education Authority, reviving an independent tourism authority, putting vacant and derelict Government properties to assisting homelessness, or investigating our cyber failures—I would applaud them and support those moves, because they would be right for Bermuda. I say this to the Government: please don't leave problems lingering. We will all benefit if you succeed in making life better here.

Mr. Speaker, however, if this Government remains unable or unwilling to deliver, then the OBA stands prepared to step in and implement these plans ourselves. We are not seeking power for its own sake, but we will not shy away from the responsibility if it is entrusted to us. Bermuda cannot afford drift and dithering for another four years. The world is moving fast; challenges like global inflation, technological change and climate impacts will not wait for us to get our house in order. We need to act with urgency and unity.

Mr. Speaker, to my fellow Bermudians, I pledge this: I will continue to listen to you, to fight for your interests, and to put Bermuda first. Whether you voted OBA, PLP, FDM, Independent or not at all—I am committed to working on behalf of all of you. The Opposition's job is not just to oppose, but to propose. You have heard many proposals today, and you will hear more in the days to come as we roll out plans and policies addressing our island's needs. Engage with us, give us your feedback, and together we will refine these ideas.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, despite the disappointments of the Throne Speech, I am optimistic. I am optimistic because I believe in Bermudians. I believe in our ability to adapt, to overcome adversity, and to build a brighter future for our children.

It's time to turn the page on mere talk and truly start doing the hard work. It's time for a Bermuda where promises are kept because they are made with honesty and executed with competence. Let us choose the path of action, accountability, and hope.

Bermuda's best days are not behind us—they are ahead of us. Just beyond this storm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition.

Members, and for the listening audience, that was the Official Opposition's Reply to the Throne Speech that was delivered last week.

Before I acknowledge the first speaker from the Government, I am going to give a couple of minutes for the cameras to be shut down and sorted out and then I will call on the first speaker for the Government.

[Pause]

The Speaker: Minister Hayward, you can have the floor.

DEBATE ON THE 2025 THRONE SPEECH AND REPLY

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I stand here once again being able to represent the constituents of Pembroke Central. And I thank the constituents of Pembroke Central for their trust and confidence in me and restoring me to this position in this Honourable House.

I also stand here as a proud member of the Progressive Labour Party. A party that has won the confidence of the people of Bermuda by securing its third consecutive election victory.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, the Opposition called for an election. The Premier answered their call and the rest is history.

An Hon. Member: Yes!

Hon. Jason Hayward: I believe that in today's daily is a reference that the Opposition "threw down the gauntlet" in their call for an election. Believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, they called for an election, and they were not ready. They were not ready for an election. As a matter of fact, in my constituency there was a discrepancy on whether the candidate—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: —that the OBA fielded was actually an OBA candidate.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I believe the media referred to it as a *rent-a-candidate scheme*.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, we cannot re-write history. The facts are we went to the polls and the Progressive Labour Party was victorious.

When I listened to what was just delivered it seemed as though somebody said the election pamphlet or manifesto that they put out was not good enough. As a result, somebody drafted a proper manifesto. They were not able to put it out prior to the election, so they used it as a Throne Speech Reply.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Because they did not—

[Gavel]

Hon. Jason Hayward: —Mr. Speaker, address the substantial matters set out in the Speech from the Throne.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Not at all!

Hon. Jason Hayward: They did not discuss the matters and determine whether or not . . . and indicate whether or not the Government was moving in a good direction or determine what tweaks would be made to the plan in which the Government set out.

But the fact is we have secured another term to ensure—

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: —social and economic justice for all.

The PLP secured another term to ensure we can implement equitable taxation for the people of Bermuda. We secured another term to ensure economic parity for the people of Bermuda. In securing another term, Mr. Speaker, we will commit to providing social protections for our seniors. We will commit to providing a first-class education for our youth. We will ensure that we do have accessible and affordable housing in Bermuda.

In securing another term we will ensure that our economy provides opportunities for the people of Bermuda. Enabling Bermuda to thrive and her people to thrive as well. We will ensure the economy works for everyone. We will ensure corporations discontinue the practice of placing profit over people. We will ensure we continue to provide political stability.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Oftentimes when I am speaking with business leaders in terms of Bermuda's value proposition, yes, our regulatory environment is highlighted. But the political stability is also a strong attribute that they appreciate.

The competency of the political leadership in Bermuda is an attribute that they articulate to this Government that they appreciate. The commitment for Government to work directly with industry, to ensure that we have a business environment that allows business to thrive is what they appreciate. We can create a narrative based off the lense of those who only want to see doom and gloom, or we can open up our eyes to the reality that Bermuda is still one of the best places to live on the planet.

Mr. Speaker, what I learned in that election process was that the people of Bermuda were not prepared to take a gamble with the Opposition and other political parties. I did welcome the opportunity to engage with residents in an earnest manner. Residents made it abundantly clear that they do not want the Government to continue to talk about *We are the party for workers. We are the party for people.* They actually want to see us demonstrate it.

But what was evidently clear was that they recognise that the Government—this Government—has their best interests at heart. They also, from a critical standpoint, recognise that this Government has done a lot of work. Even though they highlight that more work needs to be done. And I think that is something that . . . coming from an election cycle, we have to accept that at all times we do not get it right. But what we also accept is that governance is not always easy and it is complex.

And so, it is easy to recommend and say, *We will do this and we will do that.* But implementation takes time. And sometimes the impact of your implementation is not felt immediately when persons are looking for instant gratification. But they do know that this Government will work hard on their behalf. They do know that this Government is committed to building a better Bermuda. And they do know that this Government will not leave the people behind.

Persons actually want to see transformative politics where we use our collective energy for the outcomes that are in . . . to produce outcomes which are in the best interests of the people of Bermuda. If there is one message that really resonated with me on the doorstep it is that they always want the Government to keep the people on the forefront of all deci-

sions that we make. They are not too interested in the politics. As a matter of fact, they can see right through the politics. And we know that because they continue to put their faith and trust in the Progressive Labour Party.

To the people of Bermuda, I simply want to reiterate that this Government has always been committed to putting the people first. In 1963, that was our root. Other political parties started as a response to the Progressive Labour Party. Every other political party started as a response to the Progressive Labour Party.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Which means while our root was to ensure that we advance the quality of life for people, other parties started to oppose the Progressive Labour Party.

We will continue to strive and persevere for a fairer Bermuda for all. We will continue to put Bermudians first. We will continue to produce an environment where our youth can fulfil their dreams and aspirations.

Mr. Speaker, this is the people's House. We are put here to do the people's business. And each and every one of us shares in the privilege of protecting the hopes and dreams of Bermudians.

Despite what the Opposition may say about the Government, Mr. Speaker, with our overwhelming majority we will get the work done. We are committed to getting the work done and we will execute. Mr. Speaker, we have a robust set of initiatives to execute on.

Hon. Jason Hayward: We will not waste our time squandering in political theatrics trying to rewrite history, engage in hollow political rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, the people sent the Opposition a clear message.

An Hon. Member: I heard it.

Hon. Jason Hayward: And that message was that they do not believe you are fit to govern.

An Hon. Member: Ooh.

Hon. Jason Hayward: While we have secured an election victory, Mr. Speaker, we will not turn a blind eye to those individuals on the doorsteps who expressed levels of concern. We listened to those concerns, and it is our responsibility to alleviate and address those concerns. Make better choices in some areas, choices to restore confidence where it may have been lost. We will show up. We will do our job. We will lead with integrity.

Mr. Speaker, we will be accountable. We will be present in our communities. And we will remain on

the doorsteps of our residents, a place where this party never leaves—the doorsteps of the residents of Bermuda. Something else I heard during this election cycle: *Mr. Hayward, you are the only one of those candidates who has consistently come to my house.*

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: And I am sure that would have been echoed by residents in other constituencies when my colleagues knocked on their doors.

An Hon. Member: Yes, it would.

Hon. Jason Hayward: But, Mr. Speaker, more importantly, if the Government does not reflect on all of the information that we gained during this election cycle, we are simply not doing our job.

What I had to make abundantly clear, Mr. Speaker, on the doorsteps was that this Government (despite what the naysayers say) has worked extremely hard on behalf of the people of Bermuda. The number-one issue outside of BELCO, [for] my constituency, was the cost of living. And I had the pleasure of explaining to persons all of the work that the Government has done to help provide additional purchasing power in their households to mitigate some of the rising costs in Bermuda. They were simply unaware of all of the things that the Government has done.

I talked to residents as to how we froze vehicle fuel prices at the pumps. And that if we had not have done that how gas prices would have increased for every single resident who utilises a vehicle that requires gasoline. I told residents about our commitment to reduce their tax burden. Mr. Speaker, I spoke about how we reduced payroll tax for 86 per cent of the workers in this country. Putting more money in families' pockets so that they have more money to provide for their family and take care of their needs.

I spoke to seniors how this Government had a commitment to continuously increase their pensions. I spoke about how we increased pensions in 2018, how we increased pensions in 2019, how we did further increases in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. And they were grateful for those increases. I was able to show the difference between what this Government had done pertaining to their pensions and what the previous Government's position was pertaining to pension increases. That contrast was important. And then the member says, *What about my public service pension?* And now I am pleased to go back on that doorstep and tell that member that now that we were able to work with our social partners, the unions, to secure a wage package for public service workers we can now focus on reforms of our public service pension plan and look to increase the pensions of those retirees.

I spoke to the residents as to how the Government increased our subsidy on electricity fuel by reducing the tax on that fuel. I spoke to residents as to

how we have not implemented across-the-board fee increases for the majority of government services. How we lowered car licence fees for our residents. How we put in place a law to cap banking fees.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Most times after that conversation the residents simply said, *Thank you, Minister Hayward, it is appreciated.* And then they said, *You need to find a way to ensure that everybody hears this information because there is too much foolishness out there.* I was able to speak to residents as to how we progressed labour protections and social protections. How this Government was responsible for implementing Bermuda's first statutory minimum hourly wage rate.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: How this Government has a zero tolerance for bullying and harassment in the workplace and how we ensure that everybody has a workplace policy pertaining to workplace bullying [and] harassment.

I spoke about how we increased compensation for workplace injuries. How we have extended maternity leave, and how we implemented paternity leave as a statutory right. How we ensure workers receive meal breaks. How we protected the tips and gratuities of our service workers. How we have progressed the maximum severance allowable that is to be paid to workers. How we put guidelines in place to ensure that workers are not misclassified as independent contractors when they are indeed in fact employees. How we have put in place our obligation for mandatory consultations before redundancy.

Those policies impact the lives of everyday Bermudians. Through this House we have changed the laws that provide better outcomes for the people of Bermuda. And we have collectively done it with members of the Opposition. But despite that, they will go out in the public and tell individuals that this Government is not working on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, explain—how do you reconcile the two positions? How do you sit in the House of Assembly and pass laws that benefit the people of Bermuda, and then say that what the Government is doing is not in the people's best interests? What senior, Mr. Speaker, in Bermuda is going to believe that the Progressive Labour Party doesn't care about seniors?

[Honourable Member] Doug [DeCouto] said, *Quite a few.* And see, this is critical where another Member says, *waiting in the hospital room.*

And this is where the Opposition continues to fail. They continue to be critical of symptoms of a larger problem without having a full grasp of what the problem actually is. And we see this every single time we see one of these hollow little articles piggybacking

on some type of plight that is happening in our community. Every single time something goes wrong in our community or there is a challenge in our community, it is echoed by the Opposition.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jason Hayward: But when things are going well, the Opposition Leader says that he will be happy to support.

An Hon. Member: Yes, yes. *Work with us* and all that stuff.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Well, we haven't seen that support. We haven't seen where you are prepared to work with us.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jason Hayward: We haven't seen the positive articles the same way the negative articles come out. You only talk about the storm and never the sunshine.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Ah-ha!

[Crosstalk]

Some Hon. Members: Ooh! Ooh!

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I need . . . I need people to talk to the Chair. Speak to the Chair, please.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, Minister, continue.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The reality is we have supported our seniors. We have eliminated land tax for care homes. We have a robust national senior strategy that we are in the mix of executing on that will ensure positive outcomes for our seniors. We have increased our financial support and our capacity to assist those with dementia. We have assisted by expanding health care benefits for our seniors. We have subsidised health care costs. We continue to amend our public health care insurance benefits so that our seniors get more. We have amended the social protections received by our seniors through financial assistance. We have done a lot. We recognise that there is more to do and we are committed to doing more.

The reality is we have an ageing population. And because we have an ageing population, it means there are multiple factors that we have to consider. We cannot just address symptoms to the problem. We

need to get to the root cause of the problem. We cannot complain about people in the hospital without ensuring that we put the appropriate measures in place so that we have a healthier population which prevents them from being in the hospital in the first place. We have to also ensure that there are the proper safety nets where families can receive the support that they need in a timely fashion. It cannot be the approach where blame everything that is not right in this country on the Government.

An Hon. Member: That's correct.

Hon. Jason Hayward: That is not responsible. There are social challenges that we have in our communities that do not emanate from Government policy. And also, they are not easily addressed by Government policy but we are committed to separating the symptoms from the problem and providing a proper diagnosis to the problem.

After the Throne Speech was given, the Opposition did a press conference and basically described our Throne Speech as wanting, without a full appreciation that we just had a Throne Speech in November 2024 and the initiatives outlined in 2025 now form a comprehensive body of initiatives that this Government has been tasked to execute.

And while they complain about the 2025 Throne Speech lacking substance, the combination of our 2024 and 2025 Throne Speeches are more substantial than their entire election platform. That is a fact. And while, Madam Deputy Speaker, their election platform dies, ours becomes a living, breathing document that we are dedicated to execute on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968, there are two separate sections. There is the Legislature where we currently sit and then there is the Executive. This entire document, in terms of *we will, we would, we might do, this is how we would do it* . . . hoop dreams. Their role now—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: They are now responsible for passing Bills. They are not responsible for the governance of this country, according to our Constitution.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Executive is responsible for the governance of this country. This *we would've-, could've-, should've-* document should have been rolled out prior to the election, prior to the people going to the polls. The people say . . . you can say *I would've, could've, should've* and the people say *I don't want you to. We put our faith in the Progressive Labour Party.*

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, while my colleagues will highlight numerous initiatives that will form our legislative agenda over the next year, I will touch on items within the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Economy and Labour is responsible for economic growth, economic development and the expansion of jobs in our economy. The way in which I position the Ministry currently and the way in which I see the Ministry functioning is one that is transformative, one that is actually focused on the future and one that puts people first. And those are the hallmarks of which . . . that underpin the work that is actually being done and executed in the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

This Government, I repeat, was the first Government to put a statutory minimum wage in place. And this Government, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be the first Government to progress that statutory minimum wage from where it is now to a future point. We intend to do that this year. We put out a Position Paper as it pertains to the calculation that we will use. Once the December CPI is completed, we will find out what was the average Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase for the year 2024. We will apply that to the calculation and we will come back to this Parliament [with a] Bill to increase the minimum wages in Bermuda for the workers who actually need it and deserve it.

Another thing that we are committed to is ensuring that we not only protect workers in the workplace but also when they receive settlements from employers who do not fulfil their obligations as it pertains to the law. And so we will strengthen the provisions of the employment tribunal to ensure that when awards are granted there are additional powers to force employers to pay those awards.

We want to also incentivise those persons over 65 to be retained in the workplace and so we will be removing the payroll tax applicable to those individuals. What is important to understand, and if you look at our numbers, the number of employees over the age of 65 continues to increase year over year in the workforce. And it is increasing for a number of reasons.

Number one, we simply accept that one's employment life should not expire simply because one turns the age of 65. There are other social factors where persons want to continuously keep active. There are financial factors where persons want to ensure that they receive adequate remuneration as well. There are a number of factors why one remains in the workplace after 65. And having had vast consultation this Ministry is happy to support what we call alternatives to redundancy where we ask employers to sit down with employees and determine whether or not alternative work arrangements can be made. That can be shorter work weeks, more flexi time, flexible work

contracts, consultancies after that person reaches that age or even the conversation around retention.

Many persons sign off to retire at 65 unknowingly when they sign their employment contract. But we want to ensure that there are more proactive conversations. And this goes back to the problem I identified in terms of our ageing population. We are simply going to have a shortage as it pertains to labour supply over the coming years with the number of persons who will be exiting our workforce. We do not have a natural replacement rate and as a result of that we are going to rely heavily on guest workers to fill some of the technical voids.

And it is important when we talk about guest workers because we have what we consider to be a measured migration policy. One where we ensure that we match the skills demanded by employers with the skill supply with expatriate labourers through where we have a gap with our local talent pool. And that has been our approach. We are not just bringing people in for the sake of bringing people in. A lot of people say we need to grow our population, you know, do a, b, and c. It has to be according to some sort of strategy.

I reiterate converting long-term residents and providing them with status does not fill the need in terms of bridging a gap to the supply and demand of labour that exists within our economy.

I am pleased to say that in the 2024 Throne Speech we said that we were going to increase the severance allowed payable and that has been achieved. I wonder if the Opposition views that as something positive or negative.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Jarion said that—

An Hon. Member: Who?

Hon. Jason Hayward: —if there is something—

An Hon. Member: Who?

Hon. Jason Hayward: —positive—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of Order.

An Hon. Member: Honourable Opposition Leader.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of Order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He is not using the appropriate—

An Hon. Member: He? He?

Some Hon. Members: He?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Minister—

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Minister, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not using the appropriate parliamentary procedures.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Member.

Minister, the Members are Honourable Members.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Most certainly. And no slight was meant to him as . . . just in the course of speaking.

But the Honourable Member did say that he will highlight and give credit where it is due. And we are simply looking for that obligation to be met. Give credit where it is due! Some of these things have a positive impact on not just my constituents but your constituents and everybody who sits in this House, our constituents. This is something that we can collectively go to the doorsteps and say, *Hey, did you know?* And it is a positive thing. It will be received positively by everybody who is impacted by this decision.

And if a person is or has been made redundant, we are also seeking to ensure that we do not tax that redundancy pay so that the person is left whole with that redundancy settlement. Those are positive things that will positively impact the lives of the workers of Bermuda.

This document says that it will ensure that we expand apprenticeships and technical education and vocational training. But this Government has been extremely deliberate in our efforts to ensure that we pivot the way in which we were operating to ensure that we have a national certification and apprenticeship board in place, to ensure we have a pipeline for persons to go into skills trades.

We are currently running apprenticeship programmes. I am encouraged with the work that the Department of Workforce Development are doing. All of the work that we do from the . . . with the Department of Workforce Development, we do directly in partnership with employers.

So I was kind of taken aback when the Opposition alluded to the outcomes of our training not meeting the needs of the employers when we ensure that employers are an integral part of the problem . . . process. Because we recognise that was a problem in the past when we would select training, have people engaged in training and then that training does not meet industry standards. We have rectified that problem. And that should be acknowledged.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was pleased today to attend our hospitality training [Learn Through] Experience Programme, where seven persons graduated from the programme. They worked in various hotel establishments. I thank the young persons for their commitments. I thank the team at Workforce Development for their commitment. And I thank the employers for taking on these individuals. That programme was made available when we did the mid-year budget review and the Premier then allocated additional funding to training. We can see where we have allocated additional funding and Bermudians directly benefitting from that allocation.

We are committed to ensuring that we build the capacity of our workforce to take advantage of current and future job opportunities. And that is what we have been steadfast in doing. We have expanded solar energy training for electricians. And so when we first ran solar panels . . . the solar electricity training, we were not using electricians. But what we recognised was that it was an easy pivot for a lot of our electricians to pivot into solar energy installation. And as a result of that we committed to training our electricians and that programme is something I am proud about.

We will be launching a new career development platform. That career development platform will ensure that we have a comprehensive one-stop electronic medium where persons can apply for jobs, where persons can identify what the current jobs [are] in our economy. They can click on that particular job. They can get testimonials from persons who currently work in the industry. They can have a full understanding of the experience requirement. They can get a full understanding of the educational requirement. They can get a full understanding of the educational pathway they need to take, or the career pathway they need to take to ultimately land the job. And I am pleased with that work.

You see, many years ago when we embarked on this journey to produce the National Workforce Development Plan, all of these items were featured in that plan and there is continued execution of that work. What is important is that we have a robust workforce development system. One that connects people with jobs. And we are continuously improving our system.

Part of that is ensuring that we have a school system that builds the capabilities of our young persons at an earlier age in terms of certain competencies that will lead them to specific jobs and puts those individuals on career pathways earlier, ensuring that we get ongoing feedback from industry. And so that is why we developed the National Workforce Advisory Board where we get that feedback from industry and we are able to ensure that we continue to monitor our system to determine whether or not it is meeting the needs of the people of Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the reality is that Bermuda has one of the lowest unemployment rates worldwide. The reality is our current unemployment rate falls under an economic benchmark of natural unemployment. The reality is our unemployment rate is one of the lowest rates we have had in 40 years. Something that should be applauded. We do have year-over-year job growth since the pandemic. And we will continue to have job growth in Bermuda.

But the challenge we do have is that because we have so [many] Bermudians exiting the workforce as they are ageing out of the workforce, the new Bermudians coming into the workforce are simply replacing those workforce . . . those Bermudians who have left. And so when you see the job numbers you are not going to see hundreds of new jobs for Bermudians. And we recognise that that is something that we will continue to see for years to come as Bermuda's population is ageing more rapidly than other developed countries worldwide.

And so, yes, the Minister of Health and the Minister responsible for Social Development and Seniors has to double down on the execution of their particular items and I am sure they will elaborate on the initiatives that they have to better support our ageing population.

But the area I looked at it from is from a workforce standpoint. And I have been very transparent as it pertains to the challenges. I have also been transparent in trying to put forward the solutions. And so I put out a [position] paper which says the retention of our local workforce. It had a lot of aggressive targets in terms of lowering PRCs. I have done broad-based consultation on those particular proposals. And I was able to get measured feedback as to how we actually move forward. And you will be seeing some of those initiatives. And some of those initiatives have filtered into our Throne Speech in terms of the work we have to do to move forward.

But in order to grow our workforce we need to ensure that there is retention. Some of the changes we are doing in Immigration regarding our borders is to ensure that persons get the labour that they need. This is not as a result of the Bermuda Government not issuing work permits or us not granting work permits in a timely fashion. A lot of this has to do with persons' inability to obtain the necessary travel documents to get into Bermuda. And where we can change our border policy to mitigate against some of those risks, we will do so.

So, the way in which we look at it is that we have ensured that first and foremost that there are and that we maintain protections in place. And that is why we are doing a full revision of our work permit policy that will be rolled out shortly. But also we need to ensure that employers get the supply of labour that they require so that they can be effective as well. And that is also a core theme in our Economic Development Strategy.

See, the Economic Development Strategy was specifically designed to ensure that we have initiatives put in place that lead to robust economic growth in multiple industrial sections so that we can increase economic activity, increase jobs and then fill those jobs with able-bodied Bermudians. And then where there is a lack of able-bodied Bermudians find the necessary talent needed that will complement our workforce.

Some of the initiatives outlined in the Opposition's Throne Speech [Reply] are directly correlated with the initiatives that we spoke about in the Economic Development Strategy. The Economic Development Strategy is extremely robust. Things such as we need to increase agriculture production. That is something that we speak about in our strategy as areas of opportunity. How we capitalise over our blue and green economies is areas we speak about. How we diversify our international business sector is something we speak about.

The international business sector represents 28 per cent of all economic activity in our economy. This means that 71 per cent of our economic activity . . . and I am rounding now because there is more than 28 per cent, so I can say 29 [per cent] so I don't get a point of order and somebody says, *You missed a percentage*. Because you know how individuals can be petty batters when they want to be. So, 71 per cent of the economy is actually domestic. And we need to ensure that we have the appropriate diversification in our domestic (what we call our local) economy as well. And those will be the areas of focus that we set out in the Economic Development Strategy.

It is not fair to say that our economy is stagnant. The economic measures will say that we have had robust and rapid economic growth. Every external person who has looked at our economic situation has validated that we have a resilient, robust economy whether it be Standard & Poor's, KBRA, whether it be local industry. We continue to want to paint this picture of economic stagnation when in fact the numbers do not support that. But I am well aware that we will have a full economic debate in weeks to come and I will set out where the Government's economy is doing extremely well. I state every single time I talk about the economy, that notwithstanding the economy doing well there is also pressure on households with our cost of living. Two separate things. It is not convenient to disconnect the two for some because they would never want to highlight the positiveness that is taking place within our economy. But we do see year over year business growth in our domestic economy. Washington Mall put out a press release to say that they have exceeded pre-pandemic capacity levels as it pertains to the businesses in the mall.

If we are doing so bad, what is that reflective of? We are doing well in terms of progressing the economy and as a result it is providing us additional capacity from a fiscal side, and you can see where the

mid-year review allowed us to pump additional funds into initiatives that directly go into benefiting the people of Bermuda.

What I am excited about in terms of the initiatives that the Ministry of Economy and Labour will be executing on for . . . that emanate from this Throne Speech is the work we are going to do around ensuring that we produce a national entrepreneurship strategy. A national entrepreneurship strategy that makes it abundantly clear that we believe that small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy, that we want to see greater growth for small and medium-sized businesses, that we want to provide better supports, that we want to understand where the pain points [are] and reduce those pain points.

But we have been committed to ensuring that we support local business and we want to ensure that we have a robust strategy that will provide us a framework of execution. That would also be complemented by a digital entrepreneurship strategy where we increase our e-commerce capabilities as well.

We will also be putting forward cooperative legislation. I am one that strongly supports collectivism. I think that organisations working together and members within organisations then working together can achieve much more than individuals working in silos and as a result I support cooperatives. And we will ensure that we have proper cooperative legislations and frameworks in place.

One of the cooperatives that we currently have is the Bermuda Credit Union. And for persons who have been somewhat excluded from what I would consider to be our mainstream banking system, that particular institution, has provided unquantifiable services to that particular population. Persons who will probably go unbanked, persons who would be least likely to secure credit from our traditional banking institutions can lean on the credit union.

I had the pleasure of being a director of the credit union for a number of years. I went on to be the treasurer of that particular credit union. I also led a delegation of trading to the International Cooperatives [Alliance] conference because I wanted to ensure that persons knew that cooperatives expand beyond the gambit of just a credit union and grocery stores. That cooperatives can be in every industry in our economy.

And so with increasing the knowledge through the work at the BEDC, hopefully we can better . . . have persons understand collectivism in a world that focuses so much on individualism and understand that we can achieve more if we collectively work together.

We also have a commitment to cut red tape. And that is one of the items which is in the Economic Development Strategy. Reduce the bureaucracy as much as we can for businesses so that they can bring their concepts into practice in a timely manner.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand that it is the Opposition's role to be critical. But solutions are also welcomed. And I earnestly say that. If you put,

we will do a, b and c but it doesn't have the how, it provides difficulty to anybody who is trying to look at that solution and determine how we would actually implement that particular solution.

Instead of the Honourable Member Pearman continuously chirping, he should take the criticism or what I am saying as being constructive. That if there is something that would improve the well-being of the people of Bermuda, this Government will be happy to implement it. If you have something pertaining to our economy that you would like to see implemented, I welcome receiving that information.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member Pearman continues to chirp.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: And I am unsure why he feels so emboldened to continue to chirp. You know when I was standing here prior to the election, he was saying, *Oh, you are gone. I wonder where you are going to work after this.* And making all those rude—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like the Honourable Minister—

The Deputy Speaker: Point of . . . your point of order?

Mr. Scott Pearman: —to withdraw that remark. I have never said what he has just said I said.

I am sorry; that is not true.

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. I did not acknowledge you, Member. Your point of order?

Mr. Scott Pearman: My point of order is that Honourable Minister is misleading the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Craig Cannonier articulated *You are gone.* Looked me eye to eye. The Honourable Member Craig Cannonier. And then—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER*[Misleading]*

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Minister seems to have confused MP Scott Pearman, who he just accused of quoting that, with MP Cannonier. I believe we do look different.

The Deputy Speaker: Member—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, I said the Honourable Member Cannonier did say *I am gone*. And then the Honourable Member Pearman said, *I hope you find a job*.

An Hon. Member: Aah!

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I deny that I said that. And if the Honourable Minister wants to point to that in the Hansard, I will offer him an apology. But I did not say that. Thank you.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, it came from one of his chirps and an individual standing, a Minister, would not forget the remarks coming from an individual on the floor stating that.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: But, Madam Deputy Speaker, what I am here to say is that the chirping is not substantial because we are not supposed to be here as Government. We are not supposed to lead this country. According to them we were all gone. According to them they were supposed to be the Government and we were supposed to be giving the Reply. But as fate would have it, it did not work out according to their plan.

Hon. E. David Burt: Not at all! They are still over there.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: And so we are here and they are there.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: And so while we want to provide solutions, they can continue with their soundbites. We will continue with the effective implementation of initiatives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I once said that the 30 do not need the 6. And there was an uproar. Well, the 25 do not need the 11.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Because—not to govern; to legislate. And if the Honourable Leader of the Opposition can show me where it is clearly laid out that his Shadow Cabinet has a responsibility in the general administration of government departments, I will yield.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry, I don't have the parliamentary—

Hon. Jason Hayward: He cannot just rise.

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I'm sorry. I thought I was being invited, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought he invited me.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: He can't invite you. Only I can.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of clarification.

An Hon. Member: No!

The Deputy Speaker: Do you yield to point of clarification?

Hon. Jason Hayward: No. No. There is no point of clarification.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order. He is misleading the House. He invited me to—

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order. Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, he is misleading the House. He invited me to speak.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you for your point of order.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, the fact remains that we have a responsibility. We take our responsibility seriously and we will execute on those initiatives. Whether it be all of the matters that we raised of serious nature, the violent crime that we see, whether it be the violence in our schools which is a concern for us all, whether it be the challenges that we have with the capacity of our housing inventory, whether it be the cost of living in Bermuda, whether it be the geopolitical threats that arise from our neighbour to the west.

There are going to be real challenges that emanate from some of the proposed suggestions that are floating around our western border as it pertains to tariff of goods and also fees on ships that Bermuda relies on to provide sustainable goods to our economy. There are real challenges that we will face that actually require real solutions.

This Government does not have the luxury to sit back idle and simply just criticise without putting solutions in place. And so you will see the effective delivery of solutions. But we cannot rewrite history and continue to speak about doom and gloom and how people feel. People feel the exact same way they felt when they went to the polls. That the Progressive Labour Party is the best choice—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: —for governing this country. That was made—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order. The Honourable Minister is misleading the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Honourable Minister is misleading the House, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you for your point of order.

An Hon. Member: What is the point of order?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, most voters did not vote for this Government, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: There you go again.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, we won the election.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: We won the election by the majority of persons who voted. Secondly, those voters that chose not to come out and vote for the Progressive Labour Party, they still did not have enough confidence to vote for the One Bermuda Alliance government. And as a result of that, we are the Government. We have the responsibility and we will govern according to the expectations of the people of this country. And we will govern for all in Bermuda. When we put initiatives in place, they are not just for some. They are for all—those who voted for us, those who didn't and those that did not vote at all. But we take our responsibility seriously.

When you look at the totality of the initiatives in the 2024 and 2025 Throne Speeches, they are a robust set of initiatives that will put Bermuda in a better stead once fully executed and implemented. And that is what this Government is doing. Going back to our roots and ensuring that we have people in front of every policy decision that we make ensuring that we create an environment where not only current businesses can thrive, but also Bermudians who have aspirations of starting a business get the necessary support they receive.

That when our young people go off to school that they have opportunities when they return home. And many are taking advantage of those opportunities that have been created in our economy. Notwithstanding that, there are still more work to be done and we are committed to doing that work on behalf of our young persons. We want them to remain optimistic. We want them to continue to have hope in their beloved country Bermuda.

Our seniors, we want to ensure that they are clear that this Government has their best interests at heart. To the workers of this country, our track record has been abundantly clear, the support we have provided workers. To our youth, we will ensure we put an education system in place that puts them on pathways to success. To our families with young kids, we will continue to provide the necessary support in the form of child day care allowance. Those are our commitments to the people of Bermuda and that is what we will effectively execute on.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other persons?

I recognise Member Scott. Member Scott.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sorry, Pearman. Member Pearman, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Before I begin, a point of protocol. I don't know if I missed it, but I would like to be the person to welcome you to the Chair today because I don't think anyone has officially welcomed you as the new Deputy Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
I am not increasing your time.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: You can add another 10 minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: And Member, before you continue, I just want to let other Members know when they are standing on a point of order, they have to wait until the Chair recognises them. Thank you. This is for all Members. Yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Duly noted. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Let me change the tone a little bit from the last speaker. And let me start, if I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, by quoting from the Government's Throne Speech itself. At page 1, they say: "The people of Bermuda have entrusted this government . . . to collaborate, and to build a more inclusive Bermuda where every voice is heard"

In my [debate] today I intend to take the Government at face value and believe that they would like to hear my voice on what I think the Government should be doing. I say that because the speaker who spoke immediately before I stood, seemed to suggest that the only function of the Opposition is to come to Parliament and vote upon Bills. And that is clearly not what happens in a constitutional government where the Opposition has a duty to hold the Government to account. And indeed, has a duty to criticise. Although I completely agree with the Government Minister that that criticism should be constructive. And I intend it to be so.

But again, let me change the tone a bit in that I would like to look a little bit more, Madam Deputy

Speaker, at our present circumstances and also be a bit more future looking in terms of the future vision that I hope to see whether under this Government or another. And I do that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because we live in a world of fractured uncertainty.

The global world around us is unravelling. It is in unravelling to our west. It is unravelling to the east. We have a series of major conflicts around the globe that are having detrimental impact. We have various political systems in various countries that are fractured, divided, embittered and in jeopardy. And I very much am concerned to ensure that in Bermuda this does not happen to us.

But I am realistic enough to know that we are not immune from the problems of the world. It would only take something we saw recently in the papers where a ship that might import our food happens to be built in China and suddenly we have a major food security issue. And that is just a tiny little thing that was almost an afterthought by the current incumbent of a country to our west. And it could have massive ramifications to us.

Why do I highlight that we live in a time of fractured uncertainty? I highlight it because, and I will quote from the speech of the Opposition Leader, the Honourable Opposition Leader, we do need urgent action. And again, I will quote from the Honourable Opposition Leader's speech today, we do need unity. And sometimes in a partisan world, it is hard to achieve that unity. And sometimes in a world where disagreement is often more easy than agreement, it is hard to get collaboration and consensus and most important of all, delivery of the urgent action. I have said before, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we live on a small Island but for a small Island, we seem to have big problems. And to take a line from the Throne Speech and turn it on its head, many people on our Island are not thriving. They are merely surviving.

So, what do we, the 36 elected MPs in this room, in this new Parliament plan to do about it? What are we able to do about it? Because there are some problems we will not be able to solve and we recognise that. And contrary to what the last speaker said, this Opposition does not blame everything on the Government. We recognise that there are problems beyond our shores that are not in our control and they would not be in our control if we were the Government. And they are not in their control. But there are things that we can do that are within the control of the 36 in this Chamber if we show some unity and if we demonstrate some urgent action.

And at the risk of oversimplifying the situation, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am going to put it like this: Basically, people just want a better quality of life. It is really all people want—a better quality of life. And what does that mean? That means a safe home in which parents can raise happy children. It means that men and women in Bermuda can have well paid and meaningful jobs that give them satisfaction in their

lives. It means a happy, healthy prosperous life. Prosperous is important, yes, but healthy is even more so as we live longer. And as we live longer, we are facing greater health issues.

Essentially, what we want is for our Bermudian children to have a better life than their Bermudian parents. And the question is, Is that achievable? And if it is achievable, how do we get there? So I repeat, what people want is a better quality of life. And if we are going to try and achieve that, we, the 36 in this Chamber, whether we are in the Executive or the Government or just mere parliamentarians, if we are going to achieve that we need that unity and we need to get behind the urgent action.

And if there are areas on which we agree, then let's get it done. And let's be real. There are going to be areas on which we disagree. Why? Because when we approach a problem, we have to identify what the problem is. We have to agree about that problem and then we have to see if we can agree a solution. And often people do not agree on the problem. So if you can't even agree on the problem, how do you get to the solution?

Madam Deputy Speaker, with your permission, may I read one sentence from the Opposition Leader's Reply? It is right at the end, and he says this and I quote. "The Opposition's job is not just to oppose, but to propose." And I think that is right. And so to the extent that the Honourable Minister who spoke before me said it is our job just to come here and be in Parliament, I respectfully disagree. To the extent that we did not propose solutions, I respectfully disagree.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: We are proposing solutions and indeed that is part of the Opposition's job, to propose, not just to oppose. And I am grateful that the Government, that are now starting to chirp, are prepared to listen to my voice, just like everyone else's voice as they said in their Throne Speech.

In the Reply to the Throne Speech, the Opposition Leader recognised rightfully (it is page 24) that our workforce is shrinking. The same thing was said by the Honourable Minister who spoke before me. That our workforce is shrinking. So, that is at least a problem that we can agree with commonality needs to be addressed and solved. And one of the things that struck me about the Throne Speech is the absence of a real and positive and authentic and solving . . . solution-driven conversation about our population.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you may have seen the statement by the Chamber of Commerce only in the last couple of days where they reckoned our population was somewhere in the region of 54,000 people, give or take, 54[,000], 55,000. I think it was banded between 54[,000] and 56,000. But let's call it 55[,000] for sake of discussion.

And likewise I would like to add to that picture something the Honourable Minister who spoke before me said. Which is that we have an ageing population. And about that we can agree. So, we can agree that we have too few people and we can agree that the people who are here are getting older and getting older more quickly than we would wish.

I can also agree with the Honourable Minister who stood in this very House previously and said that we needed 8,000 more people. Now, I remember that debate because I chirped in and said, *Well, how about we say 10 [and] you say 8, let's agree on 9 in the middle and get on with it.* But again, let me agree with the Honourable Minister. In his speech just before me, he said, and I quote, *There has to be some kind of strategy.* We agree. There has to be some kind of strategy. So, if we all, the 36 of us in this Chamber, agree that we need more people, then how do we get there?

Hon. E. David Burt: Then how?

Mr. Scott Pearman: All right? And the Honourable Premier has just chirped in, *How?* And I am grateful again that he is willing to listen to my voice.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: So here are three ways. In fact, they are the only three I know. If we want more people, either those of us who are here have more children, if they can still bear children. Right? So more Bermudian local births. That's one.

Two of three is that we need more people from elsewhere. We need more guest workers. Or we need people who come in from abroad to do the jobs that we do not necessarily have the skills to do. Some of us. That is a longer conversation for another day, but that is the second way that we might achieve a population growth. So we have got Dame Lois's suggestion with more births. And we have got more people from elsewhere.

And then third and finally, is the opportunity to return Bermudians from abroad. Because some of those people who have left would, we hope, still return to our Island if we can give them a reason to do so. And so that begs the question—and again, we were asked for solutions and we are trying to give them. But that begs the question, *How?* How do you persuade, let's call it 10,000, right?, 55[,000] to 65[,000]. We used to always say there were 65,000 people here. Now we are told by the Chamber of Commerce there are 55[,000]. So how do we persuade that 10,000, those Bermudians, wherever they may be, to return?

Well, I think there are two pretty obvious things if we want to get them to come back. One, is we need to provide well-paid, meaningful jobs. So we need to create jobs that are well-paid and meaningful. Otherwise they are not going to come back because

the jobs are not here. And if the jobs elsewhere and that is how they are going to put food on the table, and buy that home, and pay to educate those children and raise those children well and safely, they are going to go where the jobs are. So we need to assist this community in creating more jobs. And I mean well-paid, meaningful jobs not just a low-end job that really isn't of satisfaction to someone so that they are really excited about going to work in the morning because it is a meaningful part of their life.

And the second impediment—and again, this is not something we disagree about. It was in the Throne Speech, it was in the Reply, it was in Minister Hayward's speech earlier. It is the cost of living. So, what are we going to do about it? The Opposition Leader, on page 5 of the Reply, actually described it as a cost-of-living crisis. And I think he is right. It is a cost-of-living crisis. And again, just [using] common sense here, what are the factors that contribute to the cost of living?

Well, I suggest, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are four of them. They are the four biggies. There may be more, but these are the four big ones. There is food. There is health care. There is housing. And then there is energy. So let me just touch briefly on some possible solutions in each of those four categories. Because if we are able to unify, and if we are able to work urgently to try to solve the problems, we are going to need a bit of moral imagination to get to the solutions that are going to solve people's problems. And what problem am I looking at? At the moment, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am looking at how to get Bermudians to come home because we need more people.

So, food. The answer on this side of the aisle is a very simple one. Repeal the sugar tax. When I first joined the House in 2018, unfortunately one of the first Bills on my first day (and I see someone nodding, he was there on my first day) was the Sugar Tax Bill. This seven-year adventure in taxation has proved to be a demonstrably dumb idea.

It has been a stealth tax applied across the board on food coming in. Food, which I might add, is already expensive. Why? Because we live in one of the most isolated places in the world. And so if we are not growing it here, we are importing it from elsewhere. And that ship that might have been made in China has to bring it to us.

So, let's get rid of the sugar tax. Let's admit we were wrong about it and get rid of it. And the Opposition would support the Government in that and it will bring down food costs, which is what Bermudians want.

And while I am there let me tell you what is not the answer, Madam Deputy Speaker. What is not the answer is the suggestion in the Throne Speech of socialistic price controls. That is a bad idea of all bad ideas. And it has been demonstrated as a failure in

policy in country after country that tried it. So, let's not go down that road. So that is one.

Two, Madam Deputy Speaker, is health care. Now, the easiest solve on health care . . . or perhaps putting it a different way. One of the reasons our health care . . . which is actually very, very good, but very expensive. One of the reasons it is so expensive, if you talk to people in the industry is overutilisation. Now, one of the suggestions in the Throne Speech . . . it is at page 7. I won't quote from it. But it is about the need in relation to our hospital, our urgent care provision centre, to get people who are well enough to be out of the hospital, out of the hospital. This is the Government's proposal. And we agree. Again, bipartisan. We agree with that. How do you do it? How do you achieve it?

During the election campaign I had the good fortune of sitting down and talking for not just a little bit, but for three hours or so, give or take, with someone who is a nurse in our hospital. And I won't identify the gender or the nationality of that person just to keep his or her comments safe. I was shocked. Not only was I shocked, I was shocked as someone who is aware, as those in this Chamber usually are, about the problems our health care sector is facing.

So I had some awareness of the difficulties that we are facing. But when I heard, you know, ground's-eye view, stories of what is going on in the hospital from a nurse there, I really couldn't believe it. And what I asked that person to do was to share his or her views with my colleagues in the OBA and I hope that he or she will do that, anonymously, hopefully, because it was sad.

But one of the points said was this: It is true, sad though it may be, it is true that families are leaving their seniors at the hospital because they cannot care for them or afford to care for them. And I am not ascribing ill-will to those families. I know that there is that expression which I am not going to use. I am not saying that they are putting that senior in the hospital because they don't care. I am saying it because they likely have no other choice either financially or from time. And that is another conversation for another day. But I point that out.

Another suggestion is to expand health care, universal health care. Again, that is something that I think we in Bermuda, everyone, would want to see if we can get there. Where we differ fundamentally with the Government is whether we would do that through the private sector or through the public sector. And I think that that is a massive difference between the two parties in terms of health care solutions and the provision of universal health care. And I would invite the Government to recognise that putting the Government or the State in charge of health care in Bermuda is a bad idea. Get rid of that and start to look at private health care provision through the private sector.

While I am on health care, I think it is fair to say that the seven-year experiment not just in sugar

tax, but in hospital grant, has not worked. And we have seen that during the budgeting process where we have these cost overruns. So we have to have a rethink on that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, turning to the third of the four cost drivers that I was identifying for cost of living, is housing. Now, one of the problems we have with dealing with housing, and some say there are not enough houses. Some say there are enough houses, they are just not accessible. Some say that they are accessible houses, they are just not affordable. So there is a discrepancy of the facts that people are bringing to the table. And so it is always better to try and take decisions with data that is accurate and helpful that leads you to a data-driven decision.

We suggest a housing audit. And it is in the Reply. It is at page 21. And that makes eminent good sense. I mean, we have a census of our population. We try to determine age and gender and other things to help us make decisions about where we go in the future for the Government, whatever Government of the day it may be. Well, let's have a housing audit. Because it would really be helpful to understand whether there are actual units out there that are empty. And if so, why? Is it Airbnb? Some have said it is. Possibly it is. Is it a high degree of rent control? Are there too many rent control properties? Again, I am not asserting that. But let's have a housing audit so we know it.

There are also some very good ideas. If new build is needed, there are some very good ideas about how to reduce the cost of new builds through the use of alternative building methods and construction materials. So, we can agree with the Government that this is something that is urgently needed and I commend the Premier for his decision to now have a Cabinet Minister dedicated to housing. And I hope the first thing that that Minister does is to carry out a housing audit so that we have the facts before us.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It's already done, brother.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am told by the Honourable Deputy Leader, Minister De Silva, it is already done. So I look forward to the housing audit being shared with Parliament.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The fourth element is energy. We now have got some chirping. I am going to ignore it, Madam Deputy Speaker, and continue on my way.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I didn't . . . I'm sorry. I didn't hear what the Honourable Member said and I am now told he is being nice so I thank him if he is being nice.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: No doubt . . . I am going to continue on with trusting the Government in its Throne Speech promise that it wants to hear from other voices and it wants to be collaborative. And so I go.

Energy. Energy. It is right, and I believe this appeared both in the Throne Speech and in the Throne Speech Reply, that we have some of the most expensive energy in the world. Indeed, I have heard, and I don't know if this is factually accurate, but I've heard we have *the most* expensive energy in the world. If that is true, it is deeply lamentable and something about which we should take no pride to be top of that table.

Whether we have the most or just some of the most expensive energy costs in the world, you know, let us look at some solutions that would be sensible. I love the fact that both the Government and the Opposition are calling for renewable energy. That is a wonderful thing. But let's be real. It is going to take us time to get there. And what we need is we need to try to solve the problems facing Bermudians here and now in terms of energy costs.

And the best way we can think of . . . and there is no monopoly on good ideas. The best way we think we can think of is [to] look at the regulatory system. We went and met with the regulator and what the regulator told the Opposition when we met with them is that it doesn't have the statutory teeth to be able to compel the dropping costs because it doesn't have under section 23 of its Act which empowers it, it doesn't have broad enough powers to consider public policy. So if that is true, and I take them at their word, then let's amend that Act and give them that power. Because either we need a regulator that has the teeth to regulate or the regulator is a waste of time and money. One of those two.

So, moving on, let me touch on a few points in the Throne Speech in the time left to me because I would like to say that there are some points in here that we certainly are supportive of, or that I am certainly in support of. Obviously my comments of support are subject to seeing the Bills themselves, and we haven't seen the Bills but again, as it was said, no party has a monopoly on good ideas. So, in terms of the Government's . . . the mention of the Government's vacant and derelict properties, at page 4 of the Throne Speech, it is something that we certainly should look at. And I would invite some bipartisan approach to that.

At page 3 of the Throne Speech there is a discussion of giving equal rights to legal guardians of children as opposed to their parents. So, will the parents have rights that the legal guardians don't? Extending that right to legal guardians and adoptive parents . . . that's page 3 of the Throne Speech. Again, subject to seeing the Bill, that is something that I would very much be supportive of.

Likewise, at page 6 of the Throne Speech, we understand . . . and I am no longer the Shadow for Home Affairs. It is now my colleague to my right. So, I do not wish to tread on his toes, but I see that the Government is pledging a pause on the proposed proposals for . . . for . . . It's not Blue Halo anymore. It's another "Blue." To listen to the fishermen's concerns. And I am delighted to see that. It is something we in the Opposition have been calling for and certainly a pause has our support because our fishermen . . . it is their lifeblood, and they need to be listened to.

Likewise, also on page 6 of the Throne Speech, there is a National Entrepreneurship Strategy. Now, we haven't seen it yet. Minister Hayward spoke to it in his speech. But obviously we would like to see it and I imagine Bermudians would like to see it because it is a very good idea. A lot of Bermudians are entrepreneurs because it is easier to go around with your white van and make a living than it is sometimes to do white-collar or blue-collar jobs. If you can be your own boss, why wouldn't you want to be?

My fundamental point, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that bipartisanship is possible and it can work. But it requires both parties to approach it in good faith. And I will repeat that. Both parties have to approach it in good faith.

In terms of . . . moving from the Throne Speech now to the Reply. I would just like to quote one more thing that was said in the Reply by the Opposition Leader because it really resonated with me. And this, Madam Deputy Speaker, is at page 29 of the Reply. And with your leave, I quote. "Government's first job is to govern well: to manage public affairs competently, keep its promises, and be accountable to the people." *Government's first job is to govern well: to manage public affairs competently, keep its promises, and be accountable to the people.*

Madam Deputy Speaker, if I may, I respectfully agree with the Opposition Leader and I invite the Government to consider that statement and hopefully see if they agree with it too. Because if the message the PLP has taken from the General Election, is that they have some sort of tub-thumping mandate, then I would respectfully suggest that they have not listened to the Bermudian people and we in the Opposition want Bermuda to succeed. We want Bermudians to thrive and prosper. They may not believe it, but we want this Government to go from strength-to-strength.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You're right. We don't.

Mr. Scott Pearman: And MP De Silva, the new Deputy [Premier] has just said that [they] don't believe that. Well, I am a Bermudian first.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Then I would take you, if I may, finally, before I sit, Madam Deputy Speaker, to a cou-

ple of comments from the Governor that were made at the end of the Throne Speech.

With your leave, he said this: "The importance of fairness, good governance and accountability are at the heart of the Constitution. I therefore welcome the Government's commitment to serve every Bermudian with fairness and accountability." I entirely agree. Fairness and accountability. I note that this Government ran its election campaign on the concept of fairness. If it sticks to that concept, it will have the support of many, if not all. But I would invite this Government to also consider the concept of accountability. Because it was a concept that was absent from the Throne Speech other than in the Governor's remarks.

If I may then further quote, the Governor said this: "Bermuda is not immune to global issues. As we convene, the world feels increasingly uncertain and unstable. In such times there is a need not just to maintain these principles of good governance, but to protect and strengthen them." I entirely agree.

At a time of global uncertainty, when things are unravelling to the east and unravelling to the west, we are not immune. So we must come together. We must show unity. And we must show decisive action. And if we cannot agree on all things, then at least let's try and solve the things on which we can agree. Because we have more in common than that which divides us.

I do now still hold the role of Shadow Attorney General. Although I think my title has been changed to Shadow Minister of Justice or some such like. And so let me just make one point. Again, from the Governor's statement in the Throne Speech, where the Governor praised our independent judiciary. I agree with that praise and I echo it.

What I would invite this Government to consider with my Shadow affairs judiciary hat on . . . and I know that the Honourable Minister, who sits in another place, is to increase the independence of the judiciary to allow them to have their own funding, to be separate from the Government, wholly, to ensure that those sort of statements by the Governor can be maintained into the future and upheld with pride by all Bermudians.

Just as I commented on the General Election mantra of the Government being that of fairness, let me turn to the mantra that was offered by the Opposition in the election. And that was opportunity. What do I mean by that? Again, it comes back to the basic principle, What do people want? A better quality of life. They want the opportunity to finish life better than they started. They want the opportunity for their children to have a better life than their parents. They want the opportunity for our Bermudian communities (plural) to prosper and succeed. We must raise all the boats with the tide.

And before I sit down, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just go back to what I really found resonated in the Reply. I have said it once, but I will quote it

again. “Government’s first job is to govern well: to manage public affairs competently, keep its promises, and be accountable to the people.” And I know that that is the pledge of the One Bermuda Alliance and I invite this Government to borrow that and take it if they will.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 15. This is his Maiden Speech in the House, so we normally sit quietly without interruption—

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, you can let them bring the heat, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: —to the speaker. So you have 30 minutes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Let them bring the heat.

[Inaudible interjections]

MAIDEN SPEECH

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And again, I would like to echo the sentiments of the Member from across the aisle of constituency 22 who welcomed you to the seat of which you now hold. Congratulations to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, also before I get into the meat of my speech this afternoon I would like to recognise the 421 individuals who decided that they were going to go to the polls on February 18 and cast a ballot for Owen K. Darrell. I would like to say thank you to them. And thank you for—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —the other individuals in constituency 15 who for whatever reason decided that they could not or did not want to attend the polls and cast a vote for Owen K. Darrell on February 18 and also, Madam Deputy Speaker, to those who decided to cast their vote elsewhere. But I will tell you this, I am here to serve. I am here to represent. And I will represent everyone in this country. But first and foremost, I will represent the constituents of Pembroke East, constituency 15.

With that said, Madam Deputy Speaker, in another place I have kind of developed the reputation of giving my speeches a title. So, before I even get into titles, I like to look at the titles of the speeches that have been put before me. And I had a chuckle over at . . . the Member, the Deputy Leader from the

other side and I noticed that they decided to literally go right in this year and say “Weather the Storm.”

I have had a joke with him before and I said, *One thing the One Bermuda Alliance will always do is bring doom and gloom to this place and others.* So as we say, my mate C’Daynger (that’s his stage name, Trevor Corday is his real name), *dark clouds can’t rain on my parade*, Madam Deputy Speaker. Some of you will know that tune from some time ago.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So when I see Trevor I know he will have a good laugh at me with that.

But in all seriousness, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to entitle this submission to the House of Assembly as “Empowering Bermudians.” *Empowering Bermudians.*

And as you would see in our last two Throne Speeches (that came a lot sooner than some would have thought) “A Fairer Bermuda For All” and “Building a Fairer, More Stable and Affordable Bermuda.” But in layman’s terms what that means, Madam Deputy Speaker, is empowering Bermudians and building a fairer Bermuda for everyone.

See, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe, and I am sure that most of my colleagues here believe, that the strength of Bermuda is in her people. Most definitely! And I can attest to that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because sometime last summer when it was decided that I would be the representative to replace long-serving Deputy Leader of this party, the Honourable Walter Roban, people started using the terminology of a “safe seat.” But, as I started in July, and I pushed on until the nights got . . . or until the days got short, I felt it necessary . . . as I know you [know], Madam Deputy Speaker, and many others here [know], that if you do not connect with your people you will be lost in the wilderness.

And I started to coin a term, it turned from canvassing into *I’m going up in the hills.* They said, *You are going up in the hills. What does that mean?* And if you would go back to the Throne Speech that was given last fall, a quote by Nelson Mandela was used. If I may quote it from the Speech from last year, it says, “After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.”

And I would tell you this, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have climbed the hills of Glebe Road, as I have climbed that Mission Lane hill. Ms. O’Neka, I hope you are listening. As I have climbed the hills of Long Ridge Pass, I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the strength of this country lies with its people.

I am happy, and I am proud to be, as they say in other places, a card-carrying member, and now an MP, an elected official representing the Progressive Labour Party, because nothing gives me greater joy, Madam Deputy Speaker, than serving the people, not

only of this country . . . I'm sorry, not only of Pembroke East, but of this country. And Bermuda has always been strong because of its people.

Our communities, I do not think it is by chance or by luck that the portfolio of which I hold includes many or all of the sports clubs of this country. It also includes our families, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the determination of this country and our people to push through during tough times.

And you know, it has almost become a cliché, especially since what happened five years ago, but we faced our challenges. We have pushed through them, and we have come out stronger. And now we are going to make sure that every Bermudian has a fair shot to succeed in this country.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: This Government is committed to putting people first. And I must admit, Madam Deputy Speaker, I sat here and I struggled to hear the emphasis [from] the other side of the people of which we serve. We are building a future in this party, in this Government where no one is going to be left behind. And you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I walked those hills of Pembroke East and I said to my colleagues and my friends, *I do not care what the percentages have said in the past. I don't care what you may think is safe or unsafe. I want to meet every single resident in this constituency.* I didn't get 100 [per cent] but I got close.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And what you recognise when you walk these hills and you knock on these doors is that, as my colleague said earlier, we are not ignoring the struggles of the past. Many of them up in the North Village area will tell you that they have economic hardships. They have lacked opportunities. They have been part of an unfair system that has left far too many Bermudians behind.

And when we continue to show up it shows our constituents, it shows the people of this country that we are committed to open, honest leadership that listens and puts the needs of the people first. It was not lost on me [that] the constituency which I now represent, even when it was dual-seat constituencies, had some of the giants of the political atmosphere in Bermuda, whether it be Nelson Bascome (when it was joint seats), whether it be Ottiwell Simmons (the late Ottiwell Simmons who first took it over when they went to single-seat constituencies), followed by the Honourable Walter Roban.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Those are giants in this community. And they have worked hard to make this country

better and we have a responsibility to do the same for our future generations.

I cannot tell you the number of times that I walked and they said, *Well, you know, when Nelson was our MP . . .* Or they said, *Well, you know, I remember when Otti used to . . .* Or, *You know, I used to always get a birthday card from MP Roban.* I said, *Give me the opportunity.* I said, *I can guarantee you that hard work has never scared me. And it will no longer scare me with any title that I have or election that I have won.*

It is a fact. Especially seeing the community of which I grew up in and I am still a part of. People know it as Devil's Hole. Some people would know it as Harris' Bay. Right, MP?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: That community is a strong community. And what this party is doing for communities proves that stronger communities build a stronger Bermuda. The best ideas do not come from the Government Administration Building. The best ideas do not come from 105 Front Street. The best ideas do not come from Global House or TCD. The best ideas come from those hills that we all walk and those doors that we knock on. They come from the people, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This Progressive Labour Party has shown, not only in this Speech from a couple of months ago, but in the new one, that we are working directly with community groups, directly with sports clubs, and directly with small businesses to give them the resources and the support that they need to grow.

Let me give you an example. Just a couple of weeks ago the BEDC [Bermuda Economic Development Corporation] reached out to the Department of Sport and Recreation and they said, *What can we do to help these sporting clubs?* And we said, believe it or not, it is the basics. Some of them need to know how to write a business plan. Some of them need accounting help. And they said, *Well, we are going to have a networking event.* And I am pleased to say that these community clubs have taken up the opportunity to learn how they can get better.

They had one a couple of months ago up at Warwick Workmen's [Club]. The place was packed, as the then Chair of the BEDC would attest to. And they were just grabbing for information because they realised that when you have community involvement not only do their clubs get better but the entire Island and all of the communities around them also get better.

And although I don't have the portfolio that includes youth any longer, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am also very happy as an educator (as yourself) that young people still have the tools in this country. And we will continue to give them the tools to build bright futures, whether it be sports, whether it be culture or whether it be job opportunities. This party has shown

that we invest in our people. That is jobs, that is tourism, that is culture.

And we will continue, especially under my watch, to make sure that we are growing tourism the right way. Tourism is a large part of our community. I heard earlier it seems like it was slipped in and it was tried to be downplayed. But we need to make sure and we will continue to make sure that it benefits all Bermudians and not just a few.

And to that end, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will see the Tourism Investment Act 2017 was mentioned in both Throne Speeches. And we haven't taken one and thrown it out. In the first one it mentioned that the Tourism Investment Act 2017 would include categories which includes attractions [in the] adventure tourism category. We will then streamline and reduce the complexity of the application process.

One of the shocking parts that I have had to realise is that a lot of our people don't know where to find this information. And when they do find it, it seems like a pipedream. It is unattainable to them. So I am happy that we have sat down and said, *You know what? Here is the application. This is how you get through it. And we will invest in you.* Because we are not just investing in the hotels on South Shore and the ones down on Pitts Bay Road. We are looking, as you see in this one, that we are going to include in the Tourism Investment Act 2017 smaller guest houses as well as health, medical sites. And to make these developments eligible for the suite of concessions available under the Act.

So when guest house owners call and say, *How can you help me? We can no longer say, Well, you are not really eligible under this Act. We can say, Here is the Act. This is what the Progressive Labour Party Government is doing for you and this is how you can get your guest house back on track.*

I have heard the calls. I have heard the pleas from my colleagues about individuals and guest house owners in their constituencies [who are] looking for the Government to do more. How can we help them?

We are backing major projects, as you have seen.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Not just photo ops. *Not just photo ops.* Mind you, I would have liked to have seen some of them in the photo because it is that important. But we are backing major projects such as the Fairmont Southampton redevelopment. Because they create jobs for Bermudians.

I'll tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I started by telling you that sometimes they tell you the reward for hard work is more work. So I am going to pivot a bit to what we are doing—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —in Transportation [and]—

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —how we are investing in transport in this country. We are improving public transportation.

An Hon. Member: Yes, you are.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Now, it was announced some time ago that there are currently two new ferries being built. That has been in the infrastructure because although I come from down the East End, I can tell you that the moment that the water is a little choppy and they can't run those ferries or the ferries break down, whatever happens, it is a scramble for Bermudians to get into Hamilton to school or work. So I know how important they are to the public transport infrastructure. So that is an investment that we are making.

But one of the things that almost brought tears to my eyes, Madam Deputy Speaker, and you see when you become a Minister and you take on these new portfolios or these new responsibilities, the first thing they want to do (Right MP Adams?) is take you on a tour. And they take you and they want to show you this department and they want to show this department and, you know, for the most part everybody is happy to see you. *Oh, what are you going to do for us?*

But one of the facilities that literally brought tears to my eyes was the new maintenance facility that they are building at the Dockyard. And the young man (I forget his name, forgive me) who gave me the tour was excited. He is the acting manager up there. He was excited to show me the possibilities that are going to be opened by this investing into this infrastructure. And you know, when a lot of people might have just walked by and said, *Oh, this is nice. This is a nice building. This is going to support our ferries and boats.* I said, *No, no. Take me in. I want to see what is in it.* And he took me to the current one before he took me over to the new one and there was this machine shop in the back.

And see, if anybody knows me, they would know that I grew up around a gentleman who spent all his life in a machine shop. It is all he does. And he talked about this machine and that machine and as I grew up as a young man I was like, *Daddy, I don't really need to know about all this stuff.* But when I saw the machine shop I said, *Wait. You guys do this type of stuff up here?*

And [the young man] said, *Yes. You know, outside of BELCO we are the largest machine shop in the country.*

And I immediately thought of the possibilities of what is happening in education. And these signature schools and how we can actually get our students. And we have seen all the videos, but how can we get those young men up to Dockyard and put them

in that machine shop and say, *Hey, this is what your job is going to be and this is how you support the transportation infrastructure.*

So that, Madam Deputy Speaker, was just something that just blew my mind away. And I am going to make sure that once it opens that the public gets to see what we are investing in up there for this country. As I said, the signature learning programmes will help students use that facility and gain real world skills that lead to solid careers.

But as I come down the hill, Madam Deputy Speaker, one thing that continues to be said over and over is that this Progressive Labour Party Government provides support to a Bermuda that works for everyone. As I said, it is about fairness. It is about making sure that every Bermudian—not just the wealthy, not just the well-connected—has a solid chance to succeed. Our Government is focused on real solutions, not just talk. And I will say that . . . I will put this in here, Madam President . . . I'm sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. (I am going back to another place, look at that.)

I will tell you this—

An Hon. Member: Don't go back.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I was sitting in a particular meeting earlier this week and the question came up and said, *We are having this general debate. It is the Throne Speech Reply. We need to know who is speaking.* I put my hand up. I think I shocked a couple of people. They said, *But wait. You are new.*

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I said, *Let me tell you something. I learned a long time ago that this is parliament . . .* Let me see if I can get this right for my French teacher back in the day. The word “parliament” comes from a French word *parler*.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Don't let the French people beat up on me.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: *Parler* means “to speak.” So I can tell you this, Madam Deputy Speaker, there was no way that I spent 40 days during an election campaign and about five months before that knocking on doors, walking hills, listening to people give me their problems and their issues and how we can fix it and what they want the Government to be. There was no way that I was coming to this place and not speak on their behalf, because my speaking in this place, Madam Deputy Speaker, is one part of me representing the people of this country.

So we can call this a maiden speech. We can call it whatever you want. But I am coming to work, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am coming to work for the individuals who say, *Show me a better way.* I am coming to work for the individuals who say, *Can you introduce me to a better life?* I am coming to work for the people who say, *Life just doesn't seem fair.* And I will continue to come to work in this place. I will continue to speak on their behalf.

At lunchtime today I walked by a group of gentlemen parked on Church Street. And I just wanted to get back to the House so I tried to go across the street. They said, *Hey, hey, hey, hey! Come around here and talk to us.* A group of taxi drivers. They said, *We want to speak to you. We want to talk to you.* They said, *We heard you are avoiding us.* I said, *Well, here is my number. You can text me. You can call me. You can come to my office.* My job is to serve the people of this country.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, . . . I was trying to see how I was going to slip this in. Hmm! So I am just going to go right in with my last couple of minutes before I close my speech.

But 14 years ago on Monday, Madam Deputy Speaker, a little girl came into this world. Her name was Tatum Suraeya Darrell. And she turns 14 years old on Monday. And I am going to use this opportunity and use my voice, if she is listening, to wish her a very happy birthday on Monday. But you might say, *Well, why are you telling your daughter happy birthday in this speech?*

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important that when we come to this place we don't just represent those who voted for us. But we have to represent those who are coming behind them. Because I took her up in the hills with me. And I said, *It is important for you to see why Daddy may miss your play this afternoon. It is important for you to see why Daddy has so many meetings.*

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I think as she approaches 14, and I think as I took her with me up into those hills of Pembroke East, and I drag her to football games and netball games and everything else that I do in the name of service, she gets it. And she sees what her father [and] his colleagues are doing and the party of which we represent for the people of this country.

So as I close, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will say this: Our Government will continue to focus on real solutions. And I am not going to start calling names, but to all of those up in Pembroke East and

Bermuda, we will keep working for you. We will keep working *with* you. We will keep working alongside you to build a Bermuda where everyone can thrive.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 8. Is it? Yes, I recognise the Member from constituency 8.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister who just took his seat—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: Don't worry.

[Laughter]

Mr. Ben Smith: From when we were in another place, he referred to the doom and gloom and the storms that always happen whenever we are having these kinds of debates.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, what happens is when you are doing the door knocking that he was referring to, so many times it is the stories that those families are telling you that make you realise that not everybody is feeling the same way that we may feel. And there are perspectives in this country depending on your job, where you live, your circumstances. Madam Deputy Speaker, although there are important things that the Government has done to progress this country, we acknowledge that. When you sit in a living room and the family is telling you their story that is not usually the story that they want to tell you. When a loved one spends over a week in the hallway of the emergency room, that becomes the story they tell you. They feel it. They express that to you.

So when we repeat that, it is not because we want to paint a picture of doom and gloom, but it is the reality that some of our citizens who do not have the ability to stand here and speak in this House, are giving to us.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when people are telling us that they are struggling to pay health insurance and because of the weight of that health insurance they are contemplating leaving, we are not repeating that because we want to just be negative. It is because that is what a portion of our population is feeling. And that portion seems to be growing.

And the real issue that we have is that we spend so much time on the divide that sometimes we can't even understand that we are actually on the

same side on many issues. Because it is not possible that the Government Members did not hear some of these same stories when they were on those doorsteps.

So it is not that the Government isn't trying to solve some of the problems, but the problems seem to be growing faster than we can solve them. Some of these things are because of outside pressures. But many are because we are not willing to even admit our problems.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the portfolio for me to discuss today is education. And education is obviously the foundation of how all of us were able to achieve the things we have to get to where we are today. It has helped to build a country that we have and I believe everybody here believes that that is the foundation that we must continue to build on for the future. And we have many successful students in our public education system. And the danger is that whenever we speak about public education it usually is the negative side.

So I do want to thank the Government for the added finances that they have given toward scholarships because giving an opportunity to our young people to be able to get tertiary education, to be able to get the certifications that will allow them to come back and work in our country. That is important. But something that bothers me is that so many of our young people now are leaving here, becoming educated and not thinking that Bermuda is a place that they want to return to.

Now that has always happened. There are people in Bermuda for generations who have decided that they want to go somewhere else for other opportunities. The problem is that the number is growing at a time that we are also in a population crisis. So an ageing population, a low birth rate, that is what highlights that we cannot afford to lose any of our young, educated people who have gone away to better themselves. We really need to do everything we can to attract them to come back to Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance said during the election campaign, and it is also in our Leader's Reply to the Throne [Speech] that there are certain things within education that we think need to be dealt with. I think everybody here agrees that a reform had to happen. There were changes that needed to happen in order for us to fix the trajectory of where education has been in the population.

But as I said, when we talk about the people who we get to talk to who give us the information, that is the message that I have to bring to the House. So, it is when teachers are frustrated with the process, frustrated with not feeling they know exactly what is going to happen next. It is not because I am here to say everything is bad, but I have to point out that that anxiety from our teachers has to be listened to.

Earlier today there was some conversation about some specific things that are happening in our

public school environment. Some of our young people who are not being able to be on the positive side, what we would like to be able to talk about. How we want our young public school students to be represented. But there are teachers who are frustrated because those behaviours have been happening—ongoing.

It is not new. And incidents happen and sometimes teachers are suspended while that process is happening, while they have to figure out what is happening during that specific situation. And then they return, and they find out that the same student who was causing the issue will continue to be in that class. And that is causing frustration.

And I have said it over and over again, our teachers do not withhold their work. The people who are in that specific field, teaching, that is a calling. Teaching is probably the most important job in the country. In their hands [teachers] have the future. They are the ones who are responsible for moulding those young people to be the future that all of us want to see.

So when you see the frustration and you hear their frustration, we have to bring that information here. We have to speak about it because if they are feeling that they are not being heard, and they do not actually have the ability to say it because of the job, somebody else has to be their voice. And it is our opportunity to be that voice. Not just the Opposition. Any of us who have that opportunity to talk to teachers and they voice their frustration in how the reform is being handled, whether they are being supported at the correct level, these are discussions that we have seen bubble up over and over again and most of the time . . . and only when it is in the headlines that people really get to know this frustration. But if they have the most important job in the country, we need to make sure that we are supporting them as if that is the most important job.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is another group that has voiced their frustration when it comes to education—public education, specifically. And that is parents. Now, I understand as you are making change there will be frustration because change is difficult for anybody. But some of these changes seem as if they were not thought all the way through. So now you are having parents see their child go through a transition that maybe has an interruption because it was not thought all the way through to the end. And it is frustrating them. And that is the situation when the parent is actually involved. That is the parent who is trying their very best to make sure that their child gets the best opportunity for the future.

But we cannot kid ourselves, we know that there are many of our young people who do not have that kind of support. So, they get left behind without somebody advocating for them. So when schools close and parents do not know what school their child is going to go to—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Member is intentionally misleading the House. No school closes without any student knowing where they are going to be before that school closes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Ben Smith: So moving forward, there are times that parents cannot get into first choice, second choice. [They] do not know where they are going to be able to send their child. And in many cases—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again, the Member is misleading the House, and this time he is doing it intentionally.

I have already said that no school closes without a student being allocated to another school. I do fully admit, you may not get your first choice. And very rarely will you not get your second choice. But there are always choices. You just might not like the choice that you happened to get.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Member, continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: So maybe that is the issue. That the parent wants to make sure that their child has the best opportunity and the choice that they are getting is not the one that they think is in the best interest of their child.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

Mr. Ben Smith: And that is the frustration.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again, the Member is misleading the House. What he is implying is that one school, or a particular set of schools does not offer the

same thing that another particular set of schools does. That is the problem that we have. If the people will stop pitting schools against schools, we would make more progress than we have made.

So, to say that the child is not going to the school that they want to go to so they therefore will not succeed is blatantly false. And he needs to withdraw that statement.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Member, is that what you were saying?

Mr. Ben Smith: No.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. So clarify. Thank you.

Mr. Ben Smith: Madam Deputy Speaker. So, the issue is parents. Right? Because I'm not lucky enough to be a parent. So the people that I am speaking to are telling me how they feel about their children. So, if the Minister disagrees with these parents, that's fine. But understand something. That disagreement with these parents has been ongoing throughout the reform and they have not been listened to. That is the actual thing that has been happening in this country.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again—

Mr. Ben Smith: The Minister can get upset about it—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Member is again misleading the House. That Member has been invited to many meetings that he has chosen not to attend.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh! Oh-oh!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And so while he stands here and says that he has spoken to parents, he has spoken to teachers—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —he has not spoken to the Reform Unit. He has not spoken to the Ministry of Education. Or he has not spoken to the Department of Education.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Okay, Member. You can relate to the House what your feedback is at the doorstep. But just sort of

park it there. Do not take it further and say that it means thus and so. But you can speak to what you have heard at doorsteps.

Mr. Ben Smith: Which is exactly what I am doing. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I will move on to facilities, then, since that will probably get the same activation because—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Ben Smith: —when teachers contact you and tell you that the stench of sewage early in the morning is what they are greeted with in the school and it has not been dealt with for an extended period of time, I would say that is something that I should talk about here. Because that is the issue they have written in, complained about, nothing is changed. So when we talk about facilities of these schools and it is our opinion that these are the things that should be dealt with immediately—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: —so as we are actually moving forward, our position is that some of the reform seems like it has not been finished all the way through. Even though we have spent millions of dollars from a consultant who should have told us how this process works, the frustration has been happening through the parents, through the teachers, through the administrators.

But they do not have the ability to go anywhere else after they have been complaining and the changes have not happened. So, it is not doom and gloom if the frustration is . . . and this is where I will connect it, because those parents who are having to go to a different school are speaking to the parents who are already in certain schools and being given the feedback, *You don't want to bring your child here*. Once again, these are the exact words coming from parents. I can't tell you anything else.

So, if the Minister, the new Minister, is hearing similar things then we will get advised what changes are being put in place in order to fix those things. But it is the Opposition's position that an independent education authority needs to be put in place as soon as possible. Get politics out of education. Give the support to the teachers.

Another year of not having enough substitute teachers. Another year of having classes without having teachers and then having to have teachers take their period of preparation to cover another class. Once again, these are all the frustrations that are being given to us by those teachers, by those parents.

So the question is: If these things are not happening . . . so, these parents and teachers are just making it up, because I don't see what the benefit is. The headline that we see is that teachers are with-

holding their work because of their frustration. The frustration cannot just be for nothing.

Our situation is that same frustration that I am speaking about here we are also hearing coming out of the hospital. So once again, it is not about . . . and I will say it over and over again. There are good policies that we are working towards, but the frustration of our population is what is bubbling over.

Those are the messages that we get when we are sitting in someone's living room and they are frustrated because a parent says, *I don't know if I can risk this. So now I am being forced to take my child to private education.* Those are their words. They feel like they are forced because they do not have a choice. And in a country where we already know the cost is completely out of control, having to now pay to go to private education, when you should have been able to get same world-class education without the cost.

Now, the answer . . . so it is their choice. So it is their . . . the first choice they had they didn't get. The second choice they didn't get. And they have sent their child to private. And now they have to pay that cost. And other parents are making the decision, *I can't afford that. So now I am having to leave the country.* This is just the reality of the people in the country. It is not because we want to point out only negative. But we have to highlight the things that the people in the country are telling us.

And the truth of the matter is, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are pretty sure there are 20-something people on the other side that will talk about all the positive things they are doing. So, the Opposition needs to stand up and tap the Government on the back.

An Hon. Member: Well, that would be nice.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, we have pointed out solutions, but if we don't give the details of the solution then that is not enough. So now we have to write it, do the legislation . . . remember, all of the resources are on the other side.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: So, most important thing in this education is the student and that needs to be our focus. COVID-19. We do not like to talk about it, but it had an impact on all of our students—public, private, it doesn't matter. It is the . . . the statistics are telling you that there has been an impact on our students. Not just our students, worldwide.

We have also heard the issues with mental health. So, anxiety and stress with our students. Right? The testing that was done, the young people were telling us that that is the position that they are in. So once again, from our standpoint, we want to focus on the basics of our education system to make sure

that the foundation is in place for us to get to these next levels that we agree are important.

One of the problems that we have had for a long time isn't that we didn't have the ability to teach technical. It is that our students weren't actually wanting to do technical. So, part of that is the fault of our society because we have spent so much time telling everybody that they are only a success if they are going to be in certain industries. So now we have to educate our population on those differences.

So we support a system that allows for those young people to be exposed. For them to understand that these are real opportunities that can allow them to have a strong life in Bermuda. But if we do not build the foundation, and this is based off of the statistics, then they actually cannot even take on those opportunities. And then we continue to have to bring in workers from overseas in order to do the jobs that could be done by our young people. So we have to, and we will continue to support all of the positive initiatives within education. But it is also important that we give the support that is necessary.

And when I say *support that is necessary*, to make sure that the facilities that our students are learning in, that our teachers are working in are up to par. To make sure that the security level in those schools is high enough so that parents can feel comfortable that their child is safe when they go to school. To make sure that there are substitute teachers so that when a teacher cannot be in the classroom, the learning continues at the level that it was expected to happen.

Education is the most important thing that we can give to the next generation. And we understand that we have a threat from external. And it also means that we have to prepare for a future that is completely different from the present that we are living in right now with technology potentially impacting jobs. And for that reason we have to make sure that our children have the highest level of education to give them the opportunities to be able to flourish in the future Bermuda.

But if we are not providing the support, the assessment, and then the support for our young people at the youngest ages so that they are prepared to take on the opportunities in education and then in employment, then we fail them.

And that is why the education cycle cannot be connected to our political cycle. That is why the authority has to be independent. There will be oversight because there is funding that has to come from Government, from taxpayers' money.

[Laughter]

Mr. Ben Smith: But it does not mean that when things are not going well, because there is protesting that is happening from a certain school in a certain constituency, that you get to change your mind.

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Mr. Ben Smith: Because the decision should have been data driven. If the decision was based off of the information that had been provided and from the consultant that you paid, then you cannot switch.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Member is intentionally misleading the House. He keeps referring to the consultant that we hired. The consultant was brought on after the decision of primary schools was made.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Ben Smith: And it will be wonderful to see how long we are going to continue with them and how much they will continue to get paid considering the amount of interruptions that we have, including what will be happening in September when some of the students who should have been going to senior school have now had to be rerouted.

So considering those things, it will be important to know whether those parents should continue to be frustrated. Whether those children will continue to be displaced and whether their teachers will continue to be frustrated because they do not have the support that is needed and they are in facilities that they are saying are causing them health issues.

So if that is the case, it will be interesting to hear those reports and to have transparency and accountability so that we know exactly what is happening step by step through this reform. And an audit—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

Mr. Ben Smith: —that allows us to know whether we have—

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Once again, the Member is misleading, because if he would come and sit with the Education Reform Unit—as we have asked him to do for the last five years—he would actually see those reports, because he would be able to ask for them and he would get them. So set up the meeting, sit down with the Reform team and he would get the answers that he claims he cannot find. It's simple.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is actually not important that I get those answers. It is important that the population gets those answers. That data is available—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

Mr. Ben Smith: —and honestly, they don't—

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

Mr. Ben Smith: —understand because they—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order!

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order!

Member, do not keep speaking when there is a point of order on the floor.

Okay.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again, if the Member would . . . it is interesting that the Member keeps finding the same people to talk to because there are lots of other persons that he can talk to.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: That ends the debate.
Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 19.
Member, you may speak.

Hon. Jache Adams: Good evening, Madam Deputy Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Hey, you are sick, brother.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: I am a bit disappointed this evening. I am bit disappointed this evening because the Throne Speech Debate and Budget Debate tend to be my favourite days in Parliament. I enjoy those days . . . or these days. And I am a bit disappointed, because I don't know if my voice is going to hold out

for the next 30 minutes. So, I may end up being briefer than I intended. But nevertheless, I shall plough forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are a few items that I noticed in the Throne Speech Reply that I took quite interest in and I welcome any Member from the OBA who plans to speak this evening to respond. You know, the first is, I noticed on page 29, it said, "Instead of new ministerial cars, [how about they] get more trash trucks."

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is incredibly important. So I hope that we will get a commendation from the One Bermuda Alliance when on Monday we will announce four new trash trucks will join the fleet. Okay? So—

An Hon. Member: Yay!

[Desk thumping and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you very much.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: So that is tick number one—tick number—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Not quite. Not quite. Not quite. Not quite. Not quite.

Madam Deputy Speaker, then there was a comment in relation to small businesses. And I believe the comment basically said that the One Bermuda Alliance would introduce targeted payroll tax relief for new start-up businesses. And I thought that was a great idea but then it dawned on me, cousin. I said, *Well, look. Let me go on the BEDC's website—*

An Hon. Member: And what did you find?

Hon. Jache Adams: And what I found . . . and if you would allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, it said, in quotes, "The Government of Bermuda has pledged to provide new tax relief for entrepreneurs [of] new startups to assist them in creating new jobs." You see, we are doing exactly what they said we should do.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes? Another . . . no?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: All right. No, we are doing it.

Then I saw a comment that spoke to *we would conduct a full audit and convert properties into affordable housing*. So again, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you would allow me I would go to the most recent Budget Statement—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes. The most recent Budget Statement where the Government or the Premier and Minister of Finance said, ". . . the Government will invest an additional \$10 million to the Bermuda Housing Corporation to accelerate the provision of affordable housing . . .". Again, we are doing exactly what they said we should do.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: So the audit exists.

An Hon. Member: Where does it exist?

Hon. Jache Adams: The audit exists and we have taken the liberty to ensure that appropriate financing is made to address some of the government properties into affordable housing.

He then said "[Emergency] road repaving initiatives." Well, I can say that we are currently in the road repaving efforts. And in fact, I think they said they would address some of the most critical roads first. And that is exactly what we are doing.

I welcome Members to travel up on the western end and they will see an entire repaving team that is repaving along Middle Road and they are working their way toward Southampton towards Evans Bay. And the reason they are doing that is because those roads were recently trenched. And then when they complete that, the areas or the path that they will take going forward are areas that were recently trenched as well.

So those are the areas that are critically in need of repaving and that is exactly what we are doing. Those are the steps that we are taking. So I would wonder why there is still no commendation coming from the OBA considering that is exactly what we are doing.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Well, well done. Thank you. See, we can work together.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this Honourable House to speak in support of our Throne Speech. A Throne Speech that in my opinion reflects a Government that is focused

on progress, focused on stability, focused on delivering on the needs of the very people we serve.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, before I do that, I must first speak to the spectacle I believe was the Opposition's Reply. You see, I call it a *spectacle* because in my opinion it has now been reduced to an annual performance. It is the same tired script. It is the same stale arguments. It is the same mundane narrative from a party that evidently still does not get it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I listened carefully. I tried to find the spark. I tried to find the new idea. But evidently it appears to me that the Opposition still does not get it. I mean, how many landslide defeats must they suffer?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Let's try this again. There have now been three consecutive landslide defeats.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: How many landslide defeats . . . Listen, if that—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Talk to the Chair.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Don't be distracted.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Members.

Hon. Jache Adams: Madam Deputy Speaker, what the people of this country deserve is not just opposition for the sake of opposition. Yes?

An Hon. Member: Very true.

Hon. Jache Adams: And if the Opposition wants, in my opinion, to be taken seriously they need to better understand the difference between criticism and contribution.

An Hon. Member: You show us how.

Hon. Jache Adams: Any day.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: The Honourable Member Pearman often refers to . . . I think it is his Equity Bill. Am I correct?

An Hon. Member: Equality Act.

Hon. Jache Adams: Equality Act. But until . . . that is the only time that I have ever heard of them introducing or speaking about an Opposition Bill. It is totally within their right to discuss and raise what sort of Opposition Bills they plan to bring forward. But we never hear about this.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Well, let's go. That is one in years.

An Hon. Member: So you are going to bring it back?

Hon. Jache Adams: If it is decent.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: If it makes sense. If it makes sense.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes. Listen.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: I remember.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, enough about them.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Because while they like to point fingers, this Government has been working. Working through a pandemic, global inflation, and the weight of the very mess the OBA left.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I need the public to fully understand. I need for the public to fully understand that the Government has never tried to convince you that everything is great. That has never been our position. You see, when the Premier and my other colleagues give you data, such as having the first fiscal surplus in over 20 years—

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jache Adams: Go ahead.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Minister is perhaps inadvertently misleading the House because if you read the Fiscal Responsibility Panel Report, for example, it will highlight the over \$100 million of deficit spending undertaken by this Government. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Minister, continue.

Hon. Jache Adams: Madam Deputy Speaker, our fiscal year ends on March 31, in a few days. We will then be subject to an annual audit as we always are. And I am fairly confident that that audit will announce that the consolidated fund for this current fiscal year will report a surplus. And it will report the first surplus in over 21 years.

Point-of-order that!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Say it again!

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Jache Adams: Point-of-order that!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Say it again!

Hon. Jache Adams: We have the lowest unemployment rate in over 40 years.

Hon. E. David Burt: Tell them! Tell them!

Hon. Jache Adams: There are more Bermudians working in international business than ever before.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Google is building their presence here in Bermuda. Cranes are in the City of Hamilton. Southampton Princess is on its way. Our tourism figures continue to improve.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we mention statistics such as these it is not as though we are trying to present a picture that everything is great. What we are saying is that progress is being made. That is what we are saying. I am proud to be a part of a team. Proud of what we have done and proud of where we are going.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me now speak to some of the initiatives directly under my Ministry in the most recent Throne Speech. Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will be the first to admit that when I was appointed this Ministry I spoke to the Deputy Governor and he asked me, *How does it feel?* And I said, *To be honest, it feels like being at the bottom of a mountain looking up.* It has been less than a month and I can tell you it is certainly a tall task—without question. But with the same level of conviction, I am confident that I am capable of doing the job.

An Hon. Member: You are.

Hon. Jache Adams: And I am happy and proud and appreciative of the Premier's confidence in me to do it.

Hon. E. David Burt: I support you.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you. I appreciate that.

But, you know, in order for me to proceed forward I must first recognise and appreciate my predecessors because—

[Crosstalk]

An Hon. Member: COVID-19.

Hon. Jache Adams: I have COVID-19, yes.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: Sit down. Everybody take it easy.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: Let me acknowledge my predecessors. My predecessors recognise that the Ministry has slightly shifted. It is Public Works and Environment. So, much of my Ministry is what the former Lieutenant Colonel Burch, had but also Walter Roban. And those are two significant people in my life, both personally and professionally. They are people who I hold in high regard. And to take on the mantle, to stand on their shoulders, to proceed forward and continue along the path that they blazed—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: I am appreciative of it, yes. Yes. Yes.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Throne Speech outlines some amendments to the Private Roads Acts. At first glance, to some it may seem like a small matter. But if you live on a private road, you know just how frustrating and bureaucratic it can be to get a basic safety measure completed and implemented. Whether it is a mirror on a blind corner or a speed bump to slow reckless drivers, or better lighting for our seniors and children. The red tape often means residents are left waiting—waiting while lives are still put at risk. And it is this Government that has said *Enough is enough and we will act.*

These amendments will empower the Minister, grant the Minister additional responsibility and authority to intervene where necessary, where common sense should tell us that safety should never be held

hostage by outdated legislation or procedural hurdles. Because at the end of the day, Madam Deputy Speaker, what is good for the role of Government if not to protect its people? On every road, on every neighbourhood, in every parish in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another area that falls under my responsibility is one that is more complex, challenging and, yes, controversial. And that is the issue involving the marine spatial protection. Let me be very clear. The Government is committed to protecting Bermuda's environment and protecting and preserving our oceans—full stop. But we are equally committed to doing what is fair. We are equally creating a space where we can be better informed, that brings all of the stakeholders to the table. Especially those who rely on those waters for their living.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the debate around the entire Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme [BOPP] initiative exposed some real frustrations within our local fishing industry. Their message was simple and powerful. *Do a better job enforcing the current laws before you start to layer on more regulations.* And I completely agree.

It is why we have put it in our platform. It is why we have put it in our Throne Statement. We will pause the initiative until we reach an agreement with the fishermen on better and effective ways of enforcement and data collection. That is our commitment. We have heard the fishermen and we have responded. Madam Deputy Speaker, we will get this right. Not by rushing, not by ignoring anyone but by working together for Bermudians as Bermudians.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to address an issue that the Opposition often raise in relation to corporate income tax. And the reason why I mention that is because in our Throne Speech we mentioned that we will use the funds from the corporate income tax, new funds from the corporate income tax, part of the funds, to invest in infrastructure. And part of the criticism . . . I think this needs to be said. Part of the criticism is that perhaps there is too much reliance on this corporate income tax.

An Hon. Member: True.

Hon. Jache Adams: There is too much reliance on this corporate income tax.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, here is the key point to the entire argument. We will soon have it confirmed that the Government has positioned ourselves, as I said earlier, to have its first fiscal surplus in over 21 years. And the reason why I emphasise that is because even if we did not get a dime of corporate income tax, we are still operating now at a surplus.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I still believe that the Minister is perhaps confused and unintentionally misleading the House because my understanding is that the net debt has actually increased in the prior year.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: So, let's be clear. Those are separate items. Those are separate items. What I am referring to is revenue versus expenditure. And I am simply saying this year it will be confirmed that we will be receiving a fiscal surplus, a *fiscal surplus*, for the first time in over 21 years. That is a fact.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jache Adams: Now, when I say this—

You are correct. It is not a fact yet. It will be, in my opinion. How about that? In my opinion, it will be.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes?

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: And the reason why that is so important is because it speaks to the very foundation that we have built.

So, when we speak about potential use of corporate income tax revenues, particularly to invest in critical infrastructure, we are not being reckless. We are not being naïve. We are being responsible. We are being transparent, open to the people about what we project, what we plan and why it matters.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what Government in their right mind would ignore the potential of new revenue streams? What responsible leader would fail to tell the public how those funds might be used for the betterment of the country. Again, I repeat, even if we did not receive a dime from corporate income tax . . . How about this? Even if we did not receive a dime of corporate income tax, I believe it is without question that our fiscal position is improving.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Jache Adams: Okay.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: So let me be specific. We will be investing those funds in infrastructure, as we said, because that is where every Bermudian will feel the

impact. Improved roads and bridges. Modernised and repurposed buildings, upgraded waste management facilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when we invest in infrastructure, we are investing in the backbone of our society. We are investing in the dignity and the pride and the quality of life of our people. And that is what this Government is focused on—results that the people can see. The results that they can feel. The results that they can benefit from every single day. I could almost feel me cracking up now, so I am going to close with this.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Fair enough. Fair enough. This won't be every time. I assure you of that.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: This won't be every time.

So, as I close, I want to speak directly to the people of Bermuda—to the mothers, to the fathers, the workers, the seniors, the young people, wondering what the future holds.

I want them to know that they have a Government that sees them, hears them, that will continue to fight for them. Not just during debate season. Not just during election time. But every single day. We are balancing the books. We are building homes. We are supporting our seniors. We are creating jobs and opportunities for Bermudians in industries where for far too long were not looked out for.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, to our supporters, to those who put their trust in us, because, again, I take the point that at this present time these are words. The people of this country are counting on us actually for the execution. I encourage those individuals to be proud, because what we are doing is not easy, but it is necessary. What we are building is not just today, but for generations to come.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 12, I believe it is.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and good afternoon colleagues and to Bermuda.

I must say, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a bit unusual today, this debate.

The Deputy Speaker: [INAUDIBLE]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: What?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Absolutely.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Typically, I enjoy lively a debate. And the tone was set from the Reply, which I will say after 13 years . . . or maybe 14 (I will have to do the count), but this was probably the most tame and less confrontational Reply that has been present-ed.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: I agree.

Another Hon. Member: Yes.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So full of solutions and the like . . . we might want to tame down some of the noise.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, I want to say—

An Hon. Member: Honourable Opposition Leader.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I will take that half a minute back.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: It has left me a bit bewil-dered because I am like . . . I am used to a little bit of brimstone and fire. And the honourable colleague knows that I am very passionate about where we are going as a country and this opportunity to lay out the year is important. So I agree with the Honourable Shadow Minister of Public Works . . . I am sorry, Min-ister. I am still trying to get you voted out, man. Geez.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank goodness for that Independent, he must be saying.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Minister, I have grown to actually be affectionate towards his plight for his politics and his career and so I must say that I enjoy listening to him. Unfortunately, he is not feeling too sharp today. But no excuses in this arena.

So, you know, I am sitting here and I am thinking to myself, *Well, no one really is saying anything of any consequence to this debate.* We have already had a Throne Speech in November and now we have got a partial Throne Speech to the Throne Speech from November.

And I will say this for the Minister, there was not much there about Public Works other than this private roads thing and Mary Victoria Road and we are going to do some work over there. What I will say to that is that in 2015 I had just become the Minister of Public Works and it was a whole lot of noise being made about the fact that it was yellow water. And the yellow water is still there.

So, I heard earlier in some comments, you know, how we are just always . . . going at the first speaker, the Honourable Member . . . who was it?

An Hon. Member: Hayward.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Hayward, yes. The Honourable Member Jason Hayward spoke about, you know, we are just always . . . Opposition, Opposition, Opposition. Just going at it. And quite frankly, we have been kind of tame on this side, to a whole lot, Madam Deputy Speaker.

But now that we got 11 in here, I think we can live up things a little bit.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: We can live things up. *We can live things up!* And they are going to see, as we go through this process, starting today.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Now, when we look at . . . when we look at talking about solutions and . . . you know. Where are the solutions? Well, you have been in this House for quite some time, Madam Deputy Speaker. There have been a lot of solutions thrown out there. And I am just going to say that the Honourable Minister from Public Works was talking about what . . . what, you know, where are the solutions, basically.

Well, let me just talk about the paved roads. And I will put the Minister on notice, if the Minister and budget process do not come with a substantial financial contribution to getting the roads done, there is going to be noise. Now, the solution to this is this: If we take the process that the former Minister talked about, and the cost of doing a mile of paving roads, we are going to be the next 10 years getting things fixed. So what I am suggesting to the Honourable Minister, is that yes, the Public Works guys are out there. We see them paving the roads. But if we want to speed things up, because we are seeing the results of bad roads on the tyres, and accidents, and the like

. . . and some people will take it even further. We need to speed up the process.

Take some of those capital projects, move them aside, put some more money into the roads, and get these other contractors . . . I don't know about in construction, those paving roads, but some of these other contractors out there and put the money to getting the roads done because it is—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member probably is misleading the House. Because maybe, just maybe, he is not aware of what is going on.

But he just suggested that other contractors should help the Government with the paving. In case the Honourable Member, who is Shadow Minister, should know, they are actually doing that. The East End [Asphalt] at one end of the Island, and Public Works are at the other. There are only two companies on the Island and they are both paving roads.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, I would beg to differ that there are only two. We know of some smaller, private companies as well who have been bidding.
[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Who have been bidding with Public Works—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: There are a lot of roads. Small roads as well. There are other roads that can be done and so what I am suggesting is we put more money into this to beef up the process so that we can get these roads done.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: This is one of the number one things, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I heard on the doorstep—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —as we were out during this election. And the Premier can chirp all he wants. One of the major issues . . . and if he wants to continue to interpolate let me just say this here. People are

dying on our streets. And people are pointing to the Government because of this.

So if we want to interpolate, let's talk about what the people are saying. We need the roads fixed. And we cannot wait 10-plus years to get them fixed. So whatever we need to do, let's move into the process of speeding it up. I have not heard a statement from the Honourable Minister, Jache Adams, for the roads. I have not heard a statement being put out that we have got other people doing the roads. Okay? I am not up in—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order. Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member is certainly misleading the House and this time I have to think it is intentional. Because Colonel Burch—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —in the last session in this House gave a very full detailed explanation as to what was going on and what was planned.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, and unfortunately the gentleman who just stood up is misguiding everyone because there was no mention that other companies were doing the roads in that statement. So if he wants—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order! Point of order!

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —to produce it, produce it!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: That is not true.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That is absolutely not true.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of—

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Minister . . . you can check Hansard. The Minister very clearly and articulated, stated that East End Asphalt Company were

doing one end of the Island and Government were up at the other end of the Island.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Member, continue.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you. We hear a lot . . . yes, yes. But no one seems to be able to produce it. So I will be waiting to see if they can produce that statement.

I do not recall hearing that from the Honourable former Minister. But what I do know is that, again, we are avoiding the real issue here. And that is the roads are deplorable. And there needs to be a major contribution made to those areas. We can back off of some other areas if the roads are a problem.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: If they are a problem. The flooding is a major problem.

Now, I want to say to the Honourable Minister, he has just come into the Ministry, I got to give him kudos because he set up a system that we were talking about within our caucus about how they should proceed. So, I have not received an email privately yet, or directly from him, but I do know that an email was sent out talking about a process.

But what I do understand is when we are putting out third parties to fix some of these issues, we are at the behest of those third parties. And a schedule of what is a priority. And I have already found that out as we have been going through the last couple of months trying to understand how we get some of these things fixed.

I have confidence that the Honourable Minister is going to address these things, but I am just reassuring and letting him know that if we do not put some financial support behind this, major support, we are going to have more problems.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. And so if they want to interpolate about being pretty smart, look at the situation that we are in. We are in a crisis. *We are in a crisis!*

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh-oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Deputy Speaker, if you would allow me I would like to read from Colonel

Burch's [\[press conference\]](#) statement [10 February 2025].

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh-oh!

Hon. E. David Burt: In which he says, "To assist the Ministry in accelerating paving efforts, East End Asphalt Ltd. has been retained to pave the following areas in February and March 2025: A portion of Loyal Hill in Devonshire—"

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am just saying. So, the fact is I hope the Honourable Member will withdraw his statement as that is what the Government . . . which is the theme of the Throne Speech Reply, everything that the Government is already doing.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you.

I will move on with my time because I know they like to take up my time.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No apologies.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, we are . . . there are no apologies. I said, *Show it to me*. You showed it to me.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: That's wrong!

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: There is a crisis in Bermuda right now.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And because of the crisis, the Government should be apologising for allowing the streets to get into the mess that they are in now. That is where the apology should be. If we got people on the roads who are having accidents and, dare I say, fatal almost—

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: You shouldn't say that.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, then you should . . . You know what? Okay. We are having a problem in this Island with our roads. Our taxi drivers—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I think the Honourable Member should really consider withdrawing that. To say that the roads are possibly killing people in this country when people have road accidents and we know this, I think that should be withdrawn. That is out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Out of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Come on now.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Come on now.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The people of Bermuda . . . this is what they are saying. So whether the Honourable Minister wants to acknowledge it or not, it doesn't matter to me.

He is not acknowledging it? Okay, fine. I know what they are saying.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I know what they are saying. There are some serious issues that we are having. And not just one or two.

So, let me talk about this here. We are in a crisis. We have got two crises going on here because I only got . . . what was that? Oh, I got almost 20 minutes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Crisis. We have a crisis going on right now. We have an economic crisis, [Madam] Deputy Speaker, and we have a social crisis right now.

The economic crisis has been said over and over and over. People cannot afford Bermuda right now. The middle class is being obliterated. The sandwich people in Bermuda, as the Premier notes in this Throne Speech that he has given, the sandwich people are becoming less and less and less . . . it is becoming more and more and more difficult because the stress of the cost of living in Bermuda is making it almost impossible.

There are, when governments put rules in place, and legislation in place, unintended conse-

quences to some of these decisions. And let me just give you one of those unintended consequences. We had a plight with bananas, and I talked to the farmers not too long ago about how we can resolve this—and that is going to be for another day. But the fact that we had this crisis and we did without bananas for a long time, which is probably one the number one fruits that Bermudians eat because we like to get our potassium in.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: After resolving it, [Madam] Deputy Speaker, the cost of bananas is three times the price. Three times the price for a banana! And talking about economic crisis, when I look into the Throne Speech and it goes on and on and on about regulation. More regulation. I mean, we have heard in this House how we recognise that the banks are regulating just a simple man for \$50 that gets transferred into his account. Government, in my opinion, it feels like they are becoming more of a regulator than the banks! When you go and talk to small businesses who are primarily . . . and let us just say the Black businesses, small businesses in Bermuda. And maybe some of the Portuguese businesses in Bermuda. Right? Small businesses in Bermuda. If you sit down and you talk to them . . . this regulation and overregulating of us, this is a problem for us.

You know. We are in a position here where we are going to go after and say . . . I am just going to use this as an example. I am going to go to the supermarkets—which supermarkets in and of themselves are trying to survive. You see supermarkets now being sold off like candy right now because they cannot make it. And they have lost so much money since the recession of Bermuda in 2009 forward, they are still trying to get back on ground and these supermarket [owners] are like, *I am tired of this. My kids don't want to do it anymore. So if somebody wants to come and buy it, buy it. Because there are too many problems.*

But yet we have a Government here saying, *Well, we are going to go and take your books and we are going to look at all of your underwear within these books.* When you are a small to medium-sized businessperson, you do some incredible things for your employees. Incredible things. And in the construction industry as well, as the Honourable Member would note, some guys are hired just to walk around with \$2,000 or \$3,000 just to lend it out to their employees on any particular day. Just to help them get by. Right?

Now, the Government is not going to understand all of those things, but if they are not spending enough time with the industry, explaining and listening to the industry and about what is going on. I will tell you what, I used to buy bikes for my employees because they could not make it to work on time. Right?

Now, does the Government need to know I bought a bike for a cashier? They do not need to know all of that. But yet we want to go in with an X-ray and say okay. Anybody who knows the supermarket industry—because we are using that as an example—[knows it] is now working on some pretty tight margins. And no matter how much we reduce duty on food products, including essentials, the price is still going to go up. It is still going to go up and people are trying to catch up, but they cannot even catch up even with a rate of inflation increase because they are behind.

We are going to be another 10 years before some people can afford it. And unfortunately for seniors, that is too late. It is way too late. And then you add the added complexity . . . finally somebody comes up with somewhat of a figure, but Chamber of Commerce says, *Well, you know what? We are probably about 56,000 people.* Well that is probably why unemployment is low! We have way less people than we anticipated here. And the small business and the medium sized business . . . you know what they need? Customers! They need customers. And the one elephant in the room that we are not addressing . . . we may be given, and the Government has done a good job at aiding and giving the cutbacks and the like, but the one thing that they have not moved forward with is getting (with some urgency) the population up.

Half of the babies that are being born in Bermuda are being born to ex-pats. Yes! We cannot survive. We have a negative birth rate. So something has to happen. All around the world they are trying to do something about it. So we can on one side say, *Yes, we need to give more money to our seniors. We need to give more money and duty relief on these different things.* But people cannot catch up. So people are still complaining. Yes, you might have won a third term, but people are still complaining. They need help. So the missing link is what? We need more people.

Now, I am not going to spend any more time there. I have talked about regulation up the yin-yang. They need to take that page, that number one and two of that page when it comes to regulating and tear it up and burn it. Because if you go to a private sector business and you talk about you want to see this and you want to see that. Guess what? They are going to get litigated to the *n*th degree. Because it ain't going to happen. So stop talking about regulating something and sit down with the industry like the fishermen (as the Honourable Member said) and listen to them.

But we have been flip-flopping back and forth. My goodness, a farmer was up here with a tractor. They are not listening to us! Sit down and have a real conversation about what some of their solutions are and we can get it done amicably.

But when one of the most docile groups in Bermuda, right after the election—nurses—gets up screaming and protesting . . . we still have a serious problem here. We still have a serious problem here.

So I am going to move over to this other situation that is perplexing me to the *n*th degree.

The Honourable Minister Weeks is not here, but I wanted to . . . I received a video of a fight. So I immediately, as he suggested, I called a detective. I don't want to say the name, but that is the person I call when I see these things. I send these videos to them. I want to, if you will, let me just read you something when we start talking about where are as an Island and if you permit, [Madam] Deputy Speaker, when it comes to our youth and this proliferation of fighting in the schools.

"For some, moral bankruptcy is where we stand right now, when our youngest of people are participating in such organised events. Entitlement is the rule of the day. It is always someone else's fault. Accountability no longer is needed, while situational ethics rules. Power and possessions are honoured, while standards are lost. All this while the streets are bleeding out. Looking for justice in a forest of he-said and she-said, keenly aware that the truth is lost out to a good story. We live in a time where taking a video has precedence over human interaction and intervention. We have become a voyeuristic society (talking about Bermuda) where we take pride and joy in the pain of other people."

And I can speak to that first-hand. Twenty-four-hour gas station—people will come and sit and video waiting for a fight to break out. And I am not just talking about young people. I am talking about adults. And then when you look at these videos and you see in these videos *adults*, possibly even parents, encouraging these fights to go on.

Let me break down this video for you, looking at the one that was sent to me. Our schools have become an arena for gladiator sports. They have got lookouts at the door, [Madam] Deputy Speaker. You have got people who are not afraid of being videoed, knowing that it will go out to the public. Knowing that the police will see it. Knowing that their teachers and principals will see this. And wilfully engaging in gladiator warfare.

Now the video that I saw, they instigated it to the *n*th degree. Everyone standing around. So much so that one of the boys, after he fought for a while, he was so exhausted he said, *I am done. That is it. I am done. I am done. I am done.* He said he was done! *I accept defeat. I am done.* Guess what happened? The third party instigators encouraged the fight to continue. And so the boy in defence because of swinging at him had to defend himself. What did the third party—who was not in the initial fight—do? So, I could say, well, you know, I have been in some fights in my day. Right? But I got a good whooping by the time I got home and then my mother—and she only had to do it one time—my mother took me back to the school. And what was surprising was I was young. My daddy was there. And guess what? They told the principal to whoop me. Cane me!

So what is happening? And this is not a one-time thing. This is a repeated thing over and over and over. Teachers are tired. Students, they have got to be exhausted. Something is going on for it to be that prolific that they are not afraid to engage in this activity. It does not matter who is watching. And before long, something even worse is going to happen in our schools because these kids at this point don't care.

My question is, what are we going to do about it? What are we going to do about it? Government, what are you going to do about it? I stand here ready. Hey, let's go. A heavy hand has to be dealt here. And that third party boy, when that poor young man was on his knees and on his side, was repeatedly kicked by somebody who was not a part of the fight. You want to know what needs to happen? He needs to get . . . and I want the parents to hear this and I want the school to hear this. I want the Minister to hear this. I want the police to hear this! He should get the worst punishment out of all of them! Because he kept the fight going on after the young man said, *That's it, enough.*

And then a second one, [Madam] Deputy Speaker, the poor boy was not even fighting back. He just . . . was just covering himself. And they pounded him. All on video! And those [by-standers] who were watching, who did not participate in it but they were there . . . they need to be dealt with! And I am going to wait to see what the police do. I want to see what the teachers are going to do. I want to see what Minister Weeks (after giving his Statement today) . . . what is he going to do? This is killing off of small Bermuda . . . a society that cannot afford to lose its young people.

And let us add to that. Let us add to this here. This is Black-on-Black crime. Where has the pride gone in being Black? Entrepreneurship was our foothold. How many Black small businesses do you know now? Parents are stressed out. Everyone is stressed out. So obviously if we are in this position, [Madam] Deputy Speaker, the frustration is to a height. It is to a height. And so we can say we are doing this, and we are doing that and we are doing this in the House of Assembly for this person and that person. Clearly, it is not enough! And that is why I say if we need more customers, let us get the customers.

Who, as an investor in their right mind, is going to want to come to Bermuda knowing that the private schools . . . and they are starting to have problems too. Who is going to want to come to Bermuda, invest in a Bermudian so that they can start a small business knowing that when their kids go to school . . . fights are going to break out. Who? Why invest in Bermuda? It makes no sense to me. You can say come on all you want. That is the problem. We are denying what is in our face. We are denying it!

I may be a little passionate about it. But I tell you what. There was a time when my son stepped into a situation with two adults. Okay? Yes. And he was trying to break up a little scuffle that might have

broken out. And all I had to say to him was, *Trae*. Just one word: his name. And he recognised that voice. He knew not to go any further. Where has the respect for one another gone?

And the Honourable Minister is saying to me, *Come on, Craig*. He is in town just as much as I am walking the streets. You want to know what I have noticed in town with the school kids?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I did not say you were with me.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, but you are bigger than me. So, let me tell you something else. You need to walk some more.

So, you know, you want to interpolate. The kids now? When I used to come to town . . . I am from St. David's, right. I very rarely had the opportunity to come to town, right, because back then St. George's had everything that town had. But when I did, I would just go with my buddy. We would go . . . check it out now. The kids out of protection . . . they are all in groups. You don't see . . . you see very few kids isolated, just one or two, walking through town. They are in groups after school. That is following after nature. If you want protection: group. And so they are moving as groups.

We have a serious problem on our hands. And after we had debated and looked at the National Security . . . Violence Reduction . . . I said it then. It is too soft of an approach. When a 14- or a 15-year-old looks you in the eye and does not care if you are videoing or not, puts his middle finger up to you, curses at you . . . he does not care! So what are we going to do about it?

Nobody is answering what we are going to do about it. But yet when a video comes, we want to have a Statement and all of this stuff. But at the end of the day, what are we doing? And this is not like it is close to home, you know. I have got some serious little young bad boys in my family. I am worried about them! I left this House of Assembly for a six-year-old, bad boy, to make sure that when he hears my name, he stops. Respect! We have lost complete respect for one another.

Some people would say it starts at the top. Right? And they are only emulating what they see. Well, it is more complicated than that. I would say that there are serious stresses going on. And even in the education system . . . when I say we need to be listening more, it has been a flip-flop, flip-flop . . . *Okay, we are going to do this. We are going to . . . no, no. Okay, we are going to this now. Well, hold on. We have got to hold up because we have to wait for this.*

Okay. Things happen. But this is going on for too long. Too long. And people are stressed out. And

when kids decide that their school becomes an arena for gladiator sports like that . . . this is not a one-time thing. This was so well organised. And then we heard today how a principal had to break up a fight with a young man with a knife! And so people get upset when I get up here and talk about this stuff but guess what. We are not doing . . . I will not say anything. We are not doing enough. We are not doing enough to deal with this situation here.

And so one of these young men, I was told, had some drugs on him and the like. We have got to deal with this stuff from a young, young age. Now, we have just moved here from 8 to 14. I am not sure how . . . in the Throne Speech here it talks about using this accountability age and we have moved it to 14. I do not know if it is 12 years old in the UK, maybe somebody can correct me or not. So all I am saying is that if we are going to start . . . we need to start talking about it with some sincerity. And I am not blaming anyone in this room, all 36 of us, for anything in particular. But something has got to happen. Something has got to happen.

So we can get up here and say a whole bunch of things about *well this and that*, and *oh, come on Cannonier* and the like. But guess what? If it was your child who was getting beat up by third parties you would be screaming and shouting.

So what investor wants to come here? We need more revenue in this Island and that is what I am getting to: get more people here. Bermudians and expats. Because they represent a dollar value. If we had lost 5,000 (let us just use that as an example), multiply that 5,000 by \$4,000 a month. That is the amount of money we are losing on a monthly basis in this Island. It is extraordinary! So whatever way we find to do it, let us do it. Let us get it done. There is cooperation here to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

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

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member. Minister—

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

The Speaker: Minister Rabain, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Honourable Members, for this debate that we have had today, this conversation that we have had today. Interesting reading through this particular document.

Mr. Speaker, when I read through this, you know, I look at it . . . it feels more like a post-election manifesto than a Throne Speech [Reply] or a response to the Government's legislative agenda for the

year. So I was curious to read through it. And I was just thinking to myself, if I was a One Bermuda Alliance supporter I would feel a bit bamboozled and wonder *Where was this before the election?*

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: You know because now that we are here post-election, what do we get now? We get a sweeping manifesto with rhetoric and seemingly no memory of what has actually happened to this country over the last decade.

But let me remind Members opposite—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Let me remind Members opposite, they have lost three consecutive elections. They now sit with 11 members in this House.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And so we are here today to talk about what we are doing. We are here to talk about what the Opposition says we are not doing. And we are here to determine where we are moving forward.

Now, obviously one of the things that I have been asked to speak to or respond to is . . . and they took quite a few pages to talk about education. I have been asked to respond to education. But I do want to start by saying that I am passionate about education. Not because that I am the Minister. And unlike the Shadow Minister of Education who did say he is not fortunate to have children in the system, I do have a child in the system. So I speak from the point of a parent in the system. Something that very few Members in this House can say hand over heart. So I do speak from the point of a parent. And that is why I do get passionate about it because I am there.

And as I spoke to earlier, and the point that I was trying to make . . . leadership is about meeting with everyone. Not just the people who feed into the complaint you want to make. You meet with everyone because you want to get everybody's perspective. You do not just want to get one perspective and then you keep hammering that home.

We keep hearing, *Take politics out of education*. I plead with the One Bermuda Alliance to take politics out of education because every time they speak about education it is from a political standpoint. Take the politics out of education and watch us get better and watch us move forward.

We read on page 12 of this manifesto, it says "Unclear Reform Strategy." Now, the Opposition often accuses the Government of not having a clear education reform strategy and introducing consistent change without consultation. That is what they talk about. And saying that it is creating confusion within what it is that

we are doing. Not only is this misleading, it is demonstrating a lack of understanding of what is actually going on and it is just simply false.

Our education reform strategy is built on four pillars, Mr. Speaker. It is a powerful case for change. And actually when I read through this, this document and some of the suggestions that they had that are actually already taking place . . . I thought for a moment that maybe they had actually read the case for change which governs what it is that is happening within education reform. There is a shared and clear vision for where we want to go.

The part about education reform is capacity building with the teachers. We have to build capacity. And I am going to stand here, hand over heart . . . we have not done a good job of educating our children for at least 25 years. That does not get turned around overnight because people are entrenched in the way that they want to do things. So we have to start small. Instead of what happened previously, we made a conscious decision to say we are not going to repeat what happened when we went from the two-tier to the three-tier system. And why do we say that? Because we consulted. And one of the main themes that came back from every parent was, *I went through that system. I do not want my child to go through that*. So this is why we are doing this in phases.

So if you spend time talking to the people who have not participated, they are not going to be able to tell you some of the things that are going right. They are going to tell you the things that they do not like because they see it coming down the pipeline. They see it coming down the pipeline.

I would love to have Members opposite come to one of our induction sessions where teachers come in and they find out this is the work that they are going to be doing for the next 12 months, and they would be surprised. The last one that I attended was about two weeks before the election up at CedarBridge. I was shocked to see teachers from St. George's Prep and from East End Primary and from Somerset Primary and from West End Primary saying, *We did not realise this is what this is about. We see the vision now. We see where we are going to go. And we see how this works*.

You have got to come and actually witness that so you can have an appreciation for that. Not everybody is going to be on board when we first start. But we work with everybody and the idea is to get them all to understand this is where we want to go.

Now, Mr. Speaker, page 14 speaks about enhancing technical and vocational education. I am happy that they finally agree with something that we are doing. This is the purpose of entering the signature programmes. And I will explain it as it has always been explained, Mr. Speaker, when you go to high school now there are what we call the core curriculum that everyone does and then you have the encore curriculum. You are required to get credits from those two

sides that you need to do. You have to do the core. The encore is . . . when we were in college, we would call those the optional classes that you take—

An Hon. Member: Electives.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Electives. What we have decided, and what we have gone and said is those are not going to be just random electives. They are now going to be structured around a signature so if you are interested in learning about accounting, you are now going to have a focused encore curriculum that says this is what accounting is about. It does not mean you are going to be an accountant by no means. And this is one of the misnomers that we have about our signature schools. No, you are not going to go there and leave as an accountant. But you are going to have an exposure to that. And you will have the choice to say, *You know something? I don't like this now. Let me try something else.*

We want our children to be exposed to what Bermuda needs in order to survive in terms of employment. So when they leave school, they are not just leaving with a diploma and then saying let me figure out what I want to do with my life now. They are leaving school and saying, *You know something, I have had exposure to accounting. I have had exposure to health services. I have had exposure to trades. I don't think I like that. But I do know what it is about now.*

One of the greatest things that we see is when we hear children go into all these immersion sessions and they are walking away saying, *You know something, I would have never thought I would go into tourism because all I thought was that it was about being a waiter or bartender.* But when they sit and listen to the partners we have within tourism and come and say, *You know, you can be an accountant in tourism. You can be a graphic artist in tourism. You can be a manager in tourism. You can be a sales rep in tourism,* and they say, *Wow. I did not realise that.* That is the point of what it is that we are trying to do and what it is that we are accomplishing to do.

So I ask Members opposite, and you hear me say this time and time again and we heard the Member opposite, the Shadow Minister, say that it is not about WhatsApp. It isn't about WhatsApp. The WhatsApp is probably the only thing that I send to you that you read.

An Hon. Member: No!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: That is why we do it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: But what we are trying to do is say come and sit and look at what our children are doing. Our children want to see you, adults. They do not want to hear you talking bad about them because you have not even met with them. Come and talk to them! Come up to CedarBridge—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —and see that young man, during the signature programme expose, that cut my hair. Come up there and see the young man that built a car.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Come up there and see what our children are doing. Eat the food from the culinary programme that they produce for meetings that the school has for people. Come up there and look at our virtual reality programme that is going on up there that children are just absolutely blown away from the fact that they can sit in class and be in another classroom across the world while they are doing these virtual reality programmes. These are the things I invite anybody to come because the school will show you.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I am going to get to the collaboration part.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Come up there. Come and see the new makers space where children can go and just create whatever it is that they want, whatever it is that comes to their fantasy.

So when we say we need vocational learning, and in the same breath we say the reforms are unclear that is either wilful ignorance or calculated messaging. Either way it is wrong, and it does a disservice to our children, Mr. Speaker.

On page 30, they talk about collaborative leadership.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: They talk about collaborative leadership. And they also say if education reform is contentious, we would be willing to go back to the table.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been inviting them to the table for five years.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Uh-oh! Uh-oh!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The chairs are there. The educators are there. The reform specialists are there. Even the coffee is there. The invitation remains open. All they have to do is show up and we will sit down and tell them. But where have they been? They are busy doing press conferences, arguing about, *Why is the Minister traveling around the world to talk about education reform when he is needed here?*

And I am going to get to that because something really struck me strange when I read through this. And, you know, there was something in here that I will get to that just really baffles me when I read it, Mr. Speaker. But here we are, five years on and they want maturity now. They want collaboration. But I am not going to turn them around and I know the Minister that sits in another place is not going to turn them down if they actually do want to collaborate. Because education (as they continue to say) needs the politics taken out of it and it is too important for us not to collaborate and move forward together, Mr. Speaker.

Now they talk about, on page 15, modernising our school and infrastructure. And let me address the condescending tone that I heard when I read that, Mr. Speaker. We had made it clear: new spaces, brand new furniture and the like is nice. But it is not the contributing factor to the success of our children. The contributing factor to the success of our children is the person in front of the classroom and the parental support they get from home. Those are the two factors that create the outcomes that we are desiring. We are working very hard to change the narrative inside of the classroom. Take a visit to any of our parish primary schools and have a conversation—and we will arrange a tour—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: We will arrange a tour for anyone that wants to see what is going on up there. Go and talk to those little kids who are speaking fluent Spanish by the time they finish Primary 1, Mr. Speaker. Programmes that are now within our school system that we could not even have thought about five years ago, Mr. Speaker. Buildings do not teach children, teachers do. And that is what we need to keep focussing on.

We will renovate these buildings, of course, because the buildings then need to be stepped up to match what it is that we want to do inside the school. The most important part—and this is where a lot of people get caught up in—the most important part of our reform was to change the narrative of what is happening inside the school. The buildings will take care of themselves. But we have to change the narrative of what is happening inside the school first before we start building the buildings.

So we have done that before. We built beautiful buildings. Absolutely stunning buildings. Spent hundreds of millions of dollars on buildings and some

of the resources within those buildings were never used because we didn't have anybody to actually use them. We have to figure out what we are doing inside the classroom first and build the buildings to actually match that. I believe when I first came out with this one of the things people asked was, *How much is it going to cost to renovate the buildings?* And we said we do not know. And they said, *How come you don't know?* It is because we want to make sure that what we are doing in the building is sustainable first.

I love the fact that we talked about special education. And thank you, Deputy Leader. If you will recognise, it is in our Throne Speech. It is in our manifesto. It is in our election manifesto. It is something that is a priority for us. And it has always been a priority for us. We are reviewing the services. We are creating individualised support. We are investing in teacher training. We will build a signature school specifically for students with exceptionalities.

It has always been there. Again, if collaboration is what you want, we are waiting here with open arms. Let us talk. And if you go back to our Throne Speech and our election platform, we will be introducing or strengthening the legislative things around children with special education which is something that their parents have been asking for. Again, listening to the parents. Listening to what it is that they want to have and responding to what it is that they want to have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is where I talk about the favourite topic of my Members opposite: the Education Authority.

An Hon. Member: Ahh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, and you know, and they keep talking about this, Mr. Speaker. The one thing that really bothers me . . . the one thing that really bothers me—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: What really bothers me, Mr. Speaker, is . . . I really want education to work and I really want to work with Members opposite. But we cannot work if they are consistent with rhetoric that is based on nothing factual.

Hon. E. David Burt: Nothing at all.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And hear we . . . so, Mr. Speaker, it says here on page 13, "Countries with independent education bodies, such as Finland and Singapore, consistently outperform others in global education rankings."

Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Uh-oh! Here it comes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain:—neither of these countries have an independent authority.

Several Hon. Members: Ohh!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Uh-oh.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, in Finland—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I looked that up.

The Speaker: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Finland absolutely does. I don't have the whole legislative framework for Finland. But that is definitely an independent agency. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Okay, Mr. Speaker, the education policy and oversight is managed by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. The Finnish National Agency for Education implements the policy, but it remains under government oversight.

While the schools under municipalities have more autonomy (something that we will be introducing) the system is still centralised, and in terms of national policy direction, they are guided by the Ministry of Education—not the National Agency.

Singapore. Singapore, Mr. Speaker. Singapore's education is one of the most centralised systems in the world. They do not do a thing without the Ministry of Education telling them what they can and cannot do, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry oversees curriculum, teacher training, school operations and funding. Their government agency is linked to education, but everything comes through the Ministry of Education. And guess what? Guess how we know this? Because I have been to Singapore.

Some Hon. Members: Oh! Oh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I have stood in front of the panel there because guess what. They wanted to ask, *How did you convince your Government to go with an Education Authority?*

Our team has been to Finland.

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

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Because that is where the most . . . that is where the most learned educators in the world gathered to talk about things that, the types

of things of what we are doing within our school system.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the things. So when I see this—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: When I see this . . . and so, I wonder . . . they keep saying it because it is like a buzzword. It is a buzzword that is red meat for their fans, Mr. Speaker. But I am going to say something, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I am going to say this because obviously the Members opposite do not know what they are referencing. And this is something I would not normally do in this state, but I am tired of it and I think I am going to try and put it to rest right now, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: Go on.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I am talking about the work that our Education Authority working group has done. And let me give to them what the policy document is moving forward. I am only going to quote a few things from there, Mr. Speaker, and with your indulgence I will quote.

“Following a search and selection process, the Minister shall appoint a person with appropriate qualifications, experience in governance, leadership, transformation and operational management to be the chairperson of the Education Authority and the leader of the Education Authority senior leadership team. This chairperson cannot concurrently be a member of the Legislature. This person cannot be someone who is already employed by a school or a board member. The board will have nine voting members. The Executive Chair will cast the vote in case of a tie. The board will consist of the Executive Chair, the permanent secretary representing the Ministry of Education, a member with knowledge/expertise in 21st century learning, a member with knowledge/expertise in the support needed for vulnerable and at-risk students, four senior members drawn from private, public and voluntary sectors that have relevant expertise in (for example) accounting, legal, HR or entrepreneurship and a representative from the Bermuda College.”

Does that sound like it will not be as independent as they say, Mr. Speaker? That is what we are producing. We are waiting for the legislation, and we all know once the legislation comes this is what we will bring here to this House to allow for persons to vote on. And because we have heard nothing from the other side that this is what they want, I fully expect that that Bill will fly through the Legislature without any sort of disagreement whatsoever, Mr. Speaker. So I am looking forward to that day.

Mr. Speaker, I want us to learn right now that education reform is not just a line item in our platform. It is the foundation of the future of this country, and we take it extremely seriously. To claim that there is no plan, there is no consultation, and no impact is to ignore the facts and the feedback from the work that has taken place over the last five years to move us to where we are now.

The truth is that we are building a better education system—one that meets children where they are and one that gives them the opportunity to succeed. Some people may not like it, but we will pull this across the line, Mr. Speaker, and I am certain that we will move forward with this and we will see the changes we need to see within our system over the next years as more schools come on board.

I am absolutely thrilled that we have the St. George's parish school now working together. We have the Somerset parish school groups now working together. Two additional parish primary schools will be opening in September. I know we have had some issues with the students moving on, but I am happy that we were able to come up with a hybrid of what it is that we are going to do.

So the students, what they would have been doing at Berkeley, CedarBridge and in Sandys in September, they will just be doing the same thing but at the middle school level because the school's infrastructure apparently was not ready to receive them. So we are not taking a step back. They will still be doing . . . they are starting year one of the five-year programme. They will still be considered Year 9 students. They just will not be physically in the school. So when they do go to the school in September 2026, they will be going into Year 10, not starting high school for the first time, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one thing that really stood out and I know there are some other Members here that probably will speak to this even more, Mr. Speaker, and I am looking at page 31 . . . if I can find it. Oh, I did. And it says, ". . . even in the early 2010s under an OBA government, we saw return to growth and big projects like America's Cup that lifted confidence."

Mr. Speaker, what confidence? A month after the America's Cup they were voted out of office. What confidence was there, Mr. Speaker? And not only were they voted out, we had shirts created that said "Landslide Victory" and we had less seats than we have now.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Talk about it!

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, when I see that *lifted confidence*, that is the first thing that pointed out and I had to reach and I was like, *Wait a minute, Deputy. Wasn't the America's Cup the same year as the election?* And then I really had to look, and it was a month

before. But, Mr. Speaker, it is not . . . it is not about . . . that is not a reward for performance. It is a verdict. A verdict that was delivered that, yes, we recognise that you did something, but it is just not what we want. And you have to be able to understand that.

So, we heard about, *We do not see in this Throne Speech a mea culpa and things where you are saying sorry we did not do that.* Tell the people you are sorry yourselves, Mr. Speaker. We are moving forward with this agenda.

And, Mr. Speaker, before I wrap up there is one thing that really struck me that is missing from the manifesto. And I was shocked that it was missing from the manifesto, Mr. Speaker, because it was part of their election rhetoric from day one. And that is, *Why is this election called and the students that are not here cannot vote?* Mr. Speaker, they ran with that almost weekly. There is not one thing mentioned in here about electoral reform. Not one thing mentioned. It was mentioned when they were voted in in 2012 and they never accomplished it. So I am not sure why it did not make it—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The—

The Speaker: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Minister is perhaps unintentionally misleading the House. It was in the budget twice and I believe that it was draft legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I am not sure what that point of order is, Mr. Speaker, because I said it was not in their manifesto.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I do not know what that point of order is. But, Mr. Speaker, it was in our election platform. And it was in our Throne Speech, and it is something that will move forward. And we will have absentee voting introduced under this Government, Mr. Speaker, because we just do not talk the talk. We walk the walk as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
MP Fahy—

Mr. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

The Speaker: All right. You have your time on the clock.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Okay. This is a maiden, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, it is a maiden speech so—

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: That means that there is a certain courtesy that comes with that maiden speech. So, Members I am going to ask you to restrain yourselves.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: No, no, restrain yourselves.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give my maiden speech, as I have said, having been elected for the first time to this Honourable House. Thanks to the voters of constituency 20. I am entitled to this time. You will not be seeing me reading next time.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Michael Fahy: Pembroke South West. It is an honour and a privilege to be able to speak here today.

Mr. Speaker, I am certainly no stranger to public office having first been appointed as a Member in another place under the then United Bermuda Party Leader, the Honourable Member for constituency 2, Kim Swan, in 2008 as Shadow Minister for Transport, Energy and Telecoms.

I resigned in late 2009 and was a founding member of the Bermuda Democratic Alliance but was reappointed as an Opposition Member in another place by the Honourable Member for constituency 12, Craig Cannonier under the banner of the One Bermuda Alliance as Shadow Minister of the Environment, Planning, Infrastructure and Housing.

After the OBA's election win in 2012, I was elevated to the position of Government Leader in another place where I moved the Government's agenda as Minister of Home Affairs from 2012 to 2016, and then Minister of Tourism, Transport and Municipalities from 2016 until 2017.

Now in 2025, I find myself amongst former Members I sat with in another place. So I look across the aisle, Mr. Speaker, at Honourable Members from constituencies 1, 13, 18, and 34 and look forward to engaging with them again.

I will not leave this topic, Mr. Speaker, without giving a hello to the Honourable Member from consti-

tuency 6, who first invited me to join the political scene as a member of the United Bermuda Party. So you can thank him—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Michael Fahy: Like the Honourable Members from constituencies 2 and 33, who I once shared a caucus room with. We took different paths but still find ourselves in the same place.

Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Michael Fahy: It is. It is.

[Laughter]

Mr. Michael Fahy: I am equally not a total stranger to at least being in the House of Assembly, albeit in a different location. I sat through many a debate to assist my Junior Ministers when I was the substantive Minister in another place. During that time my name was mispronounced repeatedly. It is [pronounced] "Fay." I will say it again.

The Speaker: I think the Speaker got it right just now.

Mr. Michael Fahy: "Fay."

[Laughter]

Mr. Michael Fahy: I was forced to sit in silence as some Members of this Honourable House, who still remain in their seats, hid behind parliamentary privilege to drag my family name through the mud with the full intent of trying to tarnish both the policies of the One Bermuda Alliance and that of my family. And for that I am disgusted.

Guess what, Mr. Speaker? I am here now. So I trust that when Members choose to use parliamentary privilege to utter un-factual statements, they now realise that I have the ability to retort and not sit in silence.

Mr. Speaker, it has been alleged that I am anti-Bermudian. My place of birth has been used as a weapon over the years to try and cast doubt on my motives in leading legislative initiatives. I have been accused of trying to change the very essence of what it means to be Bermudian. This has been particularly true in a number of political advertisements that were in the last election. Despicable and false narratives, Mr. Speaker, that were designed to mislead and stir emotions based on absolute falsehoods were com-monplace.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to make a number of things clear. I am a proud Bermudian. My family is Bermudian. My children are Bermudian. And I am totally committed to the success of our islands. It is beyond comprehension to think that it has become ac-

ceptable to question my nationality, my loyalty to Bermuda's success, my desire to see Bermuda the best it can possibly be for all Bermudians. Or to think that my intent has ever been or ever was to simply try and protect the interests of a small cabal of members of an ever-shrinking class who rely on their White privilege to guarantee their own success at the expense of anyone who does not fit their mould. In fact, I cannot align with those that do. I do not accept that anyone should use their inherent privilege to enrich themselves for their own selfish agendas.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would dare say that I was a vocal advocate from within the One Bermuda Alliance since its inception to removing what has been perceived as a status quo. And I will continue to ensure that we as a party and I, now as a Member of Parliament, do everything that I can to advance the interests of all Bermudians regardless of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, sex, sexual orientation, marital, family or domestic partnership status, disability, religious beliefs, economic power or political opinion from the Human Rights Act.

I have already pledged to my constituents that I will work on their behalf and for the people of Bermuda whether they voted for me or not. I am sure all other Members will do the same for their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, allow me a moment to make a number of matters clear about one policy that was introduced under my previous tenure as a Minister, now that I have the rather unique opportunity to set the record straight. Especially since there was no mention in the Throne Speech of any kind of comprehensive immigration reform. I apologise to my colleague from constituency 9 in advance for stepping on his toes.

The much-chastised Pathway to Status Bill, once before this honourable place and then withdrawn, was introduced at its most basic to allow for Bermuda status to be granted to individuals who had spent 20 years or more in Bermuda. And those who had been in Bermuda for 15 years or more to have the opportunity to apply for permanent residency, along with their children. In parallel with dozens of other measures, it is my belief if that Bill had in fact passed, much of what we are now dealing with (in terms of our ever-shrinking population) would not have in fact happened, or at least not to the extent that it has.

Imagine a situation, Mr. Speaker, where members of our community who had been in Bermuda for 20 years could actually open a local business and hire and fully partner with Bermudians. A Bermuda where people would feel stable and invest. A Bermuda where we actually welcome those who bring different experiences and contribute fully. Instead, a narrative that was about hope and saving our community became a propaganda tool, alleging floodgates would be opened to hordes of foreigners.

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, we are quite happy to marry these apparently terrible people, have chil-

dren with them and take their tax dollars to fund our very existence. A person far greater than most said, *The only thing to fear is fear itself*. And sadly, the Government has sown the seeds of fear and mistrust so often on this matter that it is impossible to have a healthy and fair debate to the detriment of all Bermudians.

The Chamber of Commerce and various alphabet groups and even the Government recognise that we are short by at least 8,000 people to make our economy work properly and support our people. Sadly, this Government has for political expediency failed all of us on this matter. Today, Government members have interpolated, *How do we increase the population? We failed on one of those major opportunities to do so and it may ultimately prove our undoing.*

We cannot on the one hand welcome the much anticipated windfall of corporate income tax that is generated by international business, thanks to both guest workers and Bermudians, and then after 20 years say, *No thanks, for the help*. That is playing Russian roulette. Eventually the gun goes off, Mr. Speaker, and then all of us are stuffed. There are obviously bad actors out there. But it is the few, not the many, that some will have you believe.

Mr. Speaker, the narrative is that the evil Michael Fahy was trying to open the floodgates. Garbage. Reforming our immigration regime is hardly opening the floodgates when people are already in Bermuda. Had we granted status to those who had been here for 20 or more years in 2015, they would have been in Bermuda since at least 1995. Of those 20 years, Mr. Speaker, 17 would have been under a PLP Government. Therefore, the PLP Government in fact granted repeated work permits to the alleged floodgate of immigrants.

Mr. Speaker, Pathways was never an opportunity to try and somehow skew the vote or change the way it means to be Bermudian. Never. I cannot presuppose (and no one should) who anyone may vote for. I believe those days are long gone. In fact, the policy was designed to ensure population stability and to protect our taxbase which would reduce our overall cost of living. More people means more people paying taxes to pay for social services, pensions, housing and health care. It would help pay for our roads, schools and help Bermuda-owned retail businesses, service providers and help grow jobs through direct inward investment. More people means more load spread, from electricity costs to food. It is basic economics.

Thanks to the shortsighted politically expedient narrative of the PLP on this issue in the last 10 years, we are now far worse off than we would have been had Pathways been part of that larger puzzle of creating a stabilised workforce and encouraging population growth. It is probably now consigned to the dustbin of history, but to the detriment of us all.

Mr. Speaker, every single one of us in this place came from somewhere else. Whether we are first generation or eighth. Let us try and remember that when we consider what is best for all of us and the future of our beloved Bermuda. I understand Bermuda's history of inequity. The use of dual-seat constituencies to disadvantage Black Bermudians. And I understand that segregation and concentrated wealth made things terrible for many. It was abhorrent and I think I would find it hard to forgive such discriminatory practices had I been at the receiving end. But I will not be tarnished with the mistakes from those of the past. I was not part of that in Bermuda and I would not support such things in any event.

Mr. Speaker, we can no longer accept or celebrate mediocrity. The Government's Throne Speech reeks of Big Brother, with the threat of price controls as if a government that fails on so many fronts thinks it knows best on private enterprise. Rather than sinking to grow our economic base with radical proposals, the Government is seeking to threaten and punish successful enterprises that ultimately employ hundreds and hundreds of Bermudians. Am I satisfied with the cost of living, Mr. Speaker? No. It is patently absurd that I get excited when I see a special on bread and it is just under \$8.00 a loaf. But we walk a very dangerous tightrope when we think we can arbitrarily interfere with business models that employ Bermudians, and many of them. Instead of punishing success, we need to expand our economic base.

Again, and simply put, more people means spreading the cost load. Let us take a very simple example that some Members have made reference to already. The threat of penalties on non-US built ships entering US ports with a fine of up to \$1.5 million per entry would be disastrous for Bermuda. Such costs would be spread across each container. More containers imported to serve more people means more containers to spread the cost. So whilst it is easy to try and wash our hands of the ramifications of a major tariff and lay the blame at those that do profiteer off of everyone in Bermuda, the Government's own failure to properly expand our economic base has seen the proverbial pigeons now come home to roost.

Mr. Speaker, years and years of pursuing the next shiny thing is leading us down the wrong path. Securing our existing international business and building on that human capital which supports it would have been a smarter move. But when you disrespect those that form the very base of our economic survival, we do so at our peril. Our shrinking population is the proof that the Government chooses to ignore. Bermudians and guest workers have left. It is that simple.

Am I happy that there is such wealth disparity in Bermuda? Absolutely not. In fact, I would suggest that displays evidence in my constituency with some properties so huge, with estates so large I was shocked. Equally, I was shocked at the evidence of

poverty just roads away from the most wealthy. This crossed the racial divide by the way, Mr. Speaker. But it is apparent that our future is in peril since I came across so many empty dwellings. Many had left since they cannot afford to retire here. Or they left to be closer to their children who do not see a future for themselves. Some properties are left to rot due to overwhelming wealth and no one in the rich family cares.

So I will support legislation that might bring properties back to the market that will help house Bermudian families. I hope the substantive Minister hears that. I am happy to work with him on some of those initiatives.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, via the official Reply to the Throne Speech has provided a myriad of solutions on housing including an audit and mobilisation of idle government properties, expanding public/private partnerships for housing development and introducing a rent-to-own programme. We have suggested reforming the Landlord [and] Tenant Act, a rent assurance programme and development of secondary rental units. I add to that by proposing new building techniques, building higher to allow for more one-bedroom units for singles, couples and seniors, utilising disused school buildings to help our seniors. So there are solutions, despite what Members on the other side have suggested throughout today. If a report on empty properties that can be used to house Bermudians is ready, then table it for discussion.

Going back to the cost of living and food, Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance has proposed scrapping the sugar tax. Other Members before me have explained how that tax has failed. When it was implemented in 2018, I was a totally private citizen. I wrote an opinion piece which addressed this and laid out how it could possibly work based on experiences in other jurisdictions. In fact, the World Health Organization says the following—and they are all pieces to the puzzle that could make a sugar tax work.

1. Retail prices on sugar drinks would need to be raised by 20 per cent or more.
2. Subsidies for fresh fruit and vegetables would need to be between 10 per cent and 30 per cent.
3. Taxing of other foods and beverages high in sugar, salt and fat up to 50 per cent would help to reduce obesity.
4. Earmark revenues raised from the sugar tax for health care.
5. Proper monitoring and evaluation [would] measure the effect of the sugar tax.
6. Require warning labels on taxed products as an education strategy.
7. Draft a multidisciplinary policy and implementation plan that includes advocacy for political buy-in. Monitoring and evaluation is critical.

All of those have to be done together to make a sugar tax work. As you can hear, those solutions end up bringing even higher costs. So scrap the tax.

Mr. Speaker, there is talk of voter reform and it is certainly required. I do not believe the Parliamentary Register is accurate. How can it be when almost everyone accepts we have had serious population decline—now estimated below 55,000 souls? Yet the number of registered voters stayed almost static from 2020 to 2025 and this time we had the lowest turnout ever.

One reason for low turnout is general voter apathy. So we should not all sing and dance as though we have won some massive undertaking here in Bermuda. The other is the voters just are not here. Both are sad indictments of our future success. The factor is that one man, one vote should be as fair as possible in each constituency to ensure the bad days of deliberate disenfranchisement do not happen. Let us use technology and data, which the Government consistently espouses, from BELCO information, TCD records and the Post Office to help create an accurate Register.

The population decline represents the most urgent matter to concentrate on if we are to have economic equity. We cannot just redistribute wealth from an ever-shrinking pool. We need to fill that pool and create the best possible social safety net, best education and best for Bermuda as a result. Without proper data we will fail. Frankly, if the Government spent as much time on proper engagement with stakeholders in creating a booming economy as it does on creating false pamphlets for elections, we would be far better off. Let us demonstrate that we can fix our potholes, house 1,100-plus homeless, fund our schools, our hospital and our police before we try and manage others. In other words, we need to stop managing our decline and build for a better tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, in order to assist with that desire, we need to ensure that energy costs are affordable. It cannot be right that there are many in Bermuda who choose between power bills and medications or food. But are we on the right trajectory to lower costs? Is the integrated resource plan currently filed being followed? It is supposed to provide a roadmap. But is it being used effectively or is it just a simple (and complicated as well) bureaucratic exercise?

Bermuda's small scale means that traditional competitive market structures do not apply in the same way as larger jurisdictions. So we also need to focus on efficiency, resilience and long-term sustainability. Any reforms must be judged based on affordability and economic impact first with sustainability and security of supply of electricity and power as critical supporting factors. We must ensure that the Regulatory Authority is fit for purpose and is ensuring that the sole power company is not just feeding us a pack.

Mr. Speaker, I have put myself forward as a candidate for this honourable place since I believe in

Bermuda. I believe in us as a people. I believe that we can do much better. But I do not believe that the Government's plans are the best blueprint for Bermuda's success. I believe that the OBA can do better than this Government and I believe with hard work and perseverance that the OBA can once again form a Government that represents the many and not the few.

The Throne Speech Reply is not doom and gloom; rather, it is a solution-orientated document which I hope the Government will consider, given the Honourable Minister of Labour and Economy's utterances earlier that all solutions will be considered. With that said, I will work with those Ministers who I shadow if I believe it is in the best interest of our community as a whole. But I will absolutely stand up and fight hard against policies, regulations, Bills and laws that I deem are not in the best interests of Bermudians, and I will use my best efforts to explain my reasoning for speaking against such things.

Mr. Speaker, finally allow me to make a few comments just a bit more personal. I have saved the best for last. I thank my parents, Mike and Gwen who came to these islands in 1979 when I was a toddler with my brother who was but a baby. My father was my mentor. He was an amazing man who always believed in this beautiful place. Sadly, he passed on 17 February 2024, and I miss him every single day.

My family's dedication to Bermuda cannot be doubted. My mom has a school building named after her for her dedication and spirit in education, with the number of Bermudians that she taught with learning difficulties unquestioned.

My equally amazing brother competed for Bermuda in the Olympics and had the honour of carrying the Bermuda flag in international competition. His family is here and is also dedicated to Bermuda's success.

When we talk about population growth, I walk the walk, Mr. Speaker. I have four fantastic children, from aged 9 months to 17 years—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Michael Fahy: I have been busy.

I have four fantastic children, from aged 9 months to 17 years who, like me, are proud Bermudians. They are incredible children and I love them dearly.

And last but not least, my Irish wife Eimear, for accepting my desire to re-engage politically has supported me without question on the campaign trail. In fact, I probably got some votes because I went with her and my nine-month-old on a number of occasions. I could not have done that without her love and support.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the indulgence today. But I want the Members of this Honourable House to remember that before we cast stones so easily and call into question people's motives, we

need to understand history, family and commitment. Each slanderous remark or libellous statement has far-reaching consequences that may only be felt years after it is too late to rectify.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

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

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: MP from constituency 28.

MP Lister, you have your 30 minutes.

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

It is an honour to stand this evening, Mr. Speaker, in strong support of the PLP's 2025 Throne Speech delivered by our Government, the Progressive Labour Party. This Throne Speech outlines our vision for the future of Bermuda, and it is not just a speech. It is an actionable framework for building a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for all Bermudians. And it is a platform that addresses our most pressing challenges while also seizing new opportunities for growth and advancement.

This 2025 Throne Speech is a testament to the PLP's continued commitment to the people of Bermuda. It reflects our dedication to economic recovery, social equity, environmental sustainability and enhanced public services. Every initiative put forth in this speech has been carefully crafted to ensure that it serves the needs of all Bermudians, and I am proud to lend my support to this forward-thinking agenda.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let us begin by discussing the economy which is a central pillar of our vision for Bermuda. We know that the global landscape has shifted and we are keenly aware of the challenges facing our economy. Inflationary pressures and global instability have left many Bermudians struggling. But the PLP Government is taking decisive action to address that through strategic investment in key sectors of our economy and creating opportunities for Bermudians. Our focus on supporting local businesses and creating jobs will ensure that Bermudians are first to benefit from Bermuda's recovery. This is a Government that puts Bermudians first always.

Mr. Speaker, each of us 36 Members of this House were out canvassing in advance of the recent election, and we all have heard the cries of our constituents. Number one being, Mr. Speaker, the cost of living. And as I sat and listened to the Throne Speech last week, Mr. Speaker, and as I read through it since then, I was excited to see the initiatives that are being put forth to address that.

One, Mr. Speaker, and we heard it earlier this evening, this Government is looking to expand the categories of essential goods that would reduce the duty to zero. Why is this essential? Because, Mr. Speaker, as I was out canvassing that was the number one complaint: the prices at the store. How can I . . . I have to choose between food, medical bills or paying electricity.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are listening and we are going to reduce duty on essential items. But that is only half the battle, Mr. Speaker, because if we do reduce it, we also have to require the importers and the grocers to pass that relief on to the consumers. There is no point in us reducing duty and the grocers are not passing that on to the consumers.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Well, I have freight costs mentioned, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I am listening to the wisdom of my teammates. I will stay to the wicket.

So, Mr. Speaker, part of the reducing of costs and passing that relief on to the consumers is also . . . and I was excited to see they are expanding the powers of the Cost-of-Living Commission to do a further deep dive into the books and records of suppliers and of food and essential goods. And why is this important, Mr. Speaker? Because we have seen previously when duty relief has been extended that it has not been passed on to the consumers. And there are many reasons given as to why.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the Government is going to take a step further and do a deeper dive into why those excuses and reasons are being given. And we heard earlier: *over-regulation*. Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will say to that is if we do nothing, nothing changes. If we do something, something changes.

And, Mr. Speaker, our duty as Government is to the people of Bermuda and doing what is in their interests. And we hear their cries and complaints and, yes, the grocery store owners, the importers, they are Bermudians too. But the everyday Bermudian that feels it . . . we have to answer to them. And we have to do something for them.

Mr. Speaker, as I further read through the Throne Speech, I . . . I still consider myself young, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I have not yet, as the Member in front of me, reached the magic age of 40. I am a few months away, Mr. Speaker. So I still consider myself young.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You are a baby to some.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: But, Mr. Speaker, I looked at what we are doing for education. And if you look on page 3 . . . as I looked on page 3 of our Throne Speech, seeing that we are going to expand access for funding for tertiary education, Mr. Speaker, that is key because in Bermuda we are not fortunate enough to have . . . we have a two-year college, Mr. Speaker, but for those that want to go on for higher education, we are not fortunate enough to have a facility here. So persons have to go overseas. And not everyone has the financial ability.

As has been mentioned numerous times this evening, people are struggling whether to pay bills or buy food. Well, Mr. Speaker, education is another expense, especially higher education. And so by expanding the access to funding for tertiary education, Mr. Speaker, we believe that there should be no barrier or any deterrent for persons to reach higher education. So by expanding access and making it available for more people, Mr. Speaker, we are helping our Bermudians to get educated to go on [to] be productive members of this society looking to give back.

I was also excited to consideration of a guaranteed loan programme, Mr. Speaker. That is also providing another avenue of access for higher education. And, Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, not everyone can afford it. But if you know that you can get a guaranteed loan for your education, Mr. Speaker . . . and yes, it not just giveaway money. You do have conditions on paying it back. And, Mr. Speaker, while it might seem punitive that you might have to garnish someone's wages . . . well, that is with any institution that loans money, Mr. Speaker.

If you default or try not to pay your mortgage or pay your car loan, Mr. Speaker, the bank has rights to get their money. So the Government is no different. If we are entrusting people to go away to school on a loan and get an education and come back to work for us, they have to be entrusted to repay their loan back, Mr. Speaker. And that is also part of life. You learn that as a young child. As you get older, responsibilities . . . if you are committed to something, that commitment comes with consequences if you do not follow those commitments. And so you are committed to a loan going away to school. You must commit and hold yourself accountable to come back and ensure that the loan is repaid.

And a part of getting an education, Mr. Speaker, is that people can make better informed decisions about their health, about their life. And as I speak about health, again we hear so much about there is a health crisis, a health issue in Bermuda due to a lot of bad diet, food habits, eating habits. Well, Mr. Speaker, with the proposed ban on trans-fat, on industrially produced trans-fat products, Mr. Speaker,

globally 278,000 deaths a year are caused or attributed to the intake of trans-fat products. So I think by us taking that step forward and banning them, that goes to help . . . it is not an all-cure medicine, but it goes a step to helping address some of our health issues. Whether it is diet . . . people realising that, or you take that out and the people see a difference in their health. Getting out, banning these trans-fat products.

There is no known health benefit of trans-fat, Mr. Speaker. And I want to reiterate that. *There is no known health benefit.* So by banning it and getting it out, Mr. Speaker, we are taking a step forward to helping and encouraging a healthier Bermuda. It might take a while. But it is a step in the right direction.

Much has been said about the housing in Bermuda, Mr. Speaker. And I look at the Throne Speech again and the proposals of the amendments to the Landlord and Tenant Act. Mr. Speaker, that was another thing that I heard out canvassing, that it is hard to find somewhere to live, to rent, for tenants.

But on the other end, Mr. Speaker, landlords also, with their investment, their property, their homes that they invested in, want protections. Because, Mr. Speaker, if you invest in a house, you put money in it and you rent it out to someone and they destroy it, they fall behind on rent—some [intentionally]. Mr. Speaker—that landlord is at a loss. And some landlords have had these situations happen to them over and over again and have made the decision that they will take their property off the market. So it is not that we have a shortage of housing, Mr. Speaker. It is a shortage of available housing because a lot of landlords have made that decision.

So with the amendments in the Landlord and Tenant Act, which will offer further provisions to the landlords, I look forward to that, Mr. Speaker, because it incentivises and it gives landlords protections to know that they can now safely rent their properties out. And if there is something that happens—damage or destruction to their property, a tenant falls behind in their rent—there is a faster, more streamlined process to deal with that. At present, a landlord can be in the courts for up to nine months, a year, even more trying to deal with a problem tenant. And that deters landlords from renting.

With the amendments to this Act to shorten their timeframe and give provisions for the landlords, I hope that this encourages them so that they can bring their properties back on to the housing market so that Bermudians can . . . we can ease the housing crisis and Bermudians can have more options of places to live, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, under the housing infrastructure, my eyes jumped and I give kudos to the Minister of Public Works. My eyes jumped when I saw the amending of the Private Roads (Improvement) Act. Mr. Speaker, in my role as chairman of the Bermuda Road Safety Council I have had numerous requests—whether it is mirrors on private roads, speed

bumps on roads, repaving of roads, Mr. Speaker. And it is always [dis]heartening to me to tell a person, *Your road is a private road*. And unfortunately, it is not . . . I don't want to say it too wrong, but it is not a priority, Mr. Speaker, because we have to deal with the public government roads. And that happens all too numerously that I have to tell people that. So I look forward to the amendments to the Private Roads (Improvement) Act.

And even further then, Mr. Speaker, is that a lot of our private roads . . . yes, they are in disrepair. But they also have to service government vehicles whether it be trash trucks, whether it be the emergency services (the fire trucks, the ambulances and the police vehicles). And some of these vehicles are not able to get on these roads. Whether the road is in bad shape or the road is too narrow or there are other different reasons. So amending the Private Roads (Improvement) Act [will] strengthen the support for these private roads and adjusting it.

Going back, Mr. Speaker, I remember in a previous debate the trash trucks. They get damaged going over some of these roads. So that is a cost to government, having to repair. So by repairing these private roads and amending the Act, again, it is not just a benefit to those residents, but it is a benefit to the government because there is less damage and wear-and-tear on their government vehicles that have to service these roads.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the Private Roads (Lighting) Act . . . I look forward to that too because, again, I have had constituents, or as the road safety chairman, I have had members of the public who have requested and asked for lights in their neighbourhoods. *It is too dark in my neighbourhood and it encourages . . .* I had one constituent reach out to me. They had a bike stolen, maybe three bikes stolen in a period of time. And he reached out because he wanted a light.

And I went out. I liaised with the Minister. I was directed to BELCO and different things. And what I found was that there are policies that do limit installation of lights in certain distances. And if we can improve and amend where we can put lights in areas where they are needed—whether it be neighbourhoods to discourage persons hanging [out] and doing antisocial activity on our roads . . . there are stretches of roads that are very dark, not lit properly.

And so by improving that and adding further lighting it has a benefit not only to those neighbourhoods, but also to our wider road users because . . . and I say that, Mr. Speaker, just as I am talking. There is a stretch of road on Middle Road, and as you go across it, it is dark. And unfortunately, there is also a crosswalk on that stretch of road. And I myself one night when I was driving home, as a matter of fact from this Honourable House, and I was doing what I usually do, doing the speed and paying attention, and a person . . . the beacon was not working. So the per-

son . . . I happened to just see a figure in the dark and I was able to slow down, and they walked across it.

But that just goes to emphasise why this amending of the Private Roads (Lighting) Act is important. Not just private roads but public roads because, again, having better lighting allows for us to be able to feel safer on those roads but also to be safer when we are driving or walking, riding or running on those roads.

Mr. Speaker, again, as I read through this Throne Speech another item that jumped out to me. And it has been a topic not just locally but globally. And I will not speak too much on it, but I will speak in that I am in support of the proposed amendments to the legislation. And that is under the Criminal Code [Act] 1907 and the repealing of the requirements for a pregnancy termination and the requirement for committee approval, Mr. Speaker.

I am not a woman. But we all came from a woman. And so I feel that as a duty, coming from a woman, that we should also understand that it is a woman's body. And it is a woman's right to do with her body as she chooses. We as men should not be able to tell a woman what to do with her body. And so as I said, Mr. Speaker, I will not go into too much detail on that. But I do support the amendment of the Criminal Code Act 1907. And, Mr. Speaker, just the name alone: the *Criminal Code Act 1907*. That was more than 100 years ago, Mr. Speaker. So, in regard to pregnancy termination, it is about time that we are looking to amend it and bring it up to date in this day and time.

So, Mr. Speaker, much has been said tonight and as I said I stand in support of our Throne Speech tonight. This will guide us through this next session of the House and with these initiatives they will help to make Bermuda, as we say, a fairer and a better place for all Bermudians. Not just a few, but for all Bermudians.

Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my remarks and as I said I look with enthusiasm and optimism going forward with these initiatives and proposals that this PLP Government is bringing in this session of the House and . . . this is our Bible. And I am a Christian, Mr. Speaker, but this is our Bible for this session and if we stick to this document we will have a successful session that will benefit Bermuda and it will bring all Bermudians along to help us become a better nation.

With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time and thank you to the listening audience.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? MP Robinson. You have your 30 minutes, sir.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good evening to the listening audience, my colleagues and also to my constituents.

I want to start off first of all by thanking the constituents of—

The Speaker: This is your maiden speech, right? Yes. Members, just be mindful. This is his maiden speech—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

The Speaker: —so he has the courtesy of an uninterrupted speech.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, I just wanted to start off first by thanking the constituents of Southampton East Central for electing me. It has been a roundabout road for me during this process and I just wanted to express that before kicking in to my comments.

This particular Parliament I want to remind us of how crucial our time is here and the next four years especially with our biggest trading partner having an incumbent that is irrational and unpredictable. And that Bermuda is facing external forces that not only want to eat our lunch but also have a huge impact on our cost of living, on how we feed ourselves and our security.

The main point that I was looking for in this Throne Speech was for the government of the day to elevate to that level . . . that level of being able to not only empower Bermudians but also to empower their personal and individual knowledge when it comes to certain things going forward. And the main thing that I want to start off with is civic engagement.

So, 45 per cent, or around that number either did not vote, could not vote or were not here to vote. And this is a huge number that I think is not so much an indictment on one singular party but an indictment on the system when it comes to engaging our electorate. And so the main thing that I wanted to see was movement towards not only accepting that fact that we have a disengaged electorate, or a portion of our electorate that is disengaged, but the acceptance of the fact that that is the bedrock of our democracy. And as we face external pressures, as we face things that we cannot necessarily control it is crucial for us to find ourselves unified in a sense internally on things that affect all Bermudians, such as cost of living, housing, health care and also our democratic process as a whole.

Many of us who knock on the door will realise that not a lot of our constituents are fully taught or understand the system of which this Island governs. And that is not an indictment on anybody's intelligence. But that is just to say that we clearly have a breakdown in the knowledge of our processes of our government, of the role of Opposition, Senate, House of Assembly and even the right and power of a voter.

The reason why I am highlighting this is because if we are not here to empower our people, empower our electorate and empower our constituents, then what are truly accomplishing? We can go back and forward on the things and the issues that plague our constituents—I know that all of us hear the same issues. But if we have not even started with the fundamental point of making sure that our people know that their vote matters, that they can come out and that somebody represents their ideals, whether it be my party or the party opposite or parties that were not elected in this . . . the fact that we have folks who are out there right now who feel as though they do not have anyone who represents them enough to come out and vote, I think is concerning. And I think that especially when it comes to the civic engagement of our youth and young people, this is a very pressing issue, which is why I was very disappointed to see that there was not a pledged date or intended move towards actually implementing the absentee voting.

I did hear it in the debate, but I think that it is crucial that those . . . as the Throne Speech is the binding contract (so to speak) of what Government's intentions are, to see that in the Throne Speech outlined and given a date of when they intend to achieve that. Because it shows to a lot of young people, which as we know was a huge talking point during the election . . . it shows the commitment of that system to not only listen to people but also to enact some of the pressing issues that they feel are at the forefront.

As we know, there are tough times ahead. And for me, as a Member who has been newly elected into this House, I really want to stress the fact that we have to be honest and forthcoming with the people of Bermuda. Promising to lower prices in the midst of a trade war, in the midst of actual physical wars . . . we cannot lead with what is going to get us elected. We cannot lead with what we feel is a feel-good statement when we know that a lot of external pressures are coming our way that are going to raise prices, that are going to send our cost of living upwards.

We are already starting off on a foot that is not truly representative of what is happening in the world, what is happening in the global scheme of things. And it shows a very insular view and acceptance that this is the status quo. This is what we accept; and it gets us to a third term and that is where we are going to stay.

But at the end of the day, this is bigger than us and this particular point in our history is going to be recorded because there are elections globally that have been run solely on who the president of the United States is and the effect that that is going to have on the entire world. And I feel like in our Throne Speech and in our politics, because we are insulated or small, or, you know, largely (in our minds) unaffected, we are downplaying that, Mr. Speaker, downplaying that effect. And what is to come for us coming forward? So I just wanted to flag that.

Also, financial literacy which was something that was not mentioned that I recall was indeed promised when it came to our folks being able to dip into their pension to put down payments on homes or dip into their pensions . . . this financial literacy piece is so crucial that I was hoping to see a plank of that in this Throne Speech because we have allowed folks to make huge decisions on their future earnings, huge decisions on purchasing assets, dipping into funds that are meant to sustain them in their old age. And in the same breath we have now heard that there are going to be amendments to the pensions to make them more sustainable.

But folks have dipped into those pensions already and we have not made an effort to empower folks to really know the strength of life insurance, or the strength of building wealth. And I am not saying that we are supposed to go into people's homes, but there needs to be a concerted effort from Government not just to subsidise or to give assistance, but also to empower people to assist themselves. Empower people to build wealth, build income and save if they can. And if you cannot save, at least how to spend your pay cheque in a way that is adequate for your family. And I think that these soft skills are missing from not just our education system, but from our society building when it comes to how we approach policy.

A lot of times we have an approach of addressing what we feel is the end result of an issue and I would like to see this Parliament, because there are a lot of new Members, a lot of new Ministers, to kind of push the envelope and really drill down on the core issues that are plaguing our people—and have been for many years. Which is not necessarily understanding the financial literacy part and the strength and power that they play in our democracy. So I just wanted to start off there. There has to be preparation for the future.

We are constantly kind of pushing Bermudians to go into international business, to go into IB. And these jobs will be under threat by AI and advanced technology which is making processes and doing business much easier without manpower. And if we have almost an entire population that, if they are not in insurance, if they are not in IB, they cannot afford to live in Bermuda, if we have a population of our young people coming up who are left here that are looking to go into that role, what happens when these jobs are threatened? What is the failsafe years down the line? And I think what we in Bermuda have trouble doing is governing for the future.

We pass a lot of legislation that we hope will have an effect in the next year, five years. But we are at a changepoint in the world, in the global economy and we are just not keeping up with what we need to be keeping up with to make sure that our next generation and generations coming up have an idea of what the economy will look like in Bermuda in the next 10 to 15 years, because you cannot just switch our system

and expect our people to fit into it. There has to be a sustainable, measured approach to not just building the economy of today but where we go 10 to 15 years from now.

My Shadow Ministry that I was lucky enough to be placed in is Tourism, Transport and Culture. And as it was mentioned in a previous debate, myself and the Minister have a storied history from another place and I hope that we can find an impasse on that because I believe that right now we have to find a way to be Team Bermuda in the face of things that are going to come down the pipeline. We have not even seen the extent of what may be coming from the global economy and pressures. So I am extending an olive branch. But I must also stress that one sentence or two sentences carried over from five months ago is not suitable for prioritising tourism in this country.

I support the expansion of investments and working towards smaller guest homes. That is a great step. But the tourism industry as a whole is looking for leadership and direction. We have a Bermuda Tourism Authority that at this current state looks like it is unable to lead the tourism industry due to conflictions between what appears to be the executive team and the board. And while we see a culture review come out, we now have the board bringing forward their own cultural reset.

At moments like this is when folks look to the Minister to show leadership of what is going to happen in the future when it comes to tourism. Because if you have a BTA that is in conflict with itself, it is really crucial that the Government faces the Island and reassures them and the public and all of our voters and all of our constituents that tourism does have a direction. There is a plan going forward.

And some of the things that we would like to see which were in our platform that I would recommend . . . I think that everyone has said it. The industry has said it, which is, you know, build our meeting facilities and conference centres. Try to implement our local artists and creatives into our tourism industry. Have a unified approach with the Chamber of Commerce and tourism and hospitality to strengthen that industry, to work with those entities and the new hospitality signature school that I hear is coming on board to make sure that Bermudians can transition into that industry.

The main issue that we are having with tourism right now is that Bermudians simply cannot afford to work in tourism and hospitality. And that is because there are not enough people on the Island to sustain that industry. So it is all linked to not only allowing our working population to shrink, but also the fact that we have our air visitors down and are now relying on cruise ships, who are historically lower spenders. So Bermuda is one of the few jurisdictions that locally folks actually participate in our tourism product. You will not go to The Bahamas or Jamaica and see locals actually going and saying *I am going to eat at a hotel*

restaurant. Usually they tell you, if you want to eat something local, I will take you somewhere. You know what I mean?

Locals in Bermuda play a huge role in sustaining the tourism industry here and making it profitable. Because at the end of the day, the minimum wage is one thing but the main source of income has always been tips and gratuities. And that is always from volume of customers because everybody knows that if you go up too high in price you may get a good gratuity, but you only sell one steak. Right? You are not going to sell a hundred \$75 steaks a night. It has always got to be volume of people coming and running those gratuities up to make it profitable for Bermudians.

So, in order for us to repair our tourism industry you must bring people or attract folks who are either coming here to work or coming here to visit. But either way we must increase our volume. And the interesting part of that is what attracted international business to our shores in the first place. It was our tourism product. Bermudians' top-class service and ability for them to take a walk down a safe avenue and a Bermudian was there to not only look after them but reoccurring visitors was another big part—where people came to look for one bellman who served them. And they come and look for that person. And then Bermudians used to welcome tourists into their homes when they came to visit.

We really have to press for the fact that in a changing world where international business (IB) and other things may be under threat by the advancement of technology that we can pivot back to something that Bermudians are very good at. But we have to make it sustainable and profitable for them. And if that is not going to happen, we can continue to spend more money—because that is what we like to do. We will increase, we are going to budget, we will give \$5 million more here. We will do this and do that. But the sustainability factor is we can invest in tourism, in small business and all that stuff but they have no customers. They do not have a base of customers and consumers to sustain their business. So therefore, we are putting money into the wrong end of the machine. We are front-loading. And this is what I mean about elevating.

When we come into this place it seems as though folks are . . . into this Honourable House (my apologies, Honourable Member)—into this Honourable House, sometimes we tend to forget that we are here to represent—

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: —constituents. We are here to represent constituents. And a lot of times we get caught up and we forget that we align on a good bit of policy. But what we do not align on is the execution of that policy.

When I looked at the Throne Speech, there was a disconnect again because the Minister gave a speech to this debate and mentioned tourism very infrequently. Only about what was stated in the Throne Speech from the previous one (five months ago) and this one. But one thing that was missing was in the previous Throne Speech (five months ago), the BTA was mentioned and working towards more self-funding for the Bermuda Tourism Authority. And that piece did not make it into this current Throne Speech and that is why a lot of people in the community, who are in the stakeholder groups, feel uncertain. And that is why I would have hoped that the Minister would have declared (or the Government, since he is not here, would have declared) what their intention is with the Bermuda Tourism Authority going forward and what their intention is focussing on when it comes to the tourism industry.

That is something that we did not hear tonight. And I am sure we will have a lot of people asking questions, because as we see all of these reports coming out, we do not know the cost yet. I am sure we will be getting to that in the Budget Debate. But the response to one report should not be another report. I feel like this is what the Honourable Opposition Leader means by *back to basics*. You try to act on the recommendations of your first report before moving into a second report. But then you come into the Honourable House, and you say, *We prioritise tourism*. But this is what is happening in the Ministry, well, in the BTA that at the end of the day the Minister is overseeing it.

This is why tourism has always been very passionate and very close to home because this is where I started. And when I began in tourism, you could make a \$1,000 a week—it might not be a lot of money to some, but it was a lot of money to me when I was 16. And people would write reviews. Revisit. And they gave folks who, like me . . . I did not have a lot of opportunities back then. It gave me an opportunity to help my mother pay bills. It gave me the opportunity to meet folks, to rub shoulders with different cultures and different backgrounds.

And I think that our Bermudians are missing that right now because they are being told that—and shown actually—that insurance and IB and corporate, are really the only way to sustain yourself or make the amount of money that you need to even think about raising a family or paying rent and having all of those things that you usually could have done off of hospitality and tourism. My predecessors . . . that is all they did when I started at 16. Guys who were there 14, 15 years who built houses, put their children through school. That Bermuda is what we need to try to recapture.

Another piece of this puzzle is transport. And transport plays a huge role in tourism—and not only just tourism, but the day-to-day productivity of any nation. And our public transport system right now, and probably all of our transport stakeholders right now

are looking for direction. They are looking for a unified approach because . . . I would ask the question openly: Does the Government truly believe that this current transport system (private and public) is capable of dealing with the tourism that we have now plus the local demand? It is not. And we are hearing numbers, and you know, well yes, I am seeing cruise arrivals are up.

We celebrate the successes in tourism. But we are also holding ourselves back if we are not addressing the fact that there is not a unified approach to transport in this country. And the stakeholders remain waiting for meetings with this current Minister to give direction on how transport unified will be able to approach and deal with the increase in tourism, the local demand. Because we all know we need people. We all know we need tourists. We need an increase in economic activity. But if our public transport cannot match it, then the productivity will not increase. It cannot.

At the end of the day that is why the question on data management is so important. Because TCD is meant to be able to provide that data to those stakeholders when it comes to how many minibuses are on the road, how many taxi licences are out there, blah, blah, blah. That they all plan their plans of attack on when it comes to dealing with their loads that they are trying to do because we see a lot of criticism on taxi drivers, on public transport, but really they are operating with what they have. We have to find a way to support them.

So the digitisation of TCD, which I am not too sure if it was in the Throne Speech . . . I believe . . . I have been here for a few hours now. I do not know if it was in the Minister's speech or the Throne [Speech], but that digitisation of TCD is going to play a good role. But the leadership has to come from the top. And right now, stakeholders are worried. They do not feel supported. They do not feel like they have a unified approach to work with minibuses, to work with our taxies to work with minibuses to supplement the public transport. Like, where do those things meet to service the tourists and the local economy that we have now? Where do they intersect so that they know where their lines are when it comes to servicing the amount of people? Because we have thousands of people moving up and down this country, this Island. And everybody is doing their own thing. And that is where the suggestions of central dispatch and various other things that the taxi industry is bringing forward.

Now, like I said, I would like to hear these things considered because at the end of the day . . . we do not have that unified approach to leadership when it comes to transport. And so again we have to start planning. We are front-loading.

So there are some things in this Government's agenda that I also want to publicly support, as I see my time is running low. The Domestic Violence Court I think is something I would have loved to see

an update on in this current Throne Speech, but I support that initiative.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: No, not yet. But I support that initiative. I also do support the amendments to the Criminal Code for abortion rights for women. I think that that is long overdue, and I think that it is a great move in the right direction.

I also do support the protections of tips and gratuities because obviously that is one of the backbones of tourism and transport when it comes to our country. So I support that. And I want to echo the sentiments that the civic engagement has to start here. And we are going to be in some tough times and folks must have a thicker skin. When you have a good friend. A good friend tells you the truth. And if you want collaboration in this House, this Honourable House, you must accept that people will tell you hard truths that you may not necessarily like to hear. And the Opposition is here to say things that are the hard truths. Because if you want collaboration, that is part of it. Accountability. Honesty. You do not build good friendships, you do not build good negotiations if you cannot speak freely, truly and honestly.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And I do not understand why it comes across that even the Government of the day does not quite understand the role of the official Opposition in this House. We are not meant—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: We are not meant to give high-fives and pats on the back. We will support good policy. As I have said, I support a lot of good policy but I am . . . and I am sure many people listening are sick of being asked to give kudos for things that Government should be doing to take care of the people. That is what they were elected for. They won three terms. That was the excitement. That is what they were elected for: to do what is right by the people.

And we in this House that form the Opposition, we are not opposing to oppose. This is about ensuring that the policy, because whether we like it or not for the next term their policy will be the policy of the day. The Progressive Labour Party. And it is our job to make sure that that policy works as best it can for the people of Bermuda. And that is going to mean that sometimes we will have to say things in this House that the Progressive Labour Party is not going to like. But we are not here for that. We are here to scrutinise and to provide solutions which we have done. They may not like them. But they like some of them. Some of them—because they took some of them.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: But at the end of the day, I want to say that I do look forward to working with colleagues in this House because I believe that this particular Parliament is going to be one of the most crucial in our history and the Progressive Labour Party has an unenviable position of having to govern through unprecedented times. And I genuinely . . . genuinely wish them success and good luck in making the decisions that are going to define Bermuda probably for a generation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I take my seat. Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, MP Robinson.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: MP Swan, I see you rise down in the corner. Would you like to have your 30 minutes?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You know, Mr. Speaker, tonight I will just be a little bit more matter-of-fact and give thanks to the Almighty for allowing me to sit here in this House, this Honourable House in which I have loved all my life.

As a youth parliamentarian in 1974, after I started the middle school system by going to Warwick [Secondary School], Mr. Winton Williams and Mr. Roderick Pearman thought it not robbery, given my family history that maybe they knew something that I did not know and put me in Youth Parliament. And I actually was selected to represent Bermuda at the Maritime Youth Parliament in 1974 but chose to go to the Orange Bowl Junior Golf Championship. It was my first trip out of Bermuda, so I had to make a choice. And I chose the profession that allowed me to travel the world and become educated as I come from humble beginnings in White Hill, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, because we went to Southampton Glebe [Primary School] together.

In 1983, as a 25-year-old, Mr. Speaker, and a very ideal[istic] young man working in the hospitality industry at the Castle Harbour at the time, I ran in that election. I was unsuccessful. I heard enough Listers and Roberts come out of the election box to make me think twice about doing it again anytime soon. But I

kept my hand around politics. I have seen a lot. But I owe my life to the hospitality industry.

I declare my interest in advance if I do speak on tourism because unlike some who have worked in tourism and then gone on to other things, tourism has been the only thing that has put bread on my family's table for all my life. And I have not made a lot of money, but I have made a lot of friends. I have met some of the wealthiest people in this world. I have learned from people like Jack Moseley, the CEO and President of USF&G through golf who helped me. I have met people like Mr. Franklin and Mr. Harold Reinauer who presented Heisman trophies through golf in St. George's, coming to St. George's. I have met people like Terry Brannon and his wife, who have helped educate me. Taught me social graces. I have learned a lot from a lot of good people up and down this country. Hubert Smith whose son sits in this very House and many others, Mr. Speaker.

So I make no apologies, but I declare my interest because I hear people make utterances out there about education authorities. They say that the Premier should not be the Premier and the Finance Minister. But it was okay when it was okay for Sir David Gibbons to be both. It was okay for deForest Trimmingham, who I knew, to be a Member of Parliament and on the Tourism board. It was okay for Dr. Stubbs, the historic Dr. Stubbs, to be a medical doctor, a Member of Parliament and be involved in tourism. It is okay! But when a young country boy who at 67 can tell you that for 55 years of his life has done everything from clean toilets to manage people, people will look suspiciously—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And the only difference in my life's experience is that had I been of a different persuasion, different outcomes are guaranteed. And that is a fact!

An Hon. Member: Yes!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: But I embrace that. Because I tell persons I am a Higginbotham from St. George's just as much as I am a Boris from Southampton up there where the Princess is, right there where the Honourable Member, the young Member who just sat down, making his maiden speech, represents. My family comes from Jews Bay. My granny had property compulsorily acquired by Southampton Princess when they built there. So we understand a little bit when we are at war up and down.

My cousin Stanley Ratteray was with Sir George Ratteray in the Upper House, so was my cousin Walter Roberts and my cousin Reginald Burrows. And my father's brother-in-law Arthur Hodgeson. And my cousin Doc Hall. All from all different walks of life. Black and White. I am not afraid to em-

brace them. But I am here to tell you that some of the things that make people suspicious about things that happen . . . it is because a lot of the things that happen benefit people centuries long down the road. There are people reaping the benefits of policies that were made today. That is why people get suspicious when persons would come here and talk about and make a good maiden speech about their enrolment and stuff. People do not trust people because people have been taken advantage of.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in 1976 when I worked in the hotel industry there was an election in June. I was 18 but I could not vote. You had to be 21 to vote in 1976, Mr. Speaker. You would know that. I had a person in 1976, Mr. Speaker, who had three children and could not vote until he got 21. And I say that respectfully, Mr. Speaker, because persons would want to negate the impact of history.

There are persons who are benefitting from bad decisions when it comes to property in this country. When it comes to wealth in this country—today! And there are people who live negatively as a consequence as well. And that is when you say you want to make a fairer Bermuda persons are referring to. But let me just get back to my opening.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of serving in this House since 1998 with a little hiatus between 2012 and 2017. And I am not going to waste my time going back into that period when I was left along the political sidewalk, run over by a car, rolled back and run over twice again. But I am glad to be out of the wilderness to be able to come back and reflect and come back and try to make a good contribution for this beautiful Bermuda.

But let me just reflect on this Throne Speech if I can. Mr. Speaker, I hear people coming here today talking about the Throne Speech as if it was the Budget Debate. It is a snapshot of what the Government will do in a calendar year. Notwithstanding that, the Government came with a Throne Speech in November. And the Opposition One Bermuda Alliance came with a Reply. On [page] 1 of that Reply they said, “It is time for an election. The One Bermuda Alliance can fix this.”

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: They said it once on page 1. On page 3, they said it again, “The OBA can fix them. It’s time for an election.” On page 4, they said the same thing. On page 5, they said it twice, “It’s time for an election.”

You know, Mr. Speaker, they did not say it on pages 6 and 7. They said it again on page 8, which made it the sixth time. But don’t worry. They caught up. They said it twice on page 9. They said it twice on page 10.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And they said it again on page 17—twice on page 17. So in 17 pages, they said it 17 times.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point or order?

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member is re-reflecting on a debate which is not appropriate for this debate. This debate is about *this* Throne Speech not the last one. Thank you.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I am reflecting—that is a good . . . that is a good shot. I am reflecting on current events.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I am reflecting on current events.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And, Mr. Speaker, I am reflecting on an Opposition that calls themselves an Opposition-in-waiting. Because if you called it 17 times in 17 pages for an election, you would have been ready.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: What happened, Mr. Speaker? They came out with a pamphlet.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Today they come out with 30-something pages! And what I am saying is this: Too little, too late! Too little, too late inasmuch as coming here today and coming out with a litany. Save that for the Budget Debate that is going to come in May so that you can articulate on some of the policies that some of the new Ministers will be revealing when they present their budgets.

But I thought that to be very, very important because it shows you that the Opposition today that comes here professing a lot was not ready for what they called for! And if they were not ready in January, what makes anybody in this country anymore certain that they are ready today?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And so, Mr. Speaker, on that point, and that point alone, it is enough to be of concern.

But let me just say this, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to some of the things . . . I have heard persons talk about how we are going to grow the economy. And that is fair. That is good. That is what an Opposition will do—and should do. And I heard the Member who just took his seat speak kind of down on the PLP when it was in Opposition. Or about the PLP as if it knows not about what to be in Opposition involves. But I can tell you what: the PLP in Opposition between 2012 and 2017 was one of the best Oppositions I had ever seen. And I can tell you what, when I came into this Honourable House as an appointed Member in 1998, I started the only Opposition this country had ever had. The only Opposition. Thirty years of it. I studied the speeches of L. Frederick Wade. I studied the speeches C. Eugene Cox. And I studied the speeches and the style of Dame Lois Browne-Evans, may she rest in peace, and L. Frederick and Mr. Cox—and my good friend, Oattie who spoke on behalf of workers.

When you make disingenuous comments about the PLP and how it would not know about being what it calls “required to be an Opposition.” We do! Because we represent the people in our communities and our constituencies up and down this country. And I am proud of it. But let me get back to this one about . . . just a little water, Mr. Speaker.

[Pause]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Let me get to this one about growing the economy.

And I am going to something that is near and dear to my heart.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: November 1 to April 30. If I have not said this a hundred times in the last two or three months, I have not said it at all.

The opportunity to grow Bermuda, to grow income in Bermuda lies in unsold inventory at hotels. It is a fact. And let me tell you this: for Southampton Princess, when it comes online, and there are many over on that side that did not support that—right?—will increase the amount of unsold inventory by at least 35 [per cent] to 40 per cent. Maybe even double it.

And you know—

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

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I think the Honourable Member may be unintentionally misleading the public.

The Southampton Princess was brought to this House in a quick reading and all of us supported the fact that this thing needed to get done. So for him to get up and say that it was not supported, it is completely false.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I certainly thank you for your utterances of support, but I could yield to the Deputy Leader who I think could remind you of all the many times that you made life very difficult for us as we tried to progress.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes—

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Point of order.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, I have a point of order. A point of order to the point of order.
Mr. Speaker,—

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will gladly bring to this House my file on this particular Bill because I wanted to have it at all times that the Opposition objected profusely about the concessions for Fairmont Southampton.

Hon. E. David Burt: They are still objecting!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And they are still objecting to today.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: All right. Thank you, Deputy.

The Speaker: You made your point.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Let me go back to November 1 to April 30 because, Mr. Speaker, I do not want it to be lost on anyone that we need to be targeting a number. We need to be targeting. And the number that I put out there is 500 additional visitors a day. So do not—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Not what we have now. Target 500 additional visitors a day between November 1 and April 30. That is about 23 weeks. It is about 500 visitors a day. That is about 3,500 a week. You multiply that by about 24 or 25 weeks. You multiply that about \$1,200 or plus more dollars that they will spend. Everybody knows that a cruise visitor spends about one-seventh of what a hotel visitor . . . target a number! And, Mr. Speaker, I am saying that we need to do that long before Princess comes on board.

Now, I am saying that because I have had some history in doing this very thing. Because I will say this, Mr. Speaker: people make fun of me about golf. But last week there was a group of lady professional golfers with their amateurs, very wealthy I might add, who were here staying at the Pompano. Well, that group has been coming to Bermuda since 1987.

This week come Monday there will be a couple's group that will be coming to stay at Pompano again—winter group. That group happened to start in St. George's as well. Just a young country boy from White Hill. I did not invent it; I learnt it at Castle Harbour and took it to St. George's. And then Alex Madeiros, as my assistant, transported it when I got out of the industry for a little bit. Those tournaments exist today.

If we look at those 25 weeks and look at events . . . and it is not just golf. It could be pickleball. It could be sailing. It could be academies, sailing academies. I grew up in a sailing family. I make no apologies about it. My family loves fishing, game fishing and sailing. We are good at it just like we are good at golf. And I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the events that can be linked up . . . look, when you talk about the National Tourism Plan that people said there is no plan. There is a plan. It is called AGILITY. The A, right? The G. The I. The L. The I. The T. And the Y. And the Y is for local involvement. Year-round involvement and the L is for local involvement.

And I am telling you here today, Mr. Speaker, that when you involve local organisations, like equestrian organisations, like swimming organisations, you will get swimmers coming here from Howard University. HU came here and stayed at the Grotto Bay and they had about 50 or 60 young swimmers here training in January at the beginning. December. Cold country. Not cold for them, but a good climate.

Up and down this country there are people with connections globally that we need to tap into. That is the L of AGILITY. Getting the locals involved with their connections because tourism is about relationships, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Walking Through Calvary . . . I had them on my radio show. I will declare my interest. I was part-time here and there as a radio talk show host—more before COVID-19 than now. But we

have tourism in focus, and I want to tell you we had the Walking Through Calvary. I did not realise that Walking Through Calvary had been going on for 30-odd years, Mr. Speaker, but . . . and more.

Mr. Speaker, events such as that . . . in January, international race week. I was standing next to Sebastian "Seb" Coe presenting prizes to folks, you know, in their shorts jumping overboard at Barr's Park in January from Kent. You cannot ask for better promotion than that . . . to get to that market. You cannot get. Why? Because persons that love running felt it not robbery to do something that has grown into something of great magnitude. Up and down this country for those months.

Mr. Speaker, I am here to say that the opportunity for Bermuda . . . and when you start adding the amount (do that multiplier effect that I put out there), you are talking about anywhere between 87,000 and 100,000 additional visitors between November 1 and April 30. Nothing to sneeze at.

And what is the knock-on effect to that? The type of people that you are appealing to, who are here, are the type of people who would hob-nob with the people that are already here. Everybody is looking at going out and finding people. Maybe we need to find more visitors that would enjoy Bermuda. And my experience through my 55 years in the hospitality industry has shown me that people that come in the winter stay longer.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: They stay longer here. And some of them are my age . . . from England. From Ireland. From Scotland. From Wales. From Canada. From the United States.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at that November to March period that I am talking about repeatedly, repeatedly, and sometimes . . . I learnt this observing David Allen. And let me just regress a minute while I mention David Allen. Remind me, where is the Gallery today? Where are those hundreds . . . independents that, that . . . all of those candidates? Where are they? They want to learn about politics. They are not here! I came into this House in 1974. I knew Lenny Swan. I met Dame Lois Browne-Evans. I came up here every week. It took me 25 years to get elected. And that is why, at my age, I will fight to keep my seat and represent the people. Because they need to let somebody who knows what time it is! Some people can sell you the okey-doke up in here.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I got a good hit now.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: But I ate too much loquats and the gout came and knocked on my door. And I took that medication that allopurinol and that diclofenac. You used to represent the pharmacies. You know how important that medication is. It works! I looked at those nice loquats, nice and ripe, and I went at them again. I had to go right back to the medication again this morning. Lord have mercy.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: But, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important. And I think it is important for Honourable Members to know, right, that if I were a wealthy man, nobody would be out there calling my name and saying, *Why choose this man in tourism?* They would not do it if I was a wealthy man. If I lived in Fairylands. But I know people in Fairylands. If I lived in Tucker's Town, but I was raised over in Tucker's Town. But I have the knowledge that all of them have! And I am here to share it freely.

And let me say this: a gentleman that bears my same last name disappointed me greatly.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Disappointed me greatly. Because I would never . . . last year at this time, Mr. Speaker, I used my own money to bring 25 people here from Britain who were very influential people in the golf industry. But I listened to somebody say, *I have solutions, but I would not give them.* If you were my National Hero, you should be giving them freely. You should be calling up my Leader and the Opposition Leader and you should be giving them your advice—freely! You should not be leading young people there and sending them to the polls without any knowledge. They should know they needed to be there at 7:30 to be able to look in the ballot box to make sure that there were not any ballots. You should be providing them with the type of education. I am telling you that because at 25 years of age I ran for you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I am here today, and I am prepared to share my knowledge with anybody in this country. I learned one thing: I never gave anybody bad advice. It is up to them to recognise if the advice that I have given is good enough coming from me. Because people took an interest in me from all around the globe. And I am grateful for it.

And I hope that the passion that I am speaking of right now is carrying forth to Milwaukee as Troy, my Trojans, play Kentucky the great. I hope that my spirit which enabled me to win collegiate events for Troy in the 1970s is causing one of the greatest up-

sets in American basketball in addition to what happened to Kansas today.

Mr. Speaker, I am here to say that the influence that I have around the world, the contacts I have made are for my country! And I would urge anybody hearing my voice . . . and I can be a little loud because I am passionate. That is why I am standing back. And I am proud of being passionate. Moses had a strong voice too. But I am here to say this, Mr. Speaker, that anybody who can get up there and say, *I would only use my knowledge if you vote for me,* worries me. And I heard that. And it bothered me. And I did a little research. I have been convalescing more than I would ever hope for over the last year. So I used my time to look back.

I looked back to start to reflect on some of the things that were done by folks who are still trying to wage their influence. I would urge them to use their knowledge and the capital to work with not only the Government and the Opposition, to be constructive. To be constructive because let me tell you this, when this country was brought to its knees in 1982 when Sir David (he was not Sir David then) was the Premier, ask anybody who was the Minister responsible for Labour. Ask them! I ain't got to tell the answer. And I know these things because I didn't just drop off the fruit truck yesterday.

And I am here to tell you, Mr. Speaker, it bothers me. And it bothers me greatly.

In closing, I spoke about that November to March . . . let me tell you where we are going to go to find these people. We are going to partner with an organisation that has grown out of COVID-19. COVID-19 was not started by the PLP. But I want to thank the Honourable Minister responsible for Health for the good work that she did and I am sure it took a toll on her during that time. But we are going to go to Charleston. We are going to go to Orlando. Fort Lauderdale. Raleigh. Richmond. We are going to go to Baltimore. Washington. We are going to go to Westchester. We are going to go to Hartford, Boston and Providence.

Do you know what? We are going to go to the traditional gateway cities. We are going to go to Montreal. We are going to go to Halifax. And who are we going to partner with? BermudAir! Yes! Goslings. Export companies—Bacardi. The export companies that have a presence here that are doing just what we need to do. Why go out there and reinvent the wheel? Just a little country boy from White Hill. You know? Just a little country boy that played goalkeeper for Somerset Eagles just like my Deputy Leader did. He played goalkeeper with two goalies for Eagles. We got a lot of Southampton Glebe people in the House including the Opposition Leader.

I am here to say, Mr. Speaker, that we in this country need to look at the glass as half-full, but we need to concentrate on that business between November 1 and April 30. That is where the opportunity

is! And when hotels can see that people buy into that. Don't take my word for it. Go up there and study the Pompano model. I can give you some of the brochures that got started in the 1980s when Mr. Kenneth Howard Randolph Horton was the Assistant Director, my PE teacher. And I went to him and I said I know a little bit about, yes, golf, and I will help you promote this country. The person previous to him, who I knew, would not listen to me. But I knew that I could go to my PE teacher, and he listened.

Forty years later, they still stand the test of time. Rugby. Football. You name it. The arts. You name it. Writing. All of those things. You think Samuel Clemens hung in Bermuda because it was not something special? We are sitting on something special. We ain't got to build it. It is already built. God built it for us! They will come when we start believing in ourselves!

We were a winter destination in the 1890s. In the 1900s. In the 1940s and 1950s. When they started building bigger cruise ships, we started dabbling in the summer business and we took our eye off of the winter. But I am here to tell you: I have lived long enough to know [what] people like, who are around in the hospitality industry. And I know them from the locker room to the board room. Because there is no more important place in any organisation than a person who will keep your bathroom smelling good. And that is why I value that job to today. The first job I ever had; the most important job. And because I cleaned that general manager's shoes better than anybody else, he took me from the locker room into the dining room. And then I could play golf with Ewart Smith at eleven o'clock against the Bermuda's best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member DeCouto, I see you are on your feet. Would you like your 30 minutes?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And I take this is a maiden speech as well.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: It is indeed, and I am very appreciative of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The Speaker: Be mindful, Members, that this is a maiden speech.

You have your 30 minutes on the clock.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you. I hope I can bring some fraction of the energy of the former Member that spoke.

The Speaker: Well, you can dance around a little bit like he did. Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I may also dip into a little bit of history that perhaps a few people in this Chamber might remember. Perhaps not as much as the prior Member, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech as we would say should be an expression of the Government's vision and I wanted to talk about some of the influences behind my vision of how one ought to conduct themselves and carry out this duty as a Member of Parliament. And I will also provide a few specific comments on the Throne Speech later on.

Clearly, first of all, I want to thank everybody who has supported me on the journey to arrive up in this Chamber. As you said, Mr. Speaker, we all got here the same way. Perhaps some of us took a little bit of a steeper path, though. Some of us took a little more of the gentler path. Clearly the voters of Warwick North East, first and foremost, I want to thank them for what I would characterise as their resounding vote of confidence in me and providing me the privilege to represent them and work on their behalf, all of the voters in the constituency and all of the residents in the constituency and all Bermudians, Mr. Speaker.

But perhaps most especially, I would like to thank my wife, Ms. Rebecca Pitman, and my entire family. And I know many of the Members and most of the Members up here will know what that is about and how important the support of one's family is to get here.

The large number of volunteers in the constituency that came out to support me in all the different ways, I also want to thank them. Both for putting their faith in me and encouraging me and showing through the work that they did on my campaign that they had belief in the value that I could bring for the constituency and for the country.

And finally, of course, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my political colleagues for their encouragement, guidance and support on top of the political debates that we have had through which we have developed our shared vision.

Now if you do not mind, Mr. Speaker, I might look back at some of the historical roots of how I got here. I think that will help people understand my way of thinking and how I approach things.

I am going to refer first, Mr. Speaker, to one of your forebears. The Honourable former Speaker Ernest DeCouto, my uncle.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am very pleased to see his portrait has arrived upon the wall. For those of you who do not know (and Minister De Silva, I know you will appreciate this too and maybe some others in the Chamber), the first Portuguese Bermudian Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Uh-huh.

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So I think it is important to acknowledge history. I think it is important for Bermuda. It is important for me. And it is probably important for many people in Bermuda.

Speaking of Portuguese Bermudians, I would be remiss not to mention my cousin, the Honourable Trevor Moniz, former MP and Attorney General—

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I would suggest that my cousin Trevor's political career provides some very good examples of upholding principles and doing the right thing.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Perhaps not everybody would agree with what he wanted to do—

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But he was certainly known, for example, helping to obtain residency, long-term residency permits for Portuguese Bermudians at a time when they perhaps fell through the cracks of the various immigration systems.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Maiden speech. Maiden speech.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And as I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue, and I would like to acknowledge perhaps the most important examples that were set for me in my parents. They set a strong sense of right and wrong and being guided by principles—even when it was not easy or when it was inconvenient.

Let me refer first to my mother, the Honourable Ann Frith Cartwright DeCouto, former Deputy Premier. Known by many in Bermuda by her professional name, Ms. Cartwright. In fact, if you would refer to Ann DeCouto they might not know who you were talking about. So you had to understand the context. She was a fierce advocate. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, if she was on your side, you had nothing to worry about. Particularly for women, but all of those who needed help. So an example had been set.

Politically, Mr. Speaker, she was known for many things, but I would like to touch on two of them here, which I think illustrate the principles of leadership and integrity that I believe all of us public servants, particularly those in the Government, should as-

pire to and adhere to on a daily basis. I speak first of the banning of the fishpots. It was a decision that she took under great pressure and controversy, but which is now generally accepted to have been the right thing to do. But at the time, Mr. Speaker, not so easy.

I also refer to what I will call the McDonald's controversy in which my mother, along with my cousin Trevor, moved to block their own party's Cabinet Ministers and Leaders from using their position to open a franchise restaurant at a great political cost to themselves. I think, Mr. Speaker, we can all agree looking around our Island today that was a good thing to happen.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, when I speak of principles I must refer to my father, the late Roderick DeCouto. As we mature (within quotes you might say) life sometimes becomes a little more complicated. A few more grey areas. Especially in the political arena or even perhaps say in some tricky family situations. And in these cases I often lean on the memory of my father. Most especially his approach of honesty and acting with respect and integrity above all else. You think we should take those things for granted, Mr. Speaker, but my experience has shown me it is worth repeating and emphasising. And if I could bring some fraction of the principled approach demonstrated by those individuals into this Chamber and our work here, Mr. Speaker, I would be very glad for it.

So let me turn to some details about the plans of the Government and some of my views there. But first, when we talk about that, we have to understand the experience of the people in Bermuda. And my honourable colleague, the Opposition Leader, has laid out the issues facing people in Bermuda in quite some detail as well as many of my prior colleagues and even some of the Government MPs and Ministers.

I am going to give you an anecdote rather than repeat what you have heard, Mr. Speaker, that will perhaps explain the issues facing us and frankly what motivates me every day in this job of which, as many of you know, can perhaps be a bit taxing. So here is the scenario, Mr. Speaker. You knock on the door (you are out canvassing) and you are invited in for a glass of water. And your host starts to tell you about her family, what is going on. The experiences. And then you see the tears come to her eyes.

Now, I have had this experience more than once, unfortunately. Perhaps her elderly parents need care that neither she nor they can afford. Perhaps her siblings have moved away to another country for cost-of-living reasons. Her children are already overseas for education or have told her that they are leaving and are not coming back. And have said, Nana (or Mom), there is nothing for me here in Bermuda. And their view of the country's leadership is indifferent at best, or cynical and hostile at worst.

I have got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, those are the hardest days. When I leave those houses, I want to go home and throw the towel in because that is the

most heart-breaking experience. When our youth and our citizens are abandoning our own country because they feel they have no choice. That, Mr. Speaker, is what motivates me. And I know it motivates my colleagues. And that is why we come up here every day to challenge this Government to do better for the people of Bermuda. Because the Bermudian people are dying out. Our population is shrinking. What will be here in 10 years for our children? What will be here in 20 years for maybe my grandchildren? That is what motivates me, Mr. Speaker.

Now let me speak to some specific plans from the Government's Throne Speech which I will comment on. And I have to say, and I know it has been briefly commented on, but the thing that I was in fact agog about was the lack of any serious treatment of absentee voting. After this Government's cynical and anti-youth move to hold the election in mid-February, they then quickly pivoted and promised to implement absentee voting. So I thought it would be on the front page of the Throne Speech. But no. It is at the end, dumped in with a lot of other vague topics on constitutional reform with a promise of "fulsome consultation."

Mr. Speaker, we have seen how this Government's consultations go—or don't go, I should say. And if I was one of these young Bermudians, I would be insulted. I do not understand why this Government has not put absentee voting up front with a clear promise to implement it by the end of the year. And as it has been mentioned earlier in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance not only put money behind it in two successive budgets, there was draft legislation prepared. So I will look forward to seeing this implemented. But frankly if I do not see a budget on it and some draft legislation coming out pretty soon, I am going to have to tell every young Bermudian I know exactly what this Government thinks about them. And I would say, Mr. Speaker, it is an example of this Government's, what I would call, shallow and cynical approach across many areas.

Another example of that approach from this Government is . . . last year it ran out of cash. It could not pay bills. So it had to move money out of the sinking fund without any legislative scrutiny. So while they go around claiming so-called "sound fiscal management," they are busy racking up the net debt and having a cash crunch. I know what my father would have thought about that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking of confused thinking, this Government claims a so-called mandate with less than half of the vote. That is no mandate. I look forward to them adjusting their approach and backing up their claims of collaboration with actions and good faith. We will certainly create opportunities for this Government to demonstrate that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me touch on a topic we have already heard much about, but it bears repeating. The Government put price controls on the first page of their legislative agenda—and we have heard

the details of the issues. But let us just be clear. They do not work. I give you Cuba. I give you Venezuela. I give you the former Communist Eastern Bloc. And I am not going to get into anymore, but I cannot believe that that was on the first page of the Throne Speech. But absentee balloting was at the end—if it really even was in the Throne Speech.

Government wants powers to pry into the books and records of private businesses. And my colleague MP Cannonier spoke at length about that. I suggest that this Government has nowhere near the mandate or the credibility to propose anything like that and I suggest that they attend to the country's books, audits and financial procedures where they have previously demonstrated many failures and poor financial outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has also promised to reduce insurance costs. And let us just say outright, that is a major issue for people. Not just in Bermuda but around the world. Bermuda's is no exception. And to be honest, we will have to see what comes out of this but on face value it does not make a tonne of sense. The Government is proposing to let homeowners select low coverage options. But my experience is (and some quick research has demonstrated this is the case) that most homeowners are already free to do that, except in the case of certain mortgages, where of course the lender does not want the property to be at risk.

And generally, Mr. Speaker, anyone who has bought insurance knows that this is not recommended. And if you have had experience with a fire, a building burning down or a major roof issue, you will know exactly what I am talking about. It is not fun when the insurance company comes along and tells you that you are not going to be able to rebuild properly because you were underinsured.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is all par for the course for this Government because they like to take credit for "improving people's finances" when really they are just making ways to encourage people to move money from one pocket to the other, or even worse, they are undermining those people's own financial futures. Again, my colleague MP Robinson spoke about financial literacy and the pensions.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me conclude with two final topics. The Government is promising a Sovereign Wealth Fund, no doubt trying to create a feeling of hope and prosperity. But in reality, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has so many urgent needs and calls for capital that in my view there will not be any meaningful wealth fund until years after this Government is long gone.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we heard today about initiatives to retain and attract public servants through raising compensation and back pay. But without getting too much into the details, we know an important part of attracting and retaining talent is culture and leadership. And frankly we often hear from civil serv-

ants about issues with culture and leadership which (as you know) start from the top. So I would urge this Government that received less than half of the vote of the people that bothered to show up to vote to remember that leadership is not position. It is how you carry yourself day-to-day. It is how you speak to people. It is how you demonstrate principles and show respect.

So, Mr. Speaker, the ball is currently in this Government's court. They should know that we will hold their feet to the fire. We will demand results and accountability on behalf of the people of Bermuda.

Now I am just looking at the clock, Mr. Speaker. I think you will see that I like to be to the point. So I hope I can continue that for the sake of the other Members for the rest of this session.

Thank you for that time.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you. I appreciated some of your history lesson because I was around for some of that time. So let me just add to a point that you made when you pointed out the first Portuguese Speaker. You do realise he became the first Portuguese Speaker because the PLP elected him to Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: That is the first Speaker that the PLP elected. So make sure the history book is correct on that one.

An Hon. Member: Ah-ha!

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, I have cautioned you that, but I certainly appreciate the reminder.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: All right, thank you. And for those who don't know, go do your research. But that was the first Speaker that the PLP elected.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Members, with that said, we are now past the magical hour. We started this debate at 2:58. We are now at 9:58 which means that we go into that period where it drops from 30 minutes to 20 minutes for each speech. So the next person starting will have 20 minutes on the clock. I will adjust the clock to a 20-minute window. And, oops, going up rather than down. Look at that. And we have 20 minutes on the clock, and I believe the next speaker is also making a maiden speech, if I am correct.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I am.

The Speaker: Okay, Minister Lightbourne is making her maiden speech, Members. So conduct yourselves accordingly for a maiden speech.

Minister, you have your 20 minutes.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This evening I rise to make this first contribution in this Honourable House and deliver my maiden speech. And I do so with heartfelt gratitude, and that gratitude for the people of constituency 14, Devonshire North West for them trusting me to represent on their behalf. And because politics, Mr. Speaker, we know is actually at its core about people. So, Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to them for their confidence, for them welcoming me in their homes and for sharing their frustrations, their hopes and their desires for a representative who listens and delivers and pledges to do more than that. And that is what I pledge to do on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, the recent election also presented options and so I commend those who too put their hat in the ring because our democracy is only stronger because of them. And at every doorstep that I pledged to be different, I also led to be compassionate, to be courageous and to also bring the clarity that they may have [been] seeking.

I came into politics, not because it was a dream that I chased, but rather as something that I no longer felt I could sit on the sidelines and not become more involved. And so I am a proud Dock Hill daughter and granddaughter of "Pommy" Lightbourne who was a barber in his community. And he chose to do that as his way of showing service because he felt a sense of duty. And so I too follow in his footsteps, feeling a sense of duty, Mr. Speaker, because of him.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also acknowledge my predecessor, MP Caines, for his sacrifice as well. And I thank him for his service to the same people of Devonshire North West, and follow in his footsteps and seek to also build on that relationship.

Mr. Speaker, I am the newly appointed Minister of Home Affairs, and I step into this role with a sense of purpose and urgency of action because our Government has been clear in its commitment to tackling the high cost of living. This burden that we know is affecting every single household, every business and every senior living on this Island. The Ministry is now tasked with this singular mission: to bring down the cost of living. That includes cost of food, energy and essential goods, because the current living situation is untenable and it diminishes hope, restricts opportunity and erodes dignity. But the burden is not just financial. It actually is moral because we recognise that these challenges are vast and interconnected. No

Ministry can solve them alone, but we can do them together. And why we are taking further steps to ensure that business operations and those in our ecosystem, contrary to what Members may have suggested in this House this evening, that facilitating greater clarity through engagement with our businesses is actually okay. Because if we think about the principles of real change, it only comes when we work with our ecosystem, rowing in the same direction.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition's Throne Speech Reply suggested that they want to weather the storm. But to weather that storm you must first have the confidence to confront the winds that created it. And those winds, Mr. Speaker, are not accidental. They are the result of foundational and systemic injustices that underpin many of our industry, our roots, our food service systems, energy markets and our economy. And so as a result, Mr. Speaker, when there is only one option and no diversity of access, that is not efficiency. That is actually economic exclusion.

We must create a fair framework where competition exists, local entrepreneurs can thrive, and consumers are protected. That must be our unwavering goal. So when we talk about building a foundation to weather the storm, we must acknowledge that some of those foundations that we are inheriting were never meant to shelter all of us. They were meant to preserve privilege, not promote equity. So, yes, Mr. Speaker, we are building. And we are building a people-first foundation. If we are serious about building a fairer Bermuda, then we must, too, commit to building a new foundation that is, one, inclusive, transparent and for the people.

Many of these foundations have been designed to preserve privilege and not promote the same equity. Regulation is not the enemy of progress. It is how we ensure that our children will have to endure the inequalities and exclusions that their parents and grandparents experienced. Regulation protects people. It builds fairness, fosters competition and ensures transparency. So therefore it is essential, Mr. Speaker, to build a Bermuda that is not only better but more just, more stable and more sustainable.

To meet this challenge, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Home Affairs has driven forward in action and seeks to promote four key pillars to address inflation and the price of essential goods, stabilise energy costs and advance Bermuda's clean energy transition. Strengthening consumer protections across key industries, reforming regulatory oversights to ensure that these gains are permanent.

Stabilising energy costs promotes a more stable Bermuda. And in 2019 this administration introduced our integrated resource plan which developed a partnership with energy providers and regulatory authority, and we must move forward with that energy future. The roadmap is clear. We must reduce this energy reliance on fossil fuels, stabilise these costs

for Bermudians and advance infrastructure development.

Transitions like this happen around the world and they must be tackled systemically. We recognise that Bermudians will not feel the change on day one and the instances of businesses who operate businesses based on profit will hear that when the Government wants to install these principles of fairness, it will do all that it can to safeguard their earnings. And we recognise that that will happen. So therefore on behalf of the Bermudian people we will ensure that long-term stability for future generations.

We are amending the Electricity Act to ensure greater transparency and limit these recoverable expenses, currently being able to be recovered. We are demanding efficiency and accountability from providers because that is what the people deserve and that is what they have asked for us to do on their behalf.

We are also strengthening consumer protections because too often Bermudians feel unsupported when they feel as if they are taking advantage by monopolies, inconsistent pricing and unclear rules. So therefore, Mr. Speaker, this must change.

The Government has already shown progress, and they have shown what is possible. Under PLP leadership, we have increased senior pensions, introduced Bermuda's first minimum wage, expanded child [day] care allowance, reduced taxes for 86 per cent of working Bermudians and built over 70 affordable homes. But we are not finished.

An Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, we are not!

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: And in our new Throne Speech, this is the evidence of the work that we are prepared to do.

The country should feel confident knowing that we are willing to evolve. So, in creating a Ministry focused on a mandate to lower the cost of living, that is us showing and evidencing that we have heard them. And we are inviting our stakeholders, every Bermudian, to join us in this journey. Because this journey is not just about governance. It is not just about policy. It is about the people that we were elected to serve.

It is also about restoring fairness, rebuilding trust and ensuring that Bermuda is not only a place where we live, but a place that we can all thrive. We remain unwavering in our commitment to build a fairer Bermuda for all.

Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, and also in view of the time, I also include a quote from [Dr.] Martin Luther King[, Jr.], who reminded us, "As we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back." We cannot turn back [from] the people who have elected us and have asked us to implement these principles of fairness into

our regulations and into our everyday business-as-usual operations, because implementing enhanced financial education programmes helps Bermudians. It gives them the tools and allows them to make empowered choices.

We are strengthening consumer protections and we know, and have heard, that Bermudians have felt that they are unsupported to this point. So we will do everything in our power, Mr. Speaker, as a Government to ensure that every single day as we come and carry out the people's business that we will do so with them in mind, that we will consider them and their children and their grandchildren, because generations deserve to have a better future than those who have passed before us.

So, we know that progress is possible. We know that it will take a collective and concerted effort, and we invite the Opposition to actually work in step with us to actually do this for the benefit of Bermuda and Bermudians. We are each representing our respective constituencies, and those constituencies have those people who are relying on us to work together for that objective.

So, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, as we carry out this mandate as the Government and its Throne Speech this year. Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

MP King, I see you have risen to your feet. I assume you would like your 20 minutes.

Mr. Robert King: I would, indeed, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mr. Robert King: Good evening Honourable Members and listening public.

In the Throne Speech it stated that the mission was for a fairer, more affordable and stable Bermuda. And all in this Honourable House would agree that this is something that we would all hope to aspire to and make happen by whatever means possible, legally, to make that happen. However, there appears to be a disconnect in terms of what the vision is and the mechanisms and process towards the achievement of those goals. And that is where the Opposition and the current Administration seem to fall out, because the devil, essentially, is in the details in terms of how we achieve the goals that we have set to meet the needs of our community.

I will use the following situation as an example. I will ask a question. What is the difference between a cybersecurity attack and a drowning on a beach? Well, essentially, according to the current Administration, there is no difference because the cyberattack happened in September 2023. A report was written in November 2023, and to date we still do

not know what the recommendations of the report were, understanding that there was a serious breach of persons' private information and yet we have not heard to date what the breach was and how we have been negatively impacted.

With regard to a drowning of a person on a beach, we knew that it was an issue beforehand over the past couple of years, and we knew that we needed lifeguards. And yet, disappointingly, when I came here today, I learned that despite the fact that we have cruise ships here, we still have no lifeguards and apparently that's okay. How can it possibly be okay when we are talking about matters of national security as it relates to the protection of persons' private details and information and the loss of life on a beach? And we essentially say *we will get to that*.

We are talking about a fairer Bermuda. But how can we have a fairer Bermuda when people are not safe? How do you explain when a young footballer was killed on 14 May—almost two years ago—and to date there has been no prosecution of the person accused of being responsible for that? And then we also—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, we are here with the Governor's Throne Speech. I appreciate the tone and tenor of the Opposition thus far, but the Honourable Member would know, and this is not his first time speaking, that the Government is not responsible for prosecutions and investigation of crimes. So the Honourable Member, knowing he was . . . security services should withdraw that as an attack against the Government as we are debating the Government's agenda versus the Opposition's agenda.

The Speaker: I appreciate the point that the Premier made in that the—

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: —conduct of those things cannot be carried out by Government.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I am speaking about is essentially our attitudes as it relates to the safety and security of persons in this community. What we will accept is that we are in a crisis, as was mentioned by the Honourable Member on this side of the House, with young persons who are using violence to deal with conflict situations, who are much younger than they were before, who do not have any fear of acting out with violence towards each other in school and outside of school.

And there does not appear to be any reduction of this behaviour or a strategic plan with the teeth to reduce the instance of these serious crimes.

We understand that the police service is underfunded . . . not underfunded, understaffed. It is an established fact which was mentioned here previously. And yet we send them overseas to Montserrat to help out with a St. Patrick's Day celebration, a sergeant and two officers. I would think—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Well, well . . . wait, wait, wait, wait before you rise to that.

Is there not a [parliamentary] question that has been put down around that?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Yes, I believe there is a question that has been submitted. So, I would ask you to leave it there. You have already submitted a question, so leave it there.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is late in the day and I am not feeling too well, so . . .

The Speaker: No problem.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: I will. I will. I have got more to offer.

So, getting back to the issue of youth violence and the increase in serious crimes, we accept that that is an issue. We know that adverse childhood experiences if these children do not get the requisite treatment services are going to continue down the path towards a life of criminality. And at the same time, in the Throne Speech, the one in November, we talked about the CMIT programme, Cross Ministry Intervention Team, with the Department of Child and Family Services, whose mandate was to work with families and basically break the cycle, provide services to the families for the risk issues to address and reduce the likelihood of a youth and their family being dependent on the system.

It is unfortunate. I have learned over the last month that that programme is not operational despite the fact that we recognise that there is a serious and pressing need for it. The families who need the help the most are not getting the help necessary so that they can provide for their families a safe environment so that the [children] can do well and exit the system.

So, it appears that although we talk about the issue of violence in the community we become desensitised to it because we have not done anything meaningful in terms of a strategic plan with specific

targets, with specific guidelines, with performance measures to address this problem. Just today I got another video of a fight in the City of Hamilton. How do we explain this? I would think that there would be an increased police presence maybe even a consideration of a curfew or something. But this needs to be taken as a national emergency and something fundamental needs to be done to address this. Otherwise it will continue.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Well, I suspect that is going to happen.

I am suggesting that when we are talking about a fairer Bermuda we need to do everything in our power to make it safer first. Otherwise, we are not going to have a fairer Bermuda at all. Tell that to the families who have lost their [children] through violence. Tell them that we care, but they continue to die and continue to get hurt. We need to do better for the community.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

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

MP Famous, would you like to have your 20 minutes on the clock?

Mr. Christopher Famous: Good evening, Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and most importantly the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, I had to look up this word earlier because I—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Hold on, hold on. Relax.

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I would like to look up—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: It's your own fleas that bite you the hardest.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, the word is "revisionist." And I said, *I know that word from somewhere, but I do not know the definition. So let me look it up because, you know, my Berkeley English ain't that great.*

A revisionist is someone who examines and tries to change existing beliefs about how events hap-

pened or what their importance or meaning is. Revisionist.

Mr. Speaker, I won't call any names, but a little earlier we were treated to someone attempting to rewrite history.

Hon. E. David Burt: One hundred per cent!

An Hon. Member: Who was that?

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, you know, it is fortuitous (that's the word, fortuitous, right?) Happy Sabbath, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

An Hon. Member: For-tu-it-ous.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Thank you, Berkeleyite.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher Famous: It is fortuitous that this is March 2025. Does anyone remember where they were nine years ago?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

An Hon. Member: I know what you are doing.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Does anyone remember where thousands of Bermudians of all ages were nine years ago?

Hmm. People gave up going to work. People took their children out of school. Grannies came away from watching "The Young and the Restless." Why? Because they knew—not they felt, they knew—what was being proposed was a threat not only to them but to their children and their grandchildren, Mr. Speaker. They knew that they lived through the era when persons were coming here and after three years were given status in order to preserve the vote for the United Bermuda Party, which someone—a revisionist—was a member of.

Mr. Speaker, thousands of Bermudians surrounded that House up the hill. Thousands of Bermudians stood in lines, soup lines almost, provided by BIU [Bermuda Industrial Union], because they were not leaving their posts. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because they knew that the proposal was not about stabilising the economy. It was not about doing what is right. It was a proposal that was put out the day after the OBA lost a bye-election. They knew what they were going to do and they failed . . . no, they refused to say it before the bye-election, but the day after they took a beating in Devonshire they said, *Guess what? We're giving out status.* So, there is no other way for people to feel than this about a vote.

When they put their propaganda out, Mr. Speaker, when they put their . . . how can I put it? I don't want to say propaganda . . . their information papers out, they purposely used persons of colour to say, *See? These are the nice people that are going to get status.* Well, the statistics proved that was not true! So when people come up here and attempt revision history, or revise history, let us not forget what thousands of Bermudians did nine years ago.

Mr. Speaker, let me move on, because this individual attempts to say numerous times that population increase would lower prices. *Population increase would lower prices.* Sort of like trickle-down effect would help you, but it doesn't. Mr. Speaker, do you know why no population increase has gone out? You and I went to the Cayman Islands, Mr. Speaker, seven years ago. And what were the *real* Caymanians saying? *This is going to hurt us. We can't afford to live in our own country. The price of housing is going up. We have to compete with others who are getting paid minimum wage.*

Mr. Speaker, when you and I went to the Cayman Islands in 2018, along with past Member Susan Jackson (so let us be clear, it was a bipartisan trip) the population was less than 60,000. Does anyone know what the population of the Cayman Islands is right now? Nearly 100,000 persons. Nearly. And just yesterday I had an interview on the radio with a young Caymanian who is running in their election and he said that his generation has given up even being able to buy a house because they have given away so much status that the persons who are gaining status have bought up all of the property and subdivided amongst themselves building luxury units that the regular Caymanian cannot afford.

So, when we go back in history and look up the *Royal Gazette* and we see persons who were proponents of saying let's be like the Cayman Islands, that is why thousands of Bermudians stood up on that hill, Mr. Speaker. That is why.

Mr. Speaker, moving on. As spoken to earlier by Honourable Jamahl Simmons, there were some recent elections in some of our sister Overseas Territories—Anguilla, Turks and Caicos, and next month the Cayman Islands.

The Speaker: Montserrat.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Montserrat as well.

Mr. Speaker, in Anguilla the Government was actually doing a lot of infrastructure work and so on and so forth. But they forgot the people. And they got wiped out. In the Turks and Caicos it was the reverse. They did so much for the people. But what did the people do? They re-elected them, Mr. Speaker. My point is to say that human nature is universal. If you have a government that brags about the fiscal side but does not do anything for the people, they get wiped out. If you have a government that does for the peo-

ple, maybe not perfect, the people keep them in power.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about absentee ballots. In that eight-page platform that the OBA put out in November of last year . . . was it November? October?

An Hon. Member: September.

Mr. Christopher Famous: September, sorry. Thank you, Honourable Member. Just before the bye-election. There was nothing in there about absentee ballots. So, if it was so important, why did it not have it in there at that time? They only raised it once. Okay. But the students raised it. That was the only time they raised it. Right?

Any point of order?

No? Great.

So, Mr. Speaker, yes, here is the thing. A month ago I had a conversation one-on-one with the Premier of the Cayman Islands about absentee ballots. To those who question what you call value of our connections with the Caribbean islands, that is what it brings, one-on-one conversations with fellow leaders. So, the Honourable Juliana O'Connor[-Connolly] explained how their ballot system works. So we are already talking, a sister island, about how to do absentee ballots. So for the Honourable Member earlier to say *Oh, until I see this in the budget, or until I see draft legislation, it's not real.*

But it's real, sir.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing I want to talk about is affordable housing, which is sort of an oxymoron sometimes. The reality is that this Government, which the people re-elected a month ago, has provided 770 units of affordable housing. In the last two years alone we have renovated 70 units. We are currently renovating almost 100 new units. I shouldn't say renovating. Some we are renovating, some are being built. Some in St. David's, some in St. George's, some up in Harmony Club, in Paget, some up the country.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that is still not enough. So when the budget comes and there is money allocated for brand new units, I expect the Opposition to fully support it. I expect them to scrutinise it. That is their job. But to sit there and say that the Government is not doing this, or to write a whole couple of pages of stuff, some of which makes no sense whatsoever, is . . . I don't know what their point is. But my point, Mr. Speaker, is, yes, their job is to scrutinise. Yes, their job is to offer criticism. Yes, their job is to collaborate. So when we come next month, or in May, with our budget to build more new affordable housing for our people of Bermuda, I fully expect the Shadow Minister of Housing and Municipalities to be in full agreement versus an attempt to revise history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Member . . . Mr. Simmons, would you like to take your 20 minutes at this point?

Mr. Scott Simmons: I would, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Speaker: Go right ahead, sir.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I will begin where the Honourable Member just left off. But before I do, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the Honourable Member and to mention the time that he has put in on the Caribbean connection throughout our entire group in the work that he has done. I think it is important. We do not often give credit where credit is due. And I think that the Honourable Member Famous needs to be commended for the work that he put in that space. And I think that he has put significant time. He has brought up a lot that has assisted us in understanding our connection to our Caribbean neighbours and our brothers and our sisters. And I do believe that that is an honourable thing that he has done.

Also, Mr. Speaker, if you will indulge me, I just want to take this opportunity, this being the first opportunity since the last election for me to get on my feet and for me to be able to commend and to thank those voters in constituency 32 who voted for me to remain in this House and represent their interests.

Ironically, the circumstances in constituency 32 were island-wide, an island-wide consistency in that a significant number of voters who have supported the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party and who have supported me, a significant number of them did not come out to the polls. It says a lot about me.

An Hon. Member: You're welcome, sir.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Thank you.

It says a lot about our Government. And I do believe that here is a lot of work to be done in that space and that is the reason why we are here in this House today discussing Throne Speech 2025.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The election is over. It is over. The voters have spoken. They have spoken very loudly and they have been clear. Mr. Speaker, we have enjoyed throughout politics in Bermuda Government and Opposition who have had their share of the electorate. This is a time in history, Mr. Speaker, and it will inform the way in which we conduct our business in this House and it will inform the way in which we go forward in dealing with the people's business. But, Mr. Speaker, a significant amount . . . and I will specify in my constituency as we discuss the Throne Speech where I did not enjoy the majority in my constituency. I enjoyed the majority of those who voted; but I did not enjoy the fullness of the electorate's confidence in constituency 32 where a signifi-

cant number either did not vote for me, or they did not arrive at the polls.

I have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to acknowledge that. And in humility I recognise that I must move forward from there. I must determine what it is that made that result the way that it was and then move forward recognising that I could do things better. I could do things differently. Of those who voted, or those who did come out, yes, they did vote for me to return as their Member of Parliament. And I appreciate them for that. But I am mindful that a large percentage of my support—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Thank you, Honourable Minister. I do not wish to overstress this, or to stress out my colleagues. But I will make this clear. I believe it is important for us to be mindful of that. But it does not preclude us from governing.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of that I have made a recommitment on how I manage my affairs in constituency 32, how I get out and deal with my supporters because I do believe that they overwhelm any other electoral group in my constituency. And I do have their support. However, this time around they unfortunately did not, as I skirt around the issue that the majority did not vote for me in my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech speaks specifically, and then . . . I take that back. It speaks generally and then highlights certain things that are the result of our platform as the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party. And then it speaks to the Throne Speech issues that come thereafter. Mr. Speaker, there is a sequence of events that takes place. And the Government's psyche and the Government's thinking is that if we express it through our platform that that platform will inform the Throne Speech, and then the Throne Speech . . . or I should say the budget then begins to die, begins to break down and begins to put money and begins to put value to the platforms and programmes that we have worked on all this time. And I do believe that this particular Throne Speech 2025 does indeed address that, and it supports that.

I realise that it is not going to hold everything that we would want to see in 2025 into 2026. But it is an understanding. And I said that the Government recognises that the mandate . . . there may be an absence of complete mandate, but there are sufficient numbers in this House for us to be able to pass legislation so that we are able to support our thought processes, what we believe the country wishes and move forward from there. It would be irresponsible for us to simply stop on the fact that the majority of Bermudians did not necessarily support us. We have a responsibility to move forward from that and begin the process of moving forward as a government but also realising that we still have a responsibility to govern.

I take it back. Mr. Speaker, in my humble opinion, I believe that lessons have been learned. Others may feel as though those lessons have not been learned yet and there are lessons yet to be learned. I do believe that there are. But I do also feel that the Government has demonstrated an understanding of what took place on 18 February, and that we have now set an agenda. I heard comments made that there is no plan. I heard individuals saying that the Bermuda Government, the Progressive Labour Party Government, seems to be flying all for nothing. There is nothing behind it.

Mr. Speaker, for the eighth year, not quite eight years, but for the amount of time, almost eight years, that I have sat in this Honourable House, that I have participated in debates and the time that I have assisted in passing Bills in this House, I have watched Opposition and Government focus in on the people of Bermuda and pass laws that benefit them. We have not always gotten it right. But we have worked, Mr. Speaker, to serve the people of Bermuda. It does not serve . . . I will repeat it: It does not serve if we are not prepared to accept that the election is gone and now we must govern. It is not good enough to continue on the same vein of the past.

We have historically spoken in this House for the last eight years that I have sat here and we have highlighted all of this. The past has come to repeat itself, with some Members returning to this House, and reminding us of the past. We have to live with that. But we also have to live with the fact that this Government has not done absolutely nothing for the entire time that we have governed, since I have been in here. I believe that we have done so. But we also have to acknowledge that there is a lot of work left to be done. But we also have to acknowledge that that work can only be done if we acknowledge that the Government of the day and the Opposition have to come to some agreement on how we get there. I realise it is 25 [minutes] to 11:00.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Simmons: I realise it is 25 [minutes] to 11:00.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Simmons: I am saying that the people of Bermuda expect that we will—

[Laughter and general uproar]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, my colleagues continue to interrupt. I do not appreciate it. This is an important speech. It is a good one.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Simmons: We have—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is 25 [minutes] to 11:00. I did not realise it until you said it.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, in order for us to achieve the agenda of the people of Bermuda who have cast a cautionary note to the Government that *we want you to govern, but we also want you to be more focused in on what we are doing.* And we can appreciate that. And I think all of my colleagues on this side of the House recognise that voice and that has already been spoken. It has been said. We got it. And we are now going to move forward in a way that best benefits the people of Bermuda.

This new Throne Speech highlights just that. It lays out what we believe is the beginning. Now, Honourable Members on the opposite side understand that this is an understanding on this side of the House of the new realities that currently exist in Bermuda. This new reality is not lost on us. If it is not lost on me in constituency 32, where I am big enough to say, big enough to accept responsibility, this Government has demonstrated on numerous occasions that we are big enough to acknowledge the mistakes of the past and to also move forward in a way that best benefits Bermuda.

The argument will be, *Well, the devil is in the details.* And then of course, *It's in the performance.* And that whether or not we will be able to do the things and be the things that we are. We are days, nearly a month, since the last election. We have new members of the Cabinet, we have difference positions, those who are supporting Ministers, those who are not, those who are working in other ministries. So there is going to be a bit of moving around. But no one in this House, especially on this side of the House who is unaware of the consequences of inaction, the consequences of not understanding what took place on 18 February and then moving forward from there. So we have to accept that, and we have to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I have every confidence in my colleagues and in this Honourable House, those on the backbench and those on the frontbench. Some of us spent more time on the backbench or on the frontbench; some of us are still on the backbench. But as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility to support each other and move forward in a way that best benefits Bermuda.

I realise, as a footnote, that the Opposition and those throughout Bermuda is a mechanism by which one absolutely must oppose. I got it. But the difficulty of it all is that we have to find that common ground, we have to keep it honourable, and we have

to stay away from the personal attacks, and we have to keep it in a way that benefits the people of Bermuda through criticism and through active expression of concerns of the behaviour of a government and it has to be positive. That is the only way we are going to get through this, because the people of Bermuda . . . and I started out the way I did, both in humility, acknowledging that things have to change and we must do things differently, but, Mr. Speaker, it is also an acknowledgement that the people of Bermuda expect both different from us and better.

I believe we are committed to it. I believe everyone in this House is committed to it. I believe we can achieve it, and we have to, because the stakes are too high. Each of us individually represents an industry in this country. *Each and every one of us represents an industry in this country.* And we speak to that industry. And there are elements of responsibility. Because that is the case, we have to deliver for all of those industries that we represent. And, as MP Famous would tell us, the Caribbean is watching us. They are watching what we are doing, duplicating what we are doing, overtaking us or falling behind.

Our ability to effectively manage this country, manage Bermuda, depends on us acknowledging where the mistakes are, acknowledging the shortfalls, acknowledging how we can do things better, but also acknowledging when we do things right and supporting those things that we are doing as the Government. It is no longer good enough for us to just simply criticise. I recognise how one can take personal the things that you feel are being done against you. And you feel as though you are being let down and that this is really no one is looking out for you. The people of Bermuda feel that way. The Bermudian people feel as if no one is looking out for their best interests. But what we have to acknowledge and what we have to do as the Government is to give them hope and to give them a feeling that they are connected to us.

I heard earlier on today from a Member of this House that he felt that the Government was not connected to its people. I have not known a time since I have served in the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party that there were not elements of concern, that there were not elements of interest, that there were not elements of not working for the people of Bermuda. I have not known that. So where there might be some shortfalls and slippage, in the majority the Progressive Labour Party has worked for the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, we have a big job in this House to get done. There is a heck of a lot of legislation to look out for, and there is a lot of want in our community that must be met. We can only achieve this together. We can fight. We can speak historically and hold up debate. But we must be seen to be working for the people of Bermuda and ensuring that their best interests are being met, and that that is the focus of our Government.

I want to take this opportunity on behalf of my constituency, and on behalf of us, that where we have fallen down and where we may not have covered in our constituency, that we are committed to refocus our efforts on making sure that their needs are met, that we hold our clinics, that we take care of the requests that they make, that we work hard. And when we cannot do it, we tell them. I commit, and my committee commits in constituency 32, to do just that.

It is my hope, and I do believe our Government, the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party Government, understands what took place, understands the politics of it all, and is prepared and if not, has already said *I got it. We understand it, and we want to move forward for the betterment of Bermuda.* So that we can, at the very minimum, offset the lack of hope, the lack of comfort and the lack of commitment existing in our community today. I hope that we can. I believe that we can. I think we can be positive in this House. And I do believe that we can deliver for the people of Bermuda. And I do believe that today we can all commit in this House to satisfying them working together and passing some good stuff in this session and the session to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Simmons.

Would any other Member like to make a contribution at this time?

MP Campbell, you have your 20 minutes.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to start out by thanking the voters of constituency 9 who exercised their right to vote in the most recent election on 18 February, and also thank those who exercised their right not to come out and vote.

Mr. Speaker, I will begin near the end of our [Reply] to the Throne Speech where the Opposition Leader commented, "Underlying all of these specific issues—the economy, education, health, housing, public safety—is a more fundamental problem: a crisis of governance and accountability. Government's first job is to govern well: to manage public affairs competently, keep its promises, and be accountable to the people." With me saying that, I appreciate the comments of the Honourable Member who spoke before me, his forthrightness and his honesty. I found him to be consistent in his approach to his responsibilities and his comments in this House. So, thank you, Honourable Member Scott Simmons.

Mr. Speaker, the PLP has been the Government since 2017. And throughout its tenure as Government has enjoyed a healthy majority. Therefore, there is no reason why many of the provisions in the current Throne Speech, which also formed part of the 2017 Throne Speech, were not, or have not been

completed. They failed to address these issues for the past seven-plus years and have no one else to blame but themselves for not getting the job done.

Speaking as a parent with two children in the educational system, the mess better known as "Education Reform" will negatively impact our children well beyond 2025, having spent millions of dollars and still have an incomplete process. Health care reform continues with no definitive end in sight whilst Bermudians, in particular our seniors, struggle with the high cost, and Bermudians must endure receiving medical care in the hallways of the emergency department of our one and only hospital.

The cost of living in general places Bermuda at the top of the list of the most expensive jurisdictions. Failure to address much-needed immigration reform in a meaningful way, reform that is needed to address our ageing population, our shrinking workforce, increasing emigration, and the creation of a growing and thriving economy. Failing infrastructure, bridges, Band-Aid approach, traffic lights still blinking, the traffic lights we were told have been on the Island for a month or more. Our roads, government buildings falling into disrepair.

The Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour spoke of what he said to his constituents on the doorstep about all of the wonderful things the Government has done. He indicated that he was sure, and I stand to be corrected if I get the ultimate gist of what he meant incorrectly, but I believe he said his colleagues in other constituencies were doing the same. However, Mr. Speaker, I wonder if when on the doorsteps the PLP candidates also spoke of the failures that I just outlined, as the Government their failure in addressing these issues that have impacted negatively on the people of this country costing them financially in repairs to cars, the high cost of food, the high cost of electricity, the high cost of health care.

In spite of the Government's claims, many are barely making ends meet. The Opposition Leader and I last week after the delivery of the Throne Speech had the opportunity later that afternoon to speak to a member of the public who advised us that within the next year, year and a half, they will be gone. They are moving to another jurisdiction where they believe they have a better chance of having a higher quality of life.

Bermuda needs more than a redistribution of wealth through the tax system. We need significant progress to the economy, providing jobs so that Bermudians can become financially dependent and less dependent on government handouts. The Minister of Economy and Labour said providing long-term residents with status does not increase the population. And I agree with him. But it may encourage others to come here, invest in Bermuda, and make Bermuda their home, thereby having an indirect effect of increasing the population.

The minimum wage, \$16.40, is a good thing for both Bermudians and our guest workers. I would

like to know, however, the data around how many Bermudians versus unskilled guest workers are benefitting from the implementation of the minimum wage. The Minister also mentioned the unemployment rate being at its lowest in years. However, in order to fully appreciate this, again, data is required as to how many of those who have emigrated were unemployed or underemployed in the months for the period prior to emigrating.

Mr. Speaker, this PLP Government has and continues to improve or broaden the social safety net for our most vulnerable. That is a great thing. Mr. Speaker, this PLP Government has and continues to improve the labour laws protecting the workers of this country. That is also a good thing.

[Laughter and general uproar]

Mr. Vance Campbell: But you know there is going to be a “but”!

[Laughter]

Mr. Vance Campbell: I will, however, Mr. Speaker reiterate the concern I expressed during last year’s Throne Speech and that is that each improvement has a cost to either the Government or business. And there must be balance, particularly when it comes to businesses.

Mr. Speaker, we must sort out the issues that are negatively impacting the BTA [Bermuda Tourism Authority] or shut it down. Tourism, the hospitality industry deserves better. We cannot overstate the importance of tourism from a jobs perspective. The jobs provided by tourism helps create and maintain our middleclass, a middleclass that is currently an endangered species. This industry also provides jobs for many unskilled workers while still providing a potential for growth and promotion.

Mr. Speaker, I support amendments to the Tourism Investment Act 2017, extending benefits to smaller guest houses. Mr. Speaker, I was also extremely pleased to receive an invitation to an information session on a skilled trades apprenticeship training programme taking place next Tuesday, the 25th, at Bermuda College. It is from 6:00 to 7:30. So, Mr. Opposition Leader, I will not be at caucus. I believe the trades remain an avenue for many Bermudians to work and enjoy a good quality of life. And I will support any initiative to revive the interest of our young people in the trades.

Mr. Speaker, the Chamber called for further discussion and clarity around expanding the powers of the Cost of Living Commission to investigate and introduce fair pricing controls. This adds compliance costs that squeezes the profits of businesses. These businesses employ Bermudians. They donate to charities and they sponsor sporting events. They also expressed concern about the broadened regulatory

authority’s role in overseeing market concentration and pricing and growth. Regulated and unregulated sectors are concerned that they might stifle business flexibility and innovation. They also expressed concern about a more timely tabling of economic information and reporting.

We had warnings at the recent Risk Summit about AI potentially taking entry level jobs in the industry off Island. Expressions of concerns about the increasing cost of living in Bermuda and international business also has issues with finding housing for their recruits. So, it is affecting the level of employment on the Island as well. We were directly told that some of these recruits say thank you or no thank you because they cannot find housing. So, they will not be coming to Bermuda.

My last point, Mr. Speaker, is that in Bermuda we know a thing or two about storms. And the key to surviving a storm, the key to minimising the impact that a storm will have on you and your household is preparation before the storm hits. So when you look at our document presented here today, Building a Foundation to Weather the Storm, this is not doom and gloom. This is actually quite positive. It is actually saying that if we build our foundation before the storm, we do not have anything to worry about when the storm comes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Premier. How are you this evening?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I am doing fine, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good. You have your 20 minutes on the clock.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay. All right.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to do something that I don’t really do because as we have had several Members make their maiden speeches today, now that I am in the age of that senior bracket, you never know when it’s going to be your last speech. So, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of my constituents who continue to have faith in me to represent them in constituency 29.

I would also like to thank my executive, the people of Bermuda, and our beloved PLP delegates for the decision they made just recently with regard to my Deputy [Premier] leadership.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you know the old saying about crying wolf. Well, you would know that last November my colleague, Mr. Kim Swan, the Honourable Member, reminded us that the Opposition stated 17

times in the last [Reply] to the Throne Speech—which was only two months ago—they said it 17 times, “call an election.” So, we called the election. And when we called the election, not only were they not ready, but they then went on to this campaign of, *Oh, we’re pulling surprises*. And they talked about the absentee ballot and all these types of things they talked about after the election was called. They said we were pulling a stunt. But clearly, Mr. Speaker, they were not ready.

Now, I do not want to spend too much time on absentee voting because it is in our platform, although some Members opposite do not like the positioning of it. I always say sometimes the most important things are saved for last. But that’s my opinion.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they made a lot of noise about absentee balloting, but if I remember correctly, I think they were in Government for about five years . . . Oh, no, you were not that long, were you? You were cut short. It was about four years, four and a half years. And the Honourable Member . . . Who was it? One of the Members opposite said that they expect with all the noise, and with us mentioned in the platform . . . I think it was the Honourable Member DeCouto said that we should have it done by the end of the year. But he also went on to say that when the One Bermuda Alliance was in Government for that short period, they spent two years getting it all ready. And it was ready to roll. And they did not get it done. But then he says we should get it done within this year, Mr. Speaker. So, you know, that is what they do. They say one thing in this side of their mouth, and they say something else in the other side of their mouth, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the Honourable Member Cannonier. [He] had a lot to say and [was] quite vocal tonight, very vocal. And he mentioned the units, not far from here, Alexander and Prospect. And he said when he was the Minister of Public Works the water was coming out yellow.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: When he was the Minister, he said for two years. So, what . . . what . . . what . . . What happened?

An Hon. Member: Still yellow.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: What . . . what . . . what . . . happened? Why did he not fix it?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh yes. Looks like we are going to have some action.

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

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member, obviously, [intentionally], I think, is misleading the House. We did replace what was causing the yellow water in certain areas, but we never got to finish the project. It looks as if this Government did not continue it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, he answered the question, didn’t he? He fixed some of it, but he did not finish it. But I will tell you what, Mr. Speaker. Between me and young Minister Jache Adams, we are going to fix it. And I can assure you. I can assure you that the Honourable former Minister of [Public] Works could not finish it. But between Minister Jache Adams and me, we will fix it. And you can take that to the bank.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, I hope the Honourable Members Fahy and DeCouto enjoyed tonight because there will be no more free passes going forward.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, I hope they enjoyed it. But, Mr. Speaker, [there were] three things the Honourable Member Fahy said tonight that I actually related to. And I hope that the rest of his team listened to him very carefully. And I say *the rest of his team*. I know the rest of the combined opposition will not do it, but I am hoping that his team takes a page and listens to what the Honourable Member Fahy said. And I will quote. He was *disgusted*, disgusted the way his name was used in certain circles since he has been in politics. It was *despicable*, [which] was another word he used. The false narratives, each *slanderous remark* were his exact words. And he indicated it not only affected him, but it affected his family.

An Hon. Member: Oh wow.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay?

Hon. E. David Burt: Talk about it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House have been putting up with that for years.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, for decades, Mr. Speaker. So, all I am going to say is, Members Opposite, I am going to keep this note, and if we should have some of these despicable, disgusting, false narratives coming from that side of the House, I will remind them of the maiden speech made by Mr. Fahy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, both Honourable Members DeCouto and Fahy have [given] their maiden speech tonight. So, we give them a lot of leeway as we should, but rewriting history is not going to happen in this place.

I witnessed, Mr. Speaker, as you did, as most people in this House did, that we had our House of Assembly surrounded by more people than I think ever in our history during that period. The House was shut down. We had the Opposition sneak into the House of Assembly at five o'clock in the morning.

An Hon. Member: That was a different occasion.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I am just . . . I am just saying. I know. I am giving the history.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No. But I am saying you had the House surrounded.

An Hon. Member: Uh-huh.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You had—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —sneaking into the House.

[Crosstalk]

An Hon. Member: A different time.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: A different time. But these are the types of things—

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

[Laughter]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I am going to take up his time.

The Honourable Member is misleading the House. No one snuck into the House of Assembly. The Honourable Member that was there early knew what was going on and went early. Nobody snuck in.

There was nobody there to sneak in with. He just walked into the House of Assembly.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I mean, he is embellishing it.

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

The Speaker: Point taken.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: He was just early to work that day.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, he went early to work.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Early to work.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, I think we should give him and any other Honourable Members that happened to turn up for work that morning at 5:00 am . . . I think we should . . . I should think we should give them an honour of some type.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That is the first time I have heard that one, Mr. Speaker. I must say. But it did happen, Mr. Speaker. Whether the Honourable Member wants to try to twist that kind of history, that is up to him.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am not twisting anything. He is misleading the House. He is the one embellishing and twisting it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay, Mr. Speaker, let's put it this way. Have they ever been to the House at five o'clock in the morning ever since?

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will take a point of order.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No points of order. Okay. Now, Mr. Speaker—

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I actually would like to congratulate the OBA. I am holding their Budget Reply in my hand—

The Speaker: Throne . . . Throne . . . Throne Reply.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, sorry. Throne Speech Reply in my hand. And I want to congratulate them. The Honourable Member Jarion Richardson, the Op-position Leader, I would like to congratulate you be-cause if I look at our Throne Speech from November and our Throne Speech from last week, Mr. Speaker, if you look at it—and I will tell you if someone wants to do a little bit of work—90 per cent of the things we have in ours, they have in theirs. It is incredible. It is not quite copy and paste, but boy they got really, real-ly close to it. I mean, it is incredible.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, I would really like to thank you—

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —for confirming that you are in agreement with our Throne Speech, Mr. Opposition Leader.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now—

An Hon. Member: Is it worth a point of order?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You can point-of-order it if you like.

An Hon. Member: Is it worth it?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, they did have a few things in the Reply that I feel I need to comment on.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And on the third page, first paragraph, I quote, “This moment calls for clear, bold, and decisive decision-making.” And I thought about that for a minute, and I said: *Well, they are actually true to their word and they have been very good at it.* They were decisive when it came to Vic Ball. That is for sure. But I am not so sure they were decisive about many things after that.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, or Madam Deputy Speaker, still on page 3, and I quote: “In recent elections, Bermudians” (now the key words are *in recent elections*) “clearly voiced their frustration.” Now think about that for a minute—in *recent elections*. Now there were only three recent elections that I am aware of. That is 2017. We won the Government 24 to 12.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: In 2020, we won 30 to 6. And in 2025, we won 25 to 11. So, let’s read this again. “In recent elections, Bermudians clearly voiced their frustration.” Well, I think they are right, but they forgot something. The frustration was [that] they are frustrated with the OBA. You see?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I could tell you the Progressive Labour Party is not perfect, but one thing the people of this country know is that our hearts are in everything that we do. And our hearts are in the right place. And the people of this country have returned us to Government three elections in a row. A third straight election victory. And I believe the Opposition Leader is correct. The people of this country were frustrated, and they wanted to voice their concerns. And they did. They are letting you all know that they enjoy the way we govern this country. They enjoy the way we look after the people of this country. We do not tell people that money grows on trees. We have looked after the seniors in this country like no other time in our history in the past seven to eight years. No other time in our history! And it is interesting because when you look at things like FutureCare and you hear the Opposition saying they want to build on FutureCare, add some more benefits. They fought against FutureCare, too. They slammed us left, right, and centre over FutureCare. I remember it clearly. Ask all our seniors what they think about FutureCare.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Madam Deputy Speaker—

[Crosstalk and laughter]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, [Madam Deputy] Speaker, while he is taking a break. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. It was not the One Bermuda Alliance—

The Deputy Speaker: Member, can you just wait until I at least acknowledge you?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh, yes, I will.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

What is that? Four minutes?

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: He is embellishing. Two thousand—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —whatever that year was, 2009, 2010, whenever it was, it was not the OBA. There were no Members over here.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Continue.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: In fact, the Honourable Member Michael Fahy—

[General uproar]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the Honourable Member Michael Fahy was a Senator in 2008 under the UBP, so he was there. He would remember it very, very clearly. Yes, he would.

[General uproar and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You know, it is like they used to talk about the fast ferries. It is a figment of our imagination. And the next thing you know, everybody is crying they want two or three more ferries in the country.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, let's talk about affordable housing for a moment. The Opposition states, "We would conduct a full audit and convert properties into affordable housing or transitional shelters." Let me remind everyone in this House in February 2024, the OBA objected to funding for affordable housing—in this very House. They objected to it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I am not. I am talking about February 2024. Do your homework, Opposition Leader. They also voted against the changes to reduce payroll tax if you recall.

That is what they do. They complained that the Minimum Wage Commission moved too early, too fast. Ask the people of this country what they think about the minimum wage. They OBA has never apologized for the Morgan's Point bad deal—never apologized for it. We are . . . Morgan's Point bad deal . . . We are at \$250 million and counting, \$250 million and counting. And look.

I am not so sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, . . . and if I have to use my last two minutes, I will. I want everyone in this country to picture Bermuda, the map of Bermuda. You start in Dockyard. You come down through Southampton. You go all the way to St. George's. Now, carve out Dockyard? So, you put . . . When you . . . Up by Lagoon Bridge, for those of you not from up Somerset. You know where Lagoon Bridge out by Boaz Island. Carve out Dockyard? The rest of the Island is quite large compared to carving out Dockyard. What we received for that \$250 million was that. If you take Morgan's Point, compare it to Bermuda, and you take Dockyard, that is what we got at Morgan's Point. Everyone in the country thinks that that \$250 million and counting . . . We have all of Morgan's Point. We do not.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: We do not.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Why not? Because the OBA Government guaranteed \$160 million for that little piece.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But I will tell you what. I think the people of this country need to know. And I am going to get it done. I am going to have it . . . I already have the map drawn out. And we are going to have a press conference, and we are going to show the people of this country because I do not think they realise that for \$250 million and counting that is all we have at Morgan's Point—that little piece.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Twenty-seven acres out of 200. Do the math; 200 minus 27. All the rest of that land does not belong to this Bermuda Government or the taxpayers of this country.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: All I am going to say is watch that space. We are going to give you more reports.

Now, really quickly.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Fifteen seconds.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I look forward to assisting my Premier and my colleagues in this House carrying out a platform—continuing carrying out a plat-

form—that the people of this country enjoy and look forward to.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak? Any other Members?

Premier, it is your turn to reply.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: I do not have the time. You know, I am replying. I am at the end.

The Deputy Speaker: Exactly.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am closing this out.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to start my comments this evening by saying it is an honour to be back here in this House of Assembly, being asked to serve, being elected to serve the people of constituency 18, Pembroke West Central for a fourth time after leading the Progressive Labour Party to a third consecutive election victory.

I see the Honourable Member from constituency 22 has started chirping very early, but do not worry. I will get to him. I will get to him because he says, *Time is up*. No, we have got plenty more time to go. He also said time is up for someone else, but there is an MP who was here inside of this area, inside of this House. But that is all right, Mr. Pearman. You will have your time.

The Deputy Speaker: [INAUDIBLE]

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Deputy Speaker, as we draw this debate on this Throne Speech to a close this evening, I find myself without question amused or in some cases bemused at the Opposition's latest attempt at a Throne Speech Reply. Now what I will say in this one is, at least the Honourable Opposition Leader decided to give it some length. But the one thing that it is, as usual, lacking in is substance, which I think is particularly interesting as I think those are the words he used to describe our Throne Speech. But I think another term would come to mind. And it is, you know, because they have suffered their third straight election defeat.

An Hon. Member: You know what it feels like.

Hon. E. David Burt: I do not know what it feels like, but that is okay.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: But here is what I will say. It is kind of funny because if there was a theme, it would be *If you cannot beat the PLP, you might as well try to*

at least pretend that you support the policies of the PLP. Because if you look through this Throne Speech [Reply], Madam [Deputy] Speaker, just about everything in this [Reply] are things that we have done, are already doing, or were inside of the Throne Speech. None of it was, *We support. We agree with the Government on [what] they propose.* It was, *We will*, as though if somehow it is going to be 2030, and there is going to be another election. No, no. no. There is time to go.

And now as we look at the time, I am reminded, and I just have to pay homage to that amazing turn of phrase from the Member from constituency 32.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this time, the One Bermuda Alliance achieved their second-worst result in their history. And I think that it is important to note that at some point in time one would at least expect that the Opposition would say, *Maybe we should change our approach.* Maybe we should try to go with some specifics. Maybe we should actually try to lay out a policy. But no. All we got is the same thing that we got during the election campaign which led to the number of seats that they have.

But here is the thing, Madam Deputy Speaker, before I go into my full remarks, I cannot allow for the comments that came from the Honourable Member in his maiden speech, from constituency 20, to go unanswered. I cannot allow it. Because the Honourable Member from constituency 11, MP Famous, used the term *revisionist*. And as someone who was there—as I know you were as well, Madam Deputy Speaker—*revisionist* is exactly what that contribution was. Because the thought that this Honourable Member would come into this place . . . I commend him for using his maiden speech. As many have said, that is the last time that he will get a pass on that. But I am not going to let the people of this country who may be listening to us at the late hour—a little bit close to [midnight] . . .

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They are listening.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, people listen. They say no one is listening. People are listening, and they are going to hear this. Because from the contributions of which he made, it would make it seem as though he was someone who was willing to work across the aisle to make sure they came together on this great national mission of ensuring the future renewal of this country, Madam Deputy Speaker. But that is not the case.

And they would allow you to think in their revisionist history that the Progressive Labour Party never discussed, thought, or mentioned matters related to immigration reform, demographic changes, and population changes. But if you will allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will quote from the 2013 Budget Reply delivered in this honourable place 15 years ago. And I quote: "That is why, Mr. Speaker, we will call on this Honourable House to establish a Joint Select Committee on Immigration reform. We have the responsibility

to examine this outdated piece of legislation and come up with something that works better for this country and its people.” [The] same thing was repeated in 2014. [The] same thing was repeated in 2015—all the time completely rebuffed, never taken up by the OBA.

But as other people said, on the day after they lose a bye-election, they put forward a Bill that went completely against the promises that they had made prior to the general election.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Completely against it! When persons . . . What were they like?

You do not want to go there. You do not want to go there, MP Cannonier, because I—the Honourable Member—because I can assure you—

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

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I did not say, *What was that like?* or whatever he just said. Completely. He is misleading the House. I did not say that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: He just said that.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Deputy Speaker, he is getting a little bit touchy. But he is my friend, so I am going to leave it alone because he is going to like this one.

I know he was the Minister of Government at the time because after the Honourable Member from constituency 20 with the former Honourable Member being, you know, the former Attorney General Trevor Moniz . . . You know. It was the Honourable Member from constituency 20 and Trevor Moniz together, peas in a pod ready to fight for justice and future of the country, came and proposed this amazing Bill. And when they laid it out, you would think that it was all about population. It was all about future demographics. They gave a long speech. Demographics and population were barely mentioned. They talk about fairness and how people have been here for so long and how these things needed to happen, et cetera.

Now here is the thing. It is important to remember at that time before the people of this country rose up against that Honourable Member and that Government was required to move him to another

portfolio, this Progressive Labour Party gave ample opportunities for the Government to work with them.

I will quote from the Hansard of 2016 in the month of March after this particular Bill was laid. A motion was laid down by the Opposition that read, and I quote:² “[T]hat this Honourable House, in an effort to develop a set of proposals for a substantial reform of immigration policy, agrees to establish a Joint Select Committee to develop such proposals; and that this committee have its proposals and its conclusions agreed by at least two-thirds of its members; and further that Part IV of the Parliament Act . . . apply to the deliberations of the Committee.”

So, we put forward in an attempt to diffuse the situation an opportunity to work together on this issue.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And what happened?

Hon. E. David Burt: It was rejected.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No! No!

An Hon. Member: Say it ain’t so.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No!

Hon. E. David Burt: It was rejected.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: There has got to be a point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: And we saw what happened following that.

Now here is the thing. I heard the speech from the Honourable Member from constituency 20, Madam Deputy Speaker. But let’s be clear on this. He said that if we would have made these changes back then we would not have had the problems that we have now. I will tell him the same thing that I told him before. If this was about population growth, and the people already here, how is that growing the population? I will then say if the changes that were passed by this Government on immigration which gave PRCs [Permanent Resident’s Certificate] to persons who were here for the length of time of which he was proposing status, was that a compromise that he would have taken? And if so, does he not think that we would be avoiding the demographic collapse that he talks about?

The fact is revisionist history is not going to work in this Honourable House because the record reflects that time and time again, when asked to work with the Government, the Opposition extending a hand to work on an issue, they said, *No*. But guess what? When we came into Government, we did not take that approach. And though we had two-thirds of the seats and did not need the 12 on that side, we

² *Official Hansard Report*, 13 March 2015, page 1643

extended our hand to work together. And guess what? We came to this Parliament to pass bipartisan immigration reform. That is the difference in leadership. And we, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I may add . . . That is the reason why that party is still on that side of the House.

[Inaudible interjections]

[Gavel]

Hon. E. David Burt: Now, let me move on from that point because you see it got my blood flowing a little bit.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, just a little bit.

But getting back to the Throne Speech and the Throne Speech Reply, I have said before that the majority of the items that were laid out in this document have either already been done, are in the process of being done, or [are] inside of our Throne Speech either in 2024 or 2025.

An Hon. Member: But they're not working.

Hon. E. David Burt: Now . . . Oh, but see, here is the thing. They said, *But they are not working*. So, let's be clear. They proposed the same policies which they are doing, but then they go on to say they are not working. It is no wonder why the electorate rejected them yet again.

And here is the thing. Here is the thing, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is interesting. Honourable Members on this side have made incredible contributions to this debate, tearing apart some of the things of which they have raised, going through this [Reply] basically saying: *Guess what? We are already doing that. Guess what? We are already doing that. Guess what? We are already doing that.*

The reality is our economic initiatives have brought us to a place where before a dime of corporate income tax has been collected, we will present a balanced budget to this country. That is the reality.

We go back without remembering five years ago. Five years ago, we were about to go into lockdown. Five years ago, this Government rose up to the challenge of a generation, a once-in-a-century pandemic. And five years later when persons were speaking about the fact that we do not know what our economic future will hold, Ministers of the Government worked with the private sector, came up with an Economic Recovery Plan, delivered that Economic Recovery Plan, [and] built up an economic development strategy. And look at where we are with the second fastest growing economy in the Americas.

That is the economic record of this Government—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: —the economic record of this Government. And see?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: There is no point of order because those are the facts.

An Hon. Member: It is the reality.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Hold [on] a second.

Yes, people are still suffering, but I do not need the OBA. We do not need the OBA to tell us that. We knock on doors, too. But the question is who do they trust more to deal with the condition of this country? Not you!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Twenty-five to eleven to us. But that is all right. I know it is hard because I know that before the election their bad internal polling and their consultants told them that they would win. But guess what? Guess what? No, no, no.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, you thought you were going to lose? Oh, come on now. Do not start with that. Do not start with that.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: So here we go. It was particularly interesting because it goes back to the theme of bipartisanship, of the significant attacks on public education. Now let me be clear. As I have said, I will be the first to admit that not everything is perfect in our public education system, but just so we know, not everything is perfect in private education. And not everything has ever been perfect in education. You are dealing with children. You are dealing with multiple dynamics. But what I can say is that we have extended the olive branch so that the Opposition can understand what is taking place. The Minister of the Cabinet Office, the former Minister of Education, gave seven and a half hard years inside of that particular ministry delivering signature schools and pressing forward education reform.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Here is the thing. [It] made it clear that never has an invitation been accepted by the Opposition to learn about what is going on.

Mr. Ben Smith: Point of order. Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Ben Smith: Definitely misleading the House. I have listened to this several times. A WhatsApp exchange is not an invitation.

An Hon. Member: It is not?

Mr. Ben Smith: This Minister has said it multiple times, and now I am having to hear it again. This cannot continue. The Minister needs to provide the details of the invitations that we denied.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, let's get this. The Minister of Education writes the Shadow Minister of Education. He does not like the method in which he has written, and then he denies that an invitation was extended. I do not need to go into that, but allow me to say this. The current Minister of Education will send you a piece of post over to the top of the Music Box, and I sincerely hope that you will then take up that invitation. I sincerely hope so.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Wow! A WhatsApp is not an invitation.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, let me continue, because there was a lot of talk and fury inside of this Throne Speech [Reply] regarding the cost of living.

Now let's talk about this because we all know that cost of living is one of the most important issues to the country. And we Members who have been in this House for a while would know my views when it comes to matters of price controls. And so, it would not surprise the Opposition Leader to say I may agree with some of what he may say because—absolutely—price controls have demonstrated in history and over effect they do not work. But that would be twisting the words of what were meant inside of our particular Throne Speech.

So I, Madam Deputy Speaker, with your permission, am going to quote from the Speech. It says: "The Government has taken steps to reduce costs for grocers and wholesalers importing goods into Bermuda with the expectation that these cost savings would be reflected at the register. To ensure that such reductions are passed onto consumers and not to prof-

its, the Government will implement fair pricing control and pricing transparency measures while expanding the categories of essential goods accruing 0% import duty."

Now I remember . . .

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Premier and Member is misleading the House. If he would like to explain the difference between price control and pricing control, we invite him to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. E. David Burt: There is no misleading. There is no misleading, but I can assure the Honourable Member that he is concerned that some of his interest may be affected by this.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Uh-oh! Uh-oh!

Hon. E. David Burt: But now, let me make it clear—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Premier has not addressed my original concern and is now imputing improper motive.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: So, here we are, Madam Deputy Speaker. Here we are. So, I remember the debate when this Government created a list of essential goods, set those items to zero per cent duty and what were the complaints from the other side? *How are you going to ensure that these matters are reflected in the prices in the grocery stores?*

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, they did.

Hon. E. David Burt: So now, after the experience of recognising that despite our best efforts to this time, those prices have not been reflected—and it is recognised through data collected that significant duty cuts

in some spaces where things have gone from 25 per cent to zero [per cent] have not been reflected at the stores—we then state as directed by our Members that this is what we are going to do to make sure that it goes through.

So, I ask the Honourable Members a question opposite that they can respond to in next week's motion to adjourn—not now: What is their plan for ensuring that duty cuts that are cut to zero [per cent] make it to consumers? I can answer the question for you, Madam Deputy Speaker. They have none. No plan whatsoever—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: —because if they had a plan, they would have stated it here. But nothing in this document talks about how you would actually reduce the cost of essential goods that Bermudians have to buy in order to survive. But let me go on, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I think there is something that is particularly important.

The Throne Speech goes on to say: “Further, the Government will amend the Cost of Living Commission Act 1974 to expand the investigatory powers of the Cost of Living Commission to examine the books and records of all businesses involved in the supply of food and other essential goods.” [It is] something else that they do not like. But why is it necessary? They talk about regulation. They talk about this. They say it is dangerous. Let's go on this one. How do you know? How do you know if price gouging is not going on?

An Hon. Member: It is simple to figure out.

Hon. E. David Burt: Ahh! He says it is simple to figure out. You can tell me next week in the motion to adjourn how you figure it out.

But here is the thing. They say it is simple to figure out, but the reality is in a small market such as Bermuda [with] limited shipping lines, limited items—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. I will go quick. Limited items—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: What did you say?

The Deputy Speaker: I was reminding you that you have 30 minutes for your reply.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. Limited time—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I would like to.

The Deputy Speaker: Just so that Members know, I recorded the time the Premier—

Hon. E. David Burt: What time did I start?

The Deputy Speaker: You started at 11:25.

Hon. E. David Burt: [At] 11:25! And look at that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: [At] 11:25 All right.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: [At] 11:25!

[General uproar]

Hon. E. David Burt: Deputy Speaker, I like that one. So back to the—

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: So back to the issue of the investigatory powers, in a small country like Bermuda—limited number of suppliers—there are duopolies and other types of things that do exist. How do you know?

Now here is the thing. I will give a practical example, Madam Deputy Speaker, of an issue that I was faced with in the Ministry of Finance the other day where a large local company that needed to come to the Ministry of Finance to ask for an increase in their rates came and asked for an increase in their rates. I said, *We are not even going to contemplate this unless you show me your audited financials*. This same company had audited financials that stated a 38 per cent operating profit, but yet they wanted an increase in prices. So, I do not think in any way, shape or form that there are many businesses in Bermuda that may be operating at those levels of profits and that may be looking at how they can possibly squeeze more from the people of this country.

But here is the thing. This Government was elected on a platform which came from our members which said that we must do everything in our power to make Bermuda more affordable. And rest assured as the Honourable Member from constituency 14—the Honourable Member in her maiden speech—said, that is exactly what we will do.

We go to something else inside of the Speech that talks about a fairer electricity market and higher regulatory standards to bring down bills. Did the Opposition read what was in the Government's Throne Speech? Could you just have not said we agree with the measure? They act as if these are not the things

that are in process. But I have news for the Opposition Leader. Change—

An Hon. Member: Pray tell.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, are you ready?

An Hon. Member: Pray tell.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, here we are. Change in law does not happen via magic wand. It actually takes time, consultation, working through items, and other things. So just saying it does not mean that it will happen.

Now here is the one thing in the Opposition Leader's Reply, Madam Deputy Speaker, that was incredible. Inside of the [Reply] the One Bermuda Alliance said that they would—and I quote—"Revitalise International Business and Financial Services." Well, my goodness. So, let's get this straight. Under this Government, [we have the] highest contribution international business GDP ever in the history of this country, [the] highest number of people working in international business in this country, [and the] greatest number of Bermudians working ever in this country. However, they say that they are going to revitalise financial services.

But it gets better. In the [Reply] they then have had a road-to-Damascus conversion where the Opposition Leader actually mentioned that they are going to press ahead with FinTech—something that that party lambasted this party for doing. Now that Bermuda is one of the undisputed leaders in the world when it comes to digital asset regulation—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

The Honourable Premier is misleading the House. That specific point was related to insisting that these emerging markets and developing businesses had a tangible impact on Bermuda, more specifically including locating staff into Bermuda.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. E. David Burt: Here is the thing.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member, you know, knows a little about this, and he knows fully that Class F and Class M digital asset companies must have staff in Bermuda. And they do. And now those things are growing. So, the thought that companies

like Coinbase, Circle, Kraken, and those ones here do not have people in Bermuda,—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: —he is misleading—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you. I was not referring specifically to the Class F licences as issued under the digital asset business. As the Premier is aware, there is Class T and Class M. And FinTech includes a number of other related services including Insurtech. So, I was just trying to be specific about the FinTech market altogether, not just the Class F. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: I look forward to debating FinTech with the Opposition Leader—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: —but we shall continue on this.

We have delivered Bermuda's leadership position in the digital asset market despite the protestations of the One Bermuda Alliance, and we have delivered jobs for Bermudians and investment into this country. And so, for him and his [Reply] to have that Damascus conversion, I am okay with it.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: But the reality is that this is what this Government is delivering—

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Madam Deputy Speaker, we do not protest about FinTech. We protest about FinTech with . . . call it sketchy counter parties. So, the Premier is misleading the House. Let me put it together for you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Premier, you have five minutes.

Hon. E. David Burt: I thank you very much.

And so, I find it very interesting the Honourable Member from constituency 25 is finally taking his

seat. But I know that Honourable Member knows full well as a doctor inside of a regulated sector that the Bermuda Monetary Authority regulates the companies and has a very sterling record in the regulation of companies that come to Bermuda.

I shall continue, however, because there was another part inside the Throne Speech [Reply] that was incredible. It spoke on the matter, which is second only to cost of living, which is that of housing.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh my. Your point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes. The Honourable Premier is misleading the House. Whilst the Bermuda Monetary Authority does in fact regulate and has a sterling reputation, they do in fact find areas of noncompliance in which case they have to penalise and withdraw licenses. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Now see? Hold a second. Hold a second. You know when you are striking at them that they are trying to make you run out of your time. But here we go, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, we go to another portion—housing, as I said. They mentioned rent-to-own schemes, advancing support services, [and] investing money—an Opposition that built zero affordable homes in their time, compared to our record of delivery and record investment in affordable homes. But here is the most amazing thing . . . the most amazing thing. Quoting from their Throne Speech Reply: “We would fund charities like HOME to develop structured transitional housing, . . .” I must ask whether or not the Honourable Opposition Leader was here when we debated the mid-year review where we had a specific line item for HOME to do just that—\$700,000, money that will likely continue into [the] next budget.

So, I say, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I do not want to run out my time—

An Hon. Member: It is done.

Hon. E. David Burt: It is not done yet, so calm yourself—

The Deputy Speaker: It is not done here as well.

Hon. E. David Burt: Calm yourself.

The reality is, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I said. The Opposition’s proposals reflect what is already done. I welcome their Damascus conversion, the things of which they previously opposed but now fully support. I would sincerely hope that during this time—this legislative session that is being opened by this Throne Speech—we could be more collaborative on these items and recognise that this Government will continue to look to work and extend an invitation.

So, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, look forward to your invitation that is coming to the Music Box. The Honourable Opposition Leader, I will make sure I let you know that the camera man is there beforehand so [that] you can come visit me again.

We are going to continue to work in the best interests of Bermuda because that is what the voters sent all of us here to do, Madam Deputy Speaker. What I will say is, I am proud to lead the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party. I am proud to be a Government that has delivered for the people of this country, will continue to deliver for the people of this country, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to the beginning of this legislative session as we continue to do the people’s work as they sent us here to build a fairer, more affordable, and more stable Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

And I just want to remind Members. After seven hours debating, you move to 20 minutes. It is except for the Reply, which goes to 30 minutes.

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

The Speaker: Premier?

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the following message should be sent to the Governor:

“May it please Your Excellency that we the Members of the House of Assembly of Bermuda thank Your Excellency for the gracious speech of which Your Excellency was pleased to open the present session of Parliament.”

The Speaker: Okay. There are no objections to that, are there?

No. The appropriate message will be sent.
Mr. Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House now adjourn until Friday, the 28th of March.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: No Members speaking? Thank you.

Members, we thank you for your participation today in the Reply to the Throne Speech, and we are appreciative that the tone of the debates stayed very upbeat throughout the day.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: I trust that this sets the tone for what this entire session will look like.

With that said, Members, have yourself a restful weekend, and we will see you back here next Friday at 10:00 am.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House now stands adjourned.

[At 11:56 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 28 March 2025.]