



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

30 MAY 2025

(Sitting number 13 of the 2025-2026 Session)

(pages 1039-1106)

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

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30 MAY 2025
10:01 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: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 28 May 2025]

The Speaker: Members, the confirmation of the Minutes from the 28th of May have been circulated.
Are there any amendments?
No amendments. The Minutes will be printed as confirmed.

[Minutes of 28 May 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: We have two Members who have indicated their absence today and that would be Minister Adams and MP Lister.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: Premier, there is one paper this morning.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

BERMUDA MONETARY AUTHORITY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Monetary Authority Annual Report 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: We have six Statements this morning.
The first is in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance. Would you like to present your Statement?

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

BERMUDA MONETARY AUTHORITY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 28 of the Bermuda Monetary Authority Act 1969, earlier today in this Honourable House I tabled the [2024 Annual Report of the Bermuda Monetary Authority](#).

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's financial services sector is subject to the regulation and supervision of the Bermuda Monetary Authority. The Authority operates pursuant to the Bermuda Monetary Authority Act 1969 (the "Act"), which provides it with a number of principal objects, including the supervision, regulation and inspection of financial institutions operating in or from within Bermuda, together with the promotion of financial stability and soundness of financial institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members would be aware that the Authority has specific licensing and supervisory responsibilities under the following regulatory statutes: the Banks and Deposit Companies Act; Corporate Service Provider Business Act; the Digital Asset Business Act; the Insurance Act; the Investment Business Act; the Investment Funds Act; Money Service Business Act; the Fund Administration Provider Business Act; the Trusts (Regulation of Trust Business) Act,

together with other statutes. The Authority also regulates the Bermuda Stock Exchange.

The Authority's mission is to contribute to Bermuda's financial stability, protect customers of financial services and protect Bermuda's currency through maintaining effective and proactive regulatory frameworks through its highly skilled and engaged workforce; delivering efficient operations and sustainable business practices; and supporting responsible innovation locally and in global markets.

International Recognition

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Authority has received international recognition for its regulatory excellence, being one of only seven jurisdictions with US National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) "qualified jurisdiction" status, one of three with NAIC "reciprocal jurisdiction" status, and one of just two jurisdictions in the world to be granted full Solvency II equivalence by the European Union.

Mr. Speaker, the Authority is an active and respected participant in key international regulatory bodies, fostering strong global relationships. The Authority's Managing Director of Supervision serves on the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS) Executive Committee, with BMA staff leading or contributing to numerous IAIS committees, including those on macroprudential policy, development, and financial crime. The Authority also engages with the Financial Stability Board, the Bank for International Settlements, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Insurance and Private Pensions Committee. The Authority is also a coordination group member of the Global Financial Innovation Network, a group of regulators committed to supporting financial innovation in the best interests of consumers.

Legislation

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Authority is authorised to advise the Minister of Finance on policy matters relating to financial institutions and may propose legislation consistent with its responsibilities under the Bermuda Monetary Authority Act 1969. Amongst the legislative proposals advanced in 2024 were those which bolstered the regime under which recognised investment exchanges and clearing houses are supervised and regulated; a Ministerial Order for the minimum initial net assets required of Restricted Banks at the time of licensing and expanded the classes of persons to whom such banks may provide services; and measures to amend the fees payable by entities operating within the Authority's innovation hub.

Additionally, rules were passed regarding the requirements for insurers to create a recovery plan, the contents of such plans, and the matters which the Authority shall consider when determining which insurers need to prepare a recovery plan. Regulations were also

issued to enable the Authority to refresh the form and design of coins to feature the image of His Majesty King Charles III.

Financial Sector Highlights

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, Members' attention is drawn to the following key highlights for the various sectors supervised by the Authority:

Banking Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: With regard to the banking sector, consolidated assets remained unchanged at \$23.7 billion in 2024. Investments retained the largest share of total assets at 53 per cent, followed by loans at 33 per cent, and cash and deposits at 11 per cent. Net interest income continued to be the largest component of the banking sector's income at \$755 million down from \$790 million in 2023.

Insurance Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, moving to the insurance sector, 1,239 insurers were registered as of 31 December 2024 compared to 1,213 in 2023. According to 2023 year-end information, total capital and surplus was \$404 billion in 2023 an increase of \$57 billion from the \$347 billion recorded in 2022. Gross written premiums were \$316 billion in 2023 an increase of \$39 billion from the \$277 billion recorded in 2022. This increase is attributed to the growth in business written by large, commercial, general business and long-term insurers. Total assets were \$1.87 trillion in 2023 an increase of \$217 billion from the \$1.65 trillion recorded in 2022. This increase was largely due to increased business written by a specific group of insurers.

Investment Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, moving to the investment sector, there were 52 licensed investment business providers, an increase of 5 from 47 in 2023; and 56 registered investment business providers operating in Bermuda during 2024. The aggregate total assets under management (AUM) reported by licensed investment providers were \$231 billion compared to \$225 billion AUM in 2023. Total assets under administration (AUA) for [2024] were \$25.4 billion, compared to \$28.1 billion reported for 2023.

Mr. Speaker, in 2024, there were 784 investment funds on the Investment Funds Act register, a decrease of 20 compared to 804 in 2023. Of these funds, 129 overseas funds being promoted in Bermuda and 655 Bermuda funds. This is contrasted against 2023, whereby 146 overseas funds were promoted in Bermuda and Bermuda funds totalled 658, with a net asset value reported in relation to Bermuda funds of \$295 billion an increase from \$281 billion in 2023. At the end of

2024, Mr. Speaker, 24 fund administrator licences were in issue, unchanged from the prior year, with \$195.6 billion in assets under administration.

Digital Asset Business Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, 2024 was a significant year of growth for the digital asset business sector which ended the year with 36 digital asset business providers operating in Bermuda, a 50 per cent increase from the 24 recorded in 2023. This sector is continuing to demonstrate strong growth and is expected to become the third largest revenue earner for the Authority in the upcoming year. This growth is a testament to this Government's foresight in ensuring that Bermuda established a credible regime for this emerging sector, which has been in place since 2018.

Mr. Speaker, the total equity market capitalisation for the Bermuda Stock Exchange stood at \$217.6 billion at the end of 2024 as compared with \$191.7 billion at the end of 2023. A total of 156 new insurance-linked securities were added to the BSX in 2024 a reduction from 195 new issues recorded in 2023. Domestic trading volume totalled 11.3 million shares in 2024 up significantly from 2.3 million in 2023; with the value of shares traded increasing 5-fold from the prior year, totalling \$105.8 million compared to \$20.4 million in 2023.

BMA 2024 Financial Highlights

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members' attention is drawn to the following highlights set out in the Statement of Accounts Report:

- Net income for the Authority was \$17.93 million up from a net loss of \$3.53 million in the previous year.
- Total revenue increased by 50 per cent up to \$129.8 million, up from \$86.7 million in the year prior. The increase is mainly due to a \$40 million increase in revenue from supervisory and licensing fees.
- Expenses increased by 24 per cent to \$111.9 million. The increase was mainly due to the \$15.5 million in increased salaries and benefits.
- Licensing fees were \$114.5 million, compared to \$74.4 million from the prior year, of which \$103 million was paid by the insurance sector.
- The receipt of funds from fines and penalties increased by \$2.554 million from the previous year.
- The Authority had 302 full-time permanent employees, an increase from 273 in 2023.
- Board Members are paid an annual fee of \$50,000 an increase from \$26,000 in 2023; Board Sub Committee Chairs are paid an annual fee of \$58,000 to \$63,000, up from \$33,000 in the year prior. The Chairman of the

Board receives an annual fee of \$125,000, an increase from \$96,000 in 2023.

- The CEO's salary is set at \$550,000 up from \$500,000 in 2023, and he is eligible for a performance-based bonus of up to 50 per cent of base salary. The salaries of the other 20 members of the executive team range from \$275,000 to \$500,000, with a performance-based bonus of up to 37 per cent of salary.

Mr. Speaker, upon reviewing the Authority's 2024 financial statements, the Auditor General has issued a clean audit opinion.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Authority's Board, chaired by former Cabinet Secretary Mr. Donald Scott. I also wish to extend special thanks to the executive team and dedicated staff of the Bermuda Monetary Authority, under the leadership of Chief Executive Officer Mr. Craig Swan. The Board and executive team deserve Honourable Members' congratulations for their sound stewardship and the excellent financial results achieved in 2024. As Minister of Finance, I am especially grateful for the continued partnership and collaboration with the Authority's leadership, as this Government remains focused on expanding and strengthening Bermuda's financial services sector in a globally competitive environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

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

Minister.

HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda about our preparedness for the [2025 Atlantic hurricane season](#), which officially commences this Sunday, 1 June and concludes on 30 November.

Mr. Speaker, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecasted an above-normal hurricane season for 2025, predicting 13 to 19 named storms, with 6 to 10 becoming hurricanes, and 3 to 5 reaching major hurricane status (Category 3 or higher). This outlook is driven by record warm sea surface temperatures in the Atlantic and the continued transition to neutral El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions, both of which create favourable conditions for storm development.

Mr. Speaker, AccuWeather's forecast aligns closely with NOAA's, anticipating 13 to 18 named storms, including 7 to 10 hurricanes and 3 to 5 major hurricanes. These forecasts underscore the importance of early preparedness, particularly as warmer

waters can contribute to rapid storm intensification, leaving less time to react once a system is formed.

Mr. Speaker, as Honourable Members will be aware, June is recognised as Hurricane Preparedness Month. On Tuesday, 11 June, I will convene the executive of the Emergency Measures Organisation (EMO) for its annual hurricane readiness meeting. This session will serve to assess Government's state of preparedness and ensure that all relevant agencies are coordinated and ready to act if and when a storm approaches. Additionally, a tabletop exercise for relevant agencies is scheduled for 18 June. This exercise will bring together stakeholders from across the public sector, utilities, and critical services to simulate emergency scenarios and test our national response protocols.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the month of June, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation (DRRM) Team within the Ministry of National Security will lead various preparedness activities. These include training sessions, equipment and connectivity testing for the Emergency Broadcast Facility, and refresher briefings for EMO Operations Centre staff.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to use this opportunity to once again encourage all residents to take personal responsibility for hurricane readiness. Now is the time to review and update your household hurricane plans, incorporating any lessons learned from previous seasons. Please ensure that your property insurance is up to date and provides adequate coverage.

Mr. Speaker, each household should assemble a comprehensive hurricane supplies kit. This should include a two-week supply of any necessary medications, along with at least three days' worth of nonperishable food and water. Flashlights, spare batteries, and a portable radio are essential items to remain informed and safe during a storm. It is also helpful to include books, games, or other small activities that can help keep children occupied and reduce stress in the event of power outages or prolonged periods indoors. In true Bermudian spirit, I encourage all residents to check in on our elderly or disabled neighbours who may need assistance with their preparations, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Mr. Speaker, in times of emergency, accurate and timely information can save lives. I urge all residents to ensure they are receiving updates from credible and official sources. The Emergency Broadcast Station at 100.1 FM is live and remains a reliable source for Government messaging, especially if the power goes out. I encourage residents to tune in now and become familiar with the station's format and content. Other trusted sources include the Government of Bermuda and the Bermuda Weather Service's Facebook pages, in addition to reputable local radio and television stations.

Mr. Speaker, I must stress the importance of verifying any information received through social media. Not all platforms share accurate or timely information, and misinformation during a storm can cause

unnecessary panic or dangerous delays. When official advisories are issued, whether to prepare, shelter in place, or evacuate, it is vital that the public acts on this advice immediately. Timely action preserves life, supports emergency services, and strengthens our collective response.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has weathered many active hurricane seasons with resilience and unity. However, this success should not engender complacency. It only takes one storm to cause significant disruption or damage to our normal lives. With early preparation, community cooperation, and a commitment to following official guidance, I am confident that Bermuda and her people will safely navigate the 2025 hurricane season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Minister.

BERMUDA DAY 2025: THE FUTURE IS NOW

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

Mr. Speaker, it is with immense pride and gratitude that I rise today—the day before the end of Heritage Month—to reflect on the unforgettable celebration that was the [2025 Bermuda Day](#) Parade. Though set against unpredictable weather, this year's parade captured the power of community, the richness of our culture, and the bold promise of our future. With "The Future is Now" as our theme, Bermudians rose to the occasion and turned imagination into reality.

Mr. Speaker, the streets of Hamilton came alive with the sounds, colours, and creativity of our people. This year's parade saw remarkable participation, and the route was lined with families, friends, and visitors all soaking up the experience. From the very first beat to the last Gombey step, the 2025 Bermuda Day Parade delivered something special—an honest and joyful collision of heritage as well as innovation.

Mr. Speaker, this year we witnessed the resurgence of one of Bermuda's most beloved parade traditions: the majorette. Leading the charge were the PHC Majorettes and Drum Corps, long-standing bearers of the tradition, joined by a strong showing of new and returning troupes: Warwick United Majorettes and Drum Corps (celebrating their 50th anniversary, Mr. Speaker), the Ex-Artillery Elite Majorettes, the Devonshire Ultimate "STAR" Twirlers and Drum Corp Band, Hamilton Parish Community Hot Peppers, and the St. George's Original Dancerettes—a proud programme of the Office of Youth Affairs. Their energy, precision, and presence were unmatched.

Mr. Speaker, the performances did not stop there. We were thrilled to welcome back United Dance Productions, who continue to raise the bar with their

choreographic brilliance. We thank groups like Sui Generis for persevering in participation, even when odds were against them in the preparation stages. Rated E brought their trademark energy and youthful spirit, and there were many other dance groups and participants worth celebrating.

Mr. Speaker, this year's floats captured the theme with bold imagination. From the futuristic [to the fantastical,] they were shining examples of what happens when community pride meets creative daring. The Association of Filipinos in Bermuda stunned spectators with intricate, hand-crafted costumes designed by their president, Ryan de Jesus. The Department of Culture, in collaboration with Bermudian artisan Ian Tucker, featured a striking futuristic Gombey—his vision of what cultural continuity might look like.

Mr. Speaker, CedarBridge Academy once again impressed with an ambitious and visually captivating float that even featured a Macy's Day Parade style blimp. It was a technical feat and a crowd favourite, showcasing the innovation and talent of our youth in real time.

Mr. Speaker, no parade would be complete without the many walking groups that bring stories, identity, and legacy to the road. This year we saw groups celebrating milestone anniversaries—like Bermuda College—as well as proud organisations like the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, who marched alongside their award-winning float with joy and intention. As Minister with responsibility for Sport, I was especially pleased to see Department of Sport and Recreation, Western Stars, and the Endeavour Programme take part—demonstrating how sport and culture complement each other beautifully in the public space.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda Day Fund once again made meaningful participation possible for many of this year's entries. A total of 20 entries were supported through this fund, allowing organisations across the island to bring their ideas to life. This vital resource continues to break down barriers and ensure our parade is as inclusive and dynamic as our people.

Mr. Speaker, this year's Grand Marshals represented the spectrum of Bermudian excellence—visionaries in media, culture, youth leadership, financial literacy, and technology:

- Glenn Jones: A distinguished career in communication and influence.
- Eugene O'Connor: Bermuda's esteemed kite master and cultural guardian.
- McKenzie-Kohl Tuckett: Championing change and empowering the next generation.
- Seldon Woolridge: Fusing arts, culture, and financial acumen.
- Coral Wells: Pioneering the future of tech in Bermuda.

Each of them exemplifies what "The Future is Now" looks like in action.

Mr. Speaker, our Gombey tradition continues to evolve in exciting ways. This year, some troupes joined the festivities along the route, adding vibrant bursts of culture throughout the day. As is tradition, the Gombey brought the parade to its official close with unmatched passion and pageantry. Their rhythmic beats echoed through the streets, a powerful reminder that even as we look ahead, our cultural roots remain deeply grounded.

Mr. Speaker, while that marked the end of the official parade, the celebrations didn't stop there. Thanks to a partnership between D'General, the Department of Culture, and One Communications, an incredible after-party truck kept the energy high and the music pumping—providing the perfect close to a phenomenal Bermuda Day. It was a finale that reflected exactly what this year's theme stood for: where we've been, and where we're going.

Mr. Speaker, I extend sincere thanks to the team behind the scenes at the Department of Culture, led this year by Acting Director Ms. Carlita Lodge. I also offer deep appreciation to the Department's Temporary Relief Cultural Programme Manager—a former student of mine, a former Head Boy of The Berkeley Institute, Mr. Aden Peets, who stepped in and stepped up—bringing the heart of an artist to the planning and delivery of an outstanding Bermuda Day celebration.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda Day 2025 has set a new standard—not just in creativity or execution, but in how we honour the past while stepping fully into the future. I thank every participant, organiser, and supporter who helped make this year's event so meaningful. Here's to the continued celebration of our culture, our resilience, and our endless potential. Bermuda, the future is now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is from the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on the tangible progress made under the Government's National [Youth Employment Strategy](#)—an initiative launched to empower Bermuda's young people through meaningful training, employment pathways, and long-term career support.

Since the introduction of the Youth Employment Strategy in 2022, we have made steady and measurable strides in reducing youth unemployment in Bermuda, demonstrating the impact of our targeted interventions and whole-of-government approach.

The Strategy was designed with clear goals: to increase training opportunities, expand apprenticeships, promote access to labour market information, and provide holistic support for vulnerable youth. I am pleased to report that we are delivering on those commitments.

Mr. Speaker, this past quarter, several key initiatives were successfully executed.

The “Learning Through Experience” Hospitality Programme provided seven young Bermudians with hands-on experience in the tourism sector. Of the four participants within the 18 to 26 age group, three gained full-time employment. This outcome not only speaks to the quality of the training but affirms the potential of experiential learning to open doors for our youth.

Through our partnership with the Gang Violence Reduction Team, two young men received structured, one-on-one support. One is now employed with Marine and Ports and on the path to becoming a ferry pilot; the other is preparing for entry into the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning industry.

We also completed Phase 1 of our expanded Apprenticeship Programme. Twelve active participants now advancing in masonry, carpentry, and plumbing—fields critical to Bermuda’s infrastructure and sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, these achievements are not without challenges. We acknowledge that maintaining youth engagement post-programme, ensuring placements in emerging industries, and addressing emotional and logistical barriers for vulnerable clients require sustained attention.

To this end, the department is developing post-programme engagement tools, expanding industry partnerships, and scaling wraparound support services.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, our plans are equally ambitious. In the coming quarter, we will

- launch and promote the new Bermuda Job Connect platform to enhance visibility of local employment opportunities;
- deliver orientation sessions in our public senior schools to prepare graduating students for workforce entry; and,
- roll out the “Bridge to Work” Programme to assist justice-involved and vulnerable youth with re-entry into training and employment.

Mr. Speaker, our young people are not statistics. They are our future homeowners, innovators, and community leaders. Through this Strategy, we affirm this Government’s commitment to ensuring that every young Bermudian has a pathway to sustainable employment and economic independence.

In closing, I commend the Department of Workforce Development and our community partners for their unwavering dedication and support. Let us remain committed in our efforts to build a Bermuda where our youth are not left behind but are given every opportunity to thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the Minister has a second Statement.

Would you like to do your second Statement, Minister?

TRADE MARKS AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce in this Honourable House the [Trade Marks Amendment Act 2025](#). This Bill relates to the Trade Marks Act 2023 and supporting legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is continuing its work on updating the legislation governing intellectual property. This effort includes modernising the laws governing trade marks, patents and registered designs, and making certain updates to the copyright legislation. The modernisation effort also aims for compliance with key international treaties which the UK may then extend to Bermuda. It is anticipated that updating these laws will make Bermuda more attractive for registration of intellectual property rights.

Mr. Speaker, the Trade Marks Act 2023 was enacted in the fall of 2023 as part of this initiative along with the Government Fees (Trade Marks) Regulations 2023. The Trade Marks Regulations 2023 were also laid in this Honourable House in December that year.

Since then, Mr. Speaker, the Registry General’s Department has taken various steps to prepare for the commencement of that legislation. This includes completing two rounds of training for the staff—the first of which was facilitated online by representatives from the United Kingdom’s Intellectual Property Office. That training was spread out over approximately six months. The second round of training was attended in person by the staff and was facilitated through intergovernmental cooperation between the Bermuda Government and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, during the debate of the Trade Marks Act 2023, it was recognised that the new legislation places more administrative requirements on the Registry General. The Government committed to supporting the department’s efforts to update its ageing technology and that commitment is being honoured. The Registry General’s Department has been allocated the necessary funding; and the department is in the process of updating its software to assist departmental staff in meeting the responsibilities under the new Act.

Mr. Speaker, during the last year, the Registry General’s Department has taken several opportunities to engage further with members of the private sector about the new legislation (in addition to the consultations undertaken during the original drafting process). The purpose was to identify any gaps or additional changes needed. Today’s Bill is a result of this further consultation and consideration by the Registry General’s Department.

Mr. Speaker, there are only a few amendments being made to the Trade Marks Act 2023 at this time, but this Bill also includes a Schedule which contains an updated set of fee regulations. These fee regulations will replace the prior Government Fees (Trade Marks) Regulations 2023.

Since the 2023 fee regulations have not yet been brought into force, the required amendments have been incorporated into the schedule of fees and the entire set of regulations [reintroduced] as a Schedule to this Bill as a matter of efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, while the vast majority of fees have remained the same in this 2025 set of fees as compared with the 2023 fees, there are approximately eight additional fees included in this updated set. The 2025 fee regulations also include minor corrections to a few of the prior fee descriptions to ensure correct application of the fees.

Mr. Speaker, we know that industry representatives are looking forward to commencement of the legislation, and we can say that commencement is certainly imminent. In fact, the new framework, supported by the approval of this Bill, will commence on 1 July 2025.

Mr. Speaker, to complete the modernisation of trade marks legislation in Bermuda, we anticipate amendments to the Trade Marks Regulations 2023 and the introduction of the Trade Marks (Customs) Regulations 2025 to be laid in this House in the coming weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank industry representatives for the time they have taken to review the various components of the trade marks legislative framework and the valuable input they have provided thus far. We look forward to continuing to work with industry representatives on upcoming legislation governing intellectual property rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Minister.

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, colleagues, and good morning listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address a matter that affects the lives and livelihoods of many in our community: [the time taken to navigate our planning system](#), particularly regarding building permits. From homeowners seeking renovations to small businesses aiming to expand and developers envisioning their next opportunity, the message remains consistent: the process can feel too slow, overly rigid, and at times unclear. We understand the public's frustrations with the

planning system, whether perceived or real, as these frustrations are genuine.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard these concerns first hand, and as Minister, I take them seriously. However, I also want to speak plainly to say this: I believe in the professionalism and dedication of the team at the Department of Planning. They are not the enemy in this story; they are central to the solution. Like all of us, they are navigating the pressures of high demand, limited resources, and an evolving public expectation for service delivery.

Understanding the Root of the Delays

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, as of today, 372 building permit [applications] remain open, with an average age of 165 days. Some are much newer, some are significantly older.

We have found that the main pinch point is not the planning approvals process itself, but the building permit process, where technical details, inter-agency coordination, and inspections come into play.

However, let's also be honest about this: a significant number of delays stem from incomplete applications submitted by agents, as well as the time required to obtain follow-up information. Currently, 59 of these applications are effectively awaiting responses from agents with an average age of 170 days. The youngest of these being 20 [days old], the oldest being 481 days old.

Mr. Speaker, this is not about assigning blame; rather, it is to highlight the importance of shared responsibility. We cannot build an efficient system if applications arrive incomplete and, despite requests for the missing information, remain unchanged for weeks or even months. This situation adversely affects everyone, particularly those whose files are ready to proceed but are delayed because of these incomplete applications.

That is why I have asked the department to explore ways to separate complete application submissions from those awaiting information, so we can keep the queue moving forward for those who have met the requirements. I also lay this marker down here: I fully support the rejection of incomplete submissions that have awaited a specified timeframe with no response. This would mean that those applications would need to be resubmitted and started over.

Since my appointment as Minister responsible for the Department of Planning, I have devoted countless hours to reviewing data, reading policy statements, listening to public feedback, and drawing upon my own experience as a former agent who submitted plans to Planning before entering full-time politics. Numerous ideas have been promoted and discussed over the past few weeks. I would now like to address some of the ideas that we plan to explore and aim to implement as swiftly as possible.

Clarifying the Director's Role in Approvals

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I need to address a public misconception. Some have questioned how certain applications are approved, especially when the name of the director appears on the approval letter.

Let me be clear: except in exceptional cases, typically when the director is acting as a plans examiner, the Director of Planning does not personally see or vet applications. Planning approvals are granted by the Development Applications Board or by delegated planning officials in the case of Permitted Development applications, commonly referred to as one-day permits.

To avoid this confusion and to protect the integrity of the department, we have instructed that approval letters indicate that decisions are made “by the department” or “by the Development Application Board” rather than being attributed solely to the director. This is a matter of public clarity and institutional accountability.

Key Reforms Underway

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Now, Mr. Speaker, let me outline key improvements the Ministry are exploring, together with the department, to modernise and streamline the system:

1. **Boosting Permit Processing [Capacity] and Internal Reorganisation.** With only one full-time permit processor and one supervisor, the team was overwhelmed. The director has brought in two experienced consultants, one working full-time and another part-time, with a third looking to be added if necessary. This immediately expands the building permit review bandwidth and is already reducing the backlog. The department is currently implementing its internal reorganisation and actively driving recruitment. In recent months, as mentioned a few days ago in the budget debate, five new staff members have been onboarded.
2. **Competent Persons Scheme (CPS).** Legislative amendments are in progress to permit the introduction of regulations for the CPS. This scheme will initially enable certified solar installers to carry out installations without traditional inspections, supplemented by casual visits by Planning inspectors to ensure compliance. Other trades will be incorporated after the concept is tested, and capacity within each industry is expanded and confirmed.
3. **Exploring a Revised Building Permit Review System.** We are actively exploring a new review model that matches scrutiny with risk:
 - **Track 1: Certified Fast-Tracking.** Applications endorsed by registered engineers (structural, electrical, mechanical) can be fast-tracked with minimal [internal] review. This empowers professionals and streamlines project approvals with expert oversight. Although this is typical of commercial applications, extending to residential applications could allow building permits for residential developments to be processed more quickly.
 - **Track 2: DIY and Minor Works.** Homeowners undertaking small projects, such as fences or sheds, could use a simplified form and a checklist-based process.
4. **Expanding Self-Inspection on Residential Projects.** Self-inspections—already a standard practice with commercial projects—allow qualified engineers to inspect their own projects and subsequently submit signed documentation. We are seeking to extend this practice to residential projects on an opt-in basis. This decreases the reliance on our limited pool of government inspectors and assists in keeping construction on schedule.
5. **The “One-Day Permit” Review System.** Small-scale works should not be delayed for months. We are considering reinstating dedicated review days, during which all relevant agencies—Planning, Health, and Building—collaborate to assess minor [permits] in real time. We are also evaluating the General Development Order (GDO) to expand what types of projects qualify for this fast-track treatment.
6. **Smarter Vetting Through AI Technology.** According to data from the Department of Planning, a significant percentage of applications submitted are initially incomplete. This results in prolonged, frustrating cycles of back-and-forth conversations between agents and the department. To break this cycle, we are considering the introduction of AI tools that screen applications on the front end, identifying missing data before it enters the review pipeline.
7. **“Soft Refusal” Reform.** Allowing common sense to prevail with applications. Too often, worthy applications are rejected due to minor conflicts with the Bermuda Plan, only to be approved on appeal at a later date. A policy to address this is being advanced through the introduction of a new tool: Ministerial Waivers. In straightforward cases, where the merits of the proposal are clear but minor conflicts with the Bermuda Plan arise, upon request from the Department of Planning or the agent, the Minister will be able to issue a targeted policy waiver that permits the application to proceed as usual to the Development Applications Board for their review and approval. This reform will save time, reduce paperwork, and avoid unnecessary appeals.
8. **Better Communication and Service Access.** To address public frustrations about unanswered

emails, delays in callbacks, and clarity on file status, we will look on how we can introduce

- dedicated office hours for in-person consultations;
- using Smart Online Query Forms to get inquiries to the right people; and
- tracking response timelines to improve service.

This isn't about building permits—it's about rebuilding trust.

Closing: Everyone Has a Role to Play

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, we are not just improving a process—we are restoring confidence in a public service function that is vital to our economy.

I would like to again thank the Director of Planning and her team for their ongoing partnership, professionalism, and willingness to evolve. I also extend my gratitude to the many architects, contractors, engineers, and homeowners who continue to work with us—and challenge us—to do better.

These reforms are just the beginning. Our goal is simple: a planning system that is clear, fair, timely, and responsive to everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Ministers.

Members, that brings us to the conclusion of the Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers for this morning. We will now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: That takes us to the Question Period for today, and we will start with responses to written questions that require an oral response, and then we'll move on to the questions from Statements that were given this morning.

The questions this morning, a written question this morning, is from MP DeCouto to the Minister of Finance/Premier.

Would you like to put your question?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, good morning, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA HOSPITALS BOARD, GOVERNMENT FINANCING TERMS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide information for this Honourable House on the outstanding principal,

the interest rate, and the remaining term of the financing guaranteed by the Government of Bermuda for the Bermuda Hospitals Board?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as noted in the financial statements and Budget Book, as of 31 March 2025, the total financial obligation stands at \$690 million. This includes scheduled debt payments of \$246 million and interest expenses amounting to \$141 million. Additionally, life-cycle, equity and maintenance-related expenditures total \$303 million.

These figures are presented in nominal terms prior to adjustment for inflation or exchange rate fluctuations, and the applicable interest rate is 6.6 per cent, with the obligation maturing in 2044.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Could the Honourable Premier please provide some examples of the . . . I believe it was the life-cycle maintenance obligations?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm not sure what he's asking me to answer.

The Speaker: Could you provide some clarity to what you're seeking?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, the Premier identified an amount that was due for, I believe it was like, I believe it was . . . he was speaking quickly, so I did try to write it down, \$303 million for those life-cycle maintenance obligations. Perhaps I misheard, and if I have misheard, then I apologise. I was seeking a concrete example of what might be included in that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: For my clarity, the Premier gave a dollar value to life-cycles. That's what you're asking?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are you trying to figure out what are examples of how that dollar is spent on a life-cycle?

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

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm not sure if it was life-cycle, but I'll try to read the answer again. I would advise the Honourable Member, if he's asking questions of figures, it might be easier for him to ask for written [answers].

Nonetheless, as of 31 March 2025, the total financial obligation stands at \$690 million. This includes

scheduled debt payments of \$246 million and interest expenses amounting to \$141 million. Additionally, life-cycle, equity, and maintenance-related expenditures total to \$303 million. These figures are presented in nominal terms prior to adjustments for inflation or exchange rate fluctuations.

The applicable interest rate is 6.6 per cent, with the obligation maturing in 2044. This is a PPP project that was done, designed, billed, maintained, and, therefore, maintenance expenses are included inside of the entire project in and of itself, which I'm sure the Honourable Member knows and understands.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Second question, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Second question.

QUESTION 2: CORPORATE INCOME TAX—TOP PAYERS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you kindly.

Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide for this Honourable House the fractions of the total estimated Corporate Income Tax (CIT) to be paid in fiscal year 2025/26 that are expected to come from the top 10 largest and the top 25 largest CIT payers? Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 17(5)(h) which prohibits questions that solicit speculation or hypothetical projections, I will decline to answer this question as it requires speculation on matters which are, at present, unknowable.

As indicated during the Budget Debate, filing . . . Bermuda constituent entities have until 10 days before the initial payment to register. At this point in time, we are not able to provide information, and that information will be provided once the Government does receive it.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

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

I understand the Government has quite a lot of confidence in its CIT projections. Perhaps the question could be answered—

The Speaker: You can put your question. You can put your question.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Put the question.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Based on the Government's CIT projections as used in the budget that have already been computed, what would be the top 10 or top 25 payers according to that modelling?

Thank you, Mr. Premier . . . I mean, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I will refer to the answer which I gave, but the Honourable Member is barking up the wrong tree.

Projections have not been done on an individual basis by individual companies. The projections which were arrived at were a broad scale at which I have stated before. Data has been received from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which collects country-by-country reporting data on an anonymised basis. That is the basis by which the Government can understand the quantum of how much is expected. We make adjustments from there and have projected out. And we have used the conservative estimate which has been in place since 2024 of \$750 million on average any given year.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Would you like to put your third question or supplementary to that?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I have a second supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. What is your supplemental?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And it is probably to clarify my understanding. So, my understanding is that the Government does not know who the material taxpayers for the CIT will be or the amounts that they will pay.

Could the Honourable Premier confirm if that is indeed the case or if I am incorrect? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I want to stop the Honourable Member because his habit is to try to ask questions to then go and engage in speculation, go to the press and say how can the Government say this and the Government doesn't know. So let me try to clarify for him, Honourable Members and the listening public.

Clearly, we will not know how much is to be paid by entities until they file and tell us how much that is to be paid. That is the first instance. The second instance is, as I referred to previously, the Government's projections are based upon information that has been received by the OECD, which is the only entity that

would have the complete information of Bermuda constituent entities. Modelling which could be done by local firms can only be done on publicly available information, but the scope of taxpayers is not just publicly held companies because there are also a large number of privately held companies in Bermuda.

I understand where the Honourable Member is trying to go because it is the speculation of which others have had. But what I must remind you, Mr. Speaker, and the Honourable Member opposite, is that this Government has an excellent track record of laying out projections and exceeding those expectations budget after budget after budget. These are conservative estimates which have been laid out. The \$750 million estimation which has been in place since 2024, as I have stated on numerous occasions, is expected to be achieved. We cannot say how much individual companies are going to pay until they tell us how much actual income they have had. I'm sure the Honourable Member understands that.

The Speaker: You've had your two supplementaries. Would you like to do your third question?

QUESTION 3: CORPORATE INCOME TAX: CRITERIA AND METHODOLOGIES

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

My third question is, Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide for this Honourable House a description of the criteria and methodologies to be used to determine how Corporate Income Tax receipts will be allocated between the Tax Reserve Fund and the Consolidated Fund, and what role the Corporate Income Tax Agency has had in determining those criteria and methodologies?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, there's a note in the question. It notes the Tax Reserve Fund. A Tax Reserve Fund does not yet exist. There will be legislation that will be brought to this House to establish a Tax Reserve Fund and those other matters. And I think that those questions and debate would be appropriately reserved for that time.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

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

The Tax Reserve Fund is, in fact, explicitly called out in the Corporate Income Tax legislation. So, the question is . . . we have estimates in the Budget Book of money that will be going into the budget. We clearly must have Corporate Income Tax receipts. So the question is: What policies, criteria, and

methodologies were used by the Government in setting the budget to allocate funds into the Consolidated Fund, as presented in the Budget Book or otherwise, to be held back now or in the future or into a future Tax Reserve Fund, which by legislation will be set up, which we know?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as stated in the budget statement last year, this year's allocation is a quarter of the estimated amount that is to be received on an annual basis to the Consolidated Fund for Corporate Income Tax. Mr. Speaker, \$750 million divided by four equals \$187.5 million, which is the figure that has been placed inside of the budget for this year—which has been answered on numerous occasions and I've answered again today.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm actually going to restate the question because he didn't answer it.

What was the criteria and methodology used to arrive at that allocation, which I appreciate the answer is one quarter. We would like to understand how the Government has arrived at one quarter.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: We've arrived at one quarter, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: How?

The Speaker: And that's both of your supplementaries used on your questions. You've had all three questions put. So, Members, that brings us to an end of the written question period.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: We will now move on to questions from Statements given this morning. But before I do that, I'd just like to acknowledge in the Gallery a former member of this House, Mark Pettengill. Welcome to the Chambers.

[Desk thumping]

[Question Period, continuing]

The Speaker: The first question this morning from statements is for the Premier, the first question for your first Statement, Premier. The Shadow Minister of Finance would like to put a question to you.

MP DeCouto, in reference to that first Statement.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA MONETARY AUTHORITY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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

And we were grateful for the Statement around the BMA annual report. They are a very important part of our economy and what we do here. And my question is around the staffing. I believe the number was 302 permanent FTEs. We know that, and especially for an agency like the Bermuda Monetary Authority, which requires a large amount of specialised expertise in this industry, there can be a lot of recruitment challenges.

Approximately how many of those staff are employed on Island versus remotely? And do they have a pay differential based on their location of employment?

The Speaker: The question is, how many are actually on Island and the pay differential?

The Speaker: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'll refer to Standing Order 17(9)(a)(vi), and we'll ask the Honourable Member to submit that question in writing so an accurate answer can be provided by the BMA.

The Speaker: Because the information isn't contained in the Statement that was given, if you feel the answer, if you can provide the answer . . . it's better to seek that question in writing so you can get the full answer. Okay?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: A supplementary?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: No, thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier, that's the end of questions for that Statement.

The next Statement that has questions this morning is from the Statement by the Minister of National Security.

Minister, the Opposition Whip has questions for you.

QUESTION 1: HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies. Just a quick question then.

Considering we're going into (I believe it was page 2) meetings on preparedness for a hurricane . . .

first, let me say the Minister has always done a great job at informing Bermuda on things to look out for and what we should be doing. I was just curious, because hurricane season starts in June, I was just thinking that maybe if the Minister could, when he gets into his meetings later on in June, maybe we should be looking at preparedness maybe a month or so ahead of the actual preparedness time.

And the reason I'm saying that is I am one of those weather junkies who sits up late at night looking at the weather and what's happening around the world and how it might affect us, even if it's something in the Pacific Ocean. And if we look at what's happening in the Pacific Ocean right now, there are literally dozens and dozens of volcanoes underwater that are erupting and causing of some strange weather patterns in the Pacific.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: I got your . . . I got your first question— Your first question was can they do their meetings earlier?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, my apologies.

The Speaker: But where are you going now?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I guess what I'm getting at is that it is difficult to predict. But we know that we're looking at warmer waters in the Atlantic Ocean and how things that may be beyond us will affect us . . . if whether or not maybe we should consider . . . and he could take a question to the group meeting maybe in April or May prior to the actual June hurricane season.

So, we're a bit ahead of time. Just something that could be taken under consideration, that's all, nothing—

The Speaker: So, can you start meeting earlier, sooner?

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

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

We will try to accommodate the Honourable Member about the volcanoes and whatnot. But when it comes to the hurricane season, the various teams that comprise the EMO, the emergency organisation, are doing stuff all year. So, what we're doing is just a formality of us getting together to formalise what we've naturally been doing all year.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: All right. Minister, that's the end of questions for your Statement.

We'll move on to the next Statement. The next Statement that has questions this morning is the Statement from the Minister of Economy and Labour on your his Statement in reference to the youth employment strategy. MP Campbell would like to put a question to you.

MP [Campbell].

QUESTION 1: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS

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

I just want to ask the Minister a quick question on the average length of the training programmes. I think that's . . . I didn't hear that in the Statement, but I feel it may encourage, if it's between two or three months, that's not that long to equip yourself for either a change of career or to improve your job prospects.

I just wanted to know if the Honourable Minister had that information available.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The programmes vary based off of the skill sets that are being developed. The apprenticeship programmes that I discussed for the construction trades, whether it be plumbing, masonry, dry welding, electricians, those are two-year programmes. And so, there's a full-fledged apprenticeship programme where those persons develop their skill sets while on the job while also taking part in vocational training.

The graduate training programme that we provide for apprentices, those programmes are around 10 weeks in duration where we place various individuals in the workplace. And then you have hospitality programmes with on-the-job training. That's about 10 weeks as well.

And so, it all depends. Sometimes when you are issuing certificates, the certificates have a requirement in terms of the modules being able to complete to obtain the certification. So, it varies. But they are comprehensive in terms of ensuring that the skill set is adequately developed so we can position our young people to take advantage of job opportunities.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Vance Campbell: A new question.

The Speaker: A new question.

QUESTION 2: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS

Mr. Vance Campbell: I thank the Minister for that answer. Another thing, I didn't quite understand, or I may

have misheard. The Minister was talking about the Learn Through Experience programme. He said seven individuals had taken advantage of that. And then he went on to say that three out of four individuals that were . . . were they of age to work? I didn't quite get that part. And they were able to gain full-time employment. So, can I, first of all, get an answer to that? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: So overall there were seven participants in the programme. Of the seven participants, four were in the age group of 18 to 26, which we would consider to be youth. As a result of those four persons embarking on that programme, three of those persons obtained full-time employment.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Vance Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The remaining three, were they younger or older? Or people younger than 18 cannot enter these programmes? Just out of curiosity.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The persons that fell outside of the category of 18 to 26 were older.

The Speaker: Supplementary or a new question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: No. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

The Speaker: No problem.

Minister, you also have a question for your next Statement, and that's from MP Pearman.

MP Pearman, I put your question to the Minister.

QUESTION 1: TRADE MARKS AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to the listening public, and thank you, Minister, for the very helpful Statement this morning on the Trade Marks Amendment Act 2025 and the Bill that will be tabled in this Honourable House later today, as I understand it.

Just one question, and you referenced in your Statement industry feedback. I declare my interest. I am, as a lawyer, likely to be within the industry that provided feedback, although I did not specifically provide feedback.

Just a high-level question. In your Statement, you referenced updating technology, increasing staff, and increasing (potentially) fees in relation to that department. But I was just curious, what sort of industry

feedback was there? What was the topic of the industry feedback or the suggestion that might now be meriting this further Bill? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The amendments to the Amendment Act . . . so, just to give a scope of the process, there was original feedback to get the 2023 Act to Parliament. Subsequent to that, that Act was never enacted, or it never commenced, which gave us an opportunity to review the entirety of that Act while we were developing regulations along with industry.

As a result of that exercise, there were additional suggestions made by industry, which will be contained in the Amendment Act, which clarifies a few things, and also clarifies some of the descriptions of fees within the Schedule. I do not have a comprehensive list of the stakeholders, but I'll endeavour to provide that. There is an opportunity for me to provide more clarity when I give the brief to the Bill.

So, I welcome the questions, and I'll ensure that if I can't provide the answers at this point in time, I'll ensure that they're incorporated in the brief so that the Member can get the clarity that he requires.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that very helpful answer. I have no supplementaries.

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister, that's the end of questions for your Statement. The next statement was from the Minister of Cabinet.

Minister, you have Members who want to put questions to you as well. The first is from MP King.

MP King.

QUESTION 1: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House and community.

Regarding the Department of Planning, absolutely, we commend the works and efforts of the persons who work there to ensure that buildings are built in a timely and efficient manner because it promotes jobs.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Yes, just setting the table. Don't worry, I'm getting there. Okay, fair enough. There have been delays that have been identified. It's 372 permits open, 165 days average age, 59 applications awaiting response, average age 170 days, youngest 20 days, oldest 481 days. When were the delays first flagged as being problematic? Because this has taken some time to get to that amount.

The Speaker: The question is, how long does it sit before it realises there's a problem with it, I guess?

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

I would say you really can't tell how long because the planning application, or in this case what we're referring to are building permit applications, could be reviewed and then you get 50 per cent through and then you see there's an issue and you reach out to the agent. They could get 10 per cent through and you realise there is an issue. I would have to ask the Department of Planning to see how they could actually look at that, but it is something that we are trying to see.

When we talked about having AI complement that . . . to actually look through them in their entirety to try and find missing things up front and then we can address them, the department can address those more holistically.

Currently, how the vetting process goes is you start, and you look, and you look and when you come across problems, you reach out. Sometimes the answer to those problems creates additional problems or they may solve things that you hadn't even noticed before. It's not an exact science and that's why I made great pains to talk about the respect that we have for the persons who are up there actually doing the work because it's not entirely their fault that there happens to be projects that are delayed 160 days versus some delayed 20 days.

When I say delay, I think "delay" is the wrong term here. We're saying they're just that old, meaning they've submitted, and six months have passed by and they still haven't been approved. Where some come, they get approved within a few days, some for whatever reason, there are things lagging that require it to stay up there a little bit longer. But we are looking to see how we can streamline all of those services and bring them together and get the projects out much quicker than what has been happening in the past.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Robert King: For clarification, Mr. Speaker, the word "delays" was actually used in the Ministerial Statement, so if that was not the appropriate term, maybe something else should have been used.

Regardless, what are the performance measures? What is the intended target for response time to the applications to reduce the delay time? There must be a target to be achieved if we accept that the delays are unacceptable. Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's an impossible question to [answer] because not every application is the same. And what you're looking to do is have all of the applications then and compiled at the

same [time] so they can get vetted and moved out versus the rest of it. We'll continuously monitor what's going on up there and we'll continually make those tweaks as they need to be made.

But as I know, as an agent, it's no straightforward answer to say why one application takes two days and one application takes five days because in any other type of scenario, those type of applications, it could be five days over here and two days over here. But they'll continue to monitor, tweak, and try to do things differently so we can get projects out of the Department of Planning faster.

The Speaker: Second supplementary or new question?

Mr. Robert King: Second supplementary.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Robert King: Fifty-nine applications awaiting response from agents, 170 days. Youngest, 20 days. Oldest, 481 [days]. So, what we're talking about is awaiting a response, not a decision that is being made. So, I'm wondering what the performance measure is for response.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The department is waiting for agents to respond. If they take 20 days, they take 20 days; if they take 100 days, they take 100 days. What I did mention is that what we're looking to do is look at . . . if he's asking for a performance measure, to look at a certain number of days and say, *Hey, if you haven't responded, we're going to push this to the side and take it out of the queue and work on other things, and you'll have to come back and resubmit.* So once . . . and as I said, these are mitigations that we are looking to implement. So, when we come and decide on a day, that'll be something that we announce to, obviously, the public so they know. If you don't respond in 30 days, your project gets taken out of the queue. If you don't respond in 60, it gets taken out of the queue.

It's just something that we need to have, you know, to really work on what that final timeline will be for that process.

The Speaker: New question?

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

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 2: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Robert King: How many Bermudians applied for the supervisor's position? Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Is that in the Statement?

Mr. Robert King: Sorry?

The Speaker: Is that in the Statement?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, it is. In terms of two new experienced consultants and a supervisor, that was in your Statement. So, the question is, is how many Bermudians applied for those positions? Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm not sure if that was part of the context of the Statement, though. The Statement was . . . and I'm trying to put it in the context of what was said. I think the reference to the supervisor was just the fact that there was a new supervisor.

But the Statement itself was about the procedures of the Ministry, right?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: The Statement was about procedures of that they are trying to clean up for how functionality in reference to applications, and it didn't necessarily address the process for the replacement of supervisors. It just mentioned that there was a new supervisor.

So it may be out of the context of the question of the Statement . . . your question is out of the context of what the Statement was.

Mr. Robert King: May I ask a question, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You're seeking clarity?

Mr. Robert King: Seeking clarification, yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: I was speaking to boosting capacity when it was stated that a permit processing person . . . two experienced consultants had been hired to fulfil the role of permit processor and supervisor. So, my question is in relation to the hiring of consultants, and my question was, How many Bermudians applied for those specific positions?

The Speaker: So, the Statement did make reference to the fact that two persons had now been employed to assist (my words). So, he is asking now, how did those two persons . . . what was the process for those two persons?

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER (*Standing Order 17(5)(g)(xi)*)

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

Mr. Speaker. I will refer to Standing Order 17(5)(g)(xi), which speaks to the fact that the Minister cannot answer questions that he is not accountable for to the Parliament.

I think that it is important, the Honourable Member, for his particular information. As he would know, the Minister, of course, would have no information on that, as Ministers of the Government are not involved in public sector hiring.

And as a former public officer, I am certain that the Honourable Member is aware of that.

The Speaker: I was trying to find how it related. And the point that the Premier has made reference to is a valid point here in that the employment of the public sector employees is outside of the remit of the Minister.

So, the Minister didn't include that in the Statement and wouldn't be able to give you an answer to it right now. Okay?

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

The Speaker: Okay. Do you have a . . . that was your second question. Do you have a third question you may put or are you done on that?

Mr. Robert King: That will be it for my submissions. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, you also have questions from other Members, MP Pearman. Would you still like to put your question?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the Whip was ahead of me in the queue, but I will go as you have directed me.

QUESTION 1: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Honourable Minister, for that helpful Statement. And I certainly commend the fact that the Government is looking at this. And I agree with you that this is a very frustrating area for planning, being a very frustrating area for people. It's something we hear a lot of.

My question is in relation to your point seven in your Statement where you discuss the Ministerial Waiver. And I was just wondering if you could perhaps give us a little bit more clarity on how that will work as a process. Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you for the question because it is quite topical.

Many of us would remember the . . . we would all remember the recent appeal process for the seniors'

home in St. David's. The seniors' home was not, could not be approved because it ran afoul of a policy within the Bermuda Plan. However, it was approved on appeal upon recommendation of everyone involved, including the Department of Planning and the Development Application Board, that if we could waive that, we would have approved it. And so, it comes to the Minister as an appeal.

So, what I have done is sought how we could fast-track that process. And the process is that if there is something within the Bermuda Plan that is minor, but we all agree that if we were able to look past that, it would be a good project, then the Minister is then allowed to provide a letter that says you can waive that for this application only. It's a very targeted waiver. It's only for that. It would only be for that specific case.

That does not mean the project doesn't still go through the regular vetting process. It could still even be rejected by the Development Applications Board. If it comes down to that, it could still be objected to by the people who object as well. But it does allow a project to be approved if it . . . if all of the other merits are good, except for just that one piece within the Bermuda Plan that everybody actually agrees that if we could, if that wasn't there, we would just approve it anyway.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, supplementary. Thank you, Honourable Minister, for that detailed answer.

Just in terms again of the waiver, how does the Minister anticipate that the request for the waiver would get to the Minister? Would that be by the applicant or by the officer or by the board or all three?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you for that. And as we develop this, what we've come up with is the opportunity for the department to apply for the waiver, opportunity for the agent to apply for the waiver. In an ideal case, both of them would send the same document, but we recognise there may be cases where the agent thinks there's merit to a waiver and where the department may think there's merit to the waiver.

There's also . . . we also intend for this policy to be recorded and published on a quarterly or bi-, or once or twice a year basis of how many waivers have been issued and what projects they applied to as well.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, second supplementary. Thank you again, Minister, for that detailed answer.

In terms of the waiver and the scope of it, would it just be curtailed to breaches of the Bermuda Plan or might it be more broad in your thinking?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm actually not sure what else it could cover. Development applications are by the Bermuda Plan, period, and nothing else. But you do have the City of Hamilton Plan. You do have the North Hamilton Plan. And as you would know, the North Hamilton Plan and the City of Hamilton Plan that we just passed here provides that leeway to the agents of planning now and the next Bermuda Plan, we're looking to incorporate that as well so that there is more flexibility for them to say, *Hey, in this case, we can look past that.*

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second question.

The Speaker: Second question, yes.

QUESTION 2: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, thank you.

Following on again, still in the same topic of the waivers. In terms . . . you just indicated to this Honourable House that what you would do is probably publish twice a year a list of waivers that had occurred. If a member of the public, i.e., not someone who's in favour of the waiver potentially, wanted to challenge it, how would they know or how might they know? Is that something that you've given consideration to?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If there is an objection to a planning application that comes during the vetting process, and they . . . if someone is that keen, they will be following it. And normally the persons who do make objections are following the plan. All of these records would be our public records. You can go on the planning.gov.bm website, do a search for the address you're looking for. And all of this documentation would be there for you to look at, download at your leisure.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: It's actually third question.

The Speaker: Third question.

QUESTION 3: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Still the same topic. Final question. I'll just wait while the discussion is being had between the Premier and Minister. Thank you, Minister.

Just in terms again of the challenge, presumably the waiver would also be open to challenge in the usual way that any other element of the application would be open to challenge. Is that correct?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Absolutely.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

The Speaker: Opposition Whip. [Would] you still like to put your questions?

QUESTION 1: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. And thank you.

The Minister has given some great detail, so most of my questions were already answered. Just one last question.

On page six of seven, the Honourable Minister talks about better communication and service access. And one of the . . . in relation to callbacks and the like, and one of the dotted items there and solution is *dedicated office hours for in-person consultation*. So, I'm assuming this has to do mostly with applications that probably have already come in.

There's been a lot of talk also in the past about pre-consultation as well, before we even get to that point. So, I was wondering how the Minister has been making out. And when he says these hours, does that involve pre-consultation as well and informing people how to get their applications right in the first place?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, pre-consultation still takes place. I know I might have been reading fast during the budget, but we did talk about pre-consultation in the budget and how they still do that. The idea of the dedicated office hours is what the department is finding out, as people come there whenever. And when someone is reviewing a planning permit, and then they got to leave and go talk to someone, and a five-minute conversation turns into two hours, that's two hours of vetting that has not happened.

And we also, they're so . . . they're very . . . they understand the frustration. So, when they receive an email, they're leaving what they're doing to respond to this email, and sometimes it becomes a back and forth. And so, the suggestion that I had when we were sitting was like, well, why not dedicate specific times for that? And so, you know, Thursdays . . . if you want to come and talk to someone, this is the day to make an appointment, versus how it is now where people just come in whenever they feel like it and expect . . . and they get the service of people leaving what they're doing to come and actually talk to them. And I think it would . . . I believe it would lead to less frustrations if it was just a regulated thing.

But pre-consultation before you begin on a project is something that is always asked for, and if you . . . when we talked about the Bermuda, the City of Hamilton plan, the pre-consultation was a big part of my

presentation to say, hey, we encourage you to come, we encourage you to be there, we encourage you to come and talk to the Department of Planning first before you begin, because that also leads to less frustration of putting something in, and then the back and forth of finding out that it's not going to work, or you're going to have to curtail it more so than you originally had thought.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary? No? You're good? Okay.

Members, that brings us to a conclusion of the question-and-answer period for this morning.

We will now move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

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

Minister, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: I rise this morning to offer congratulatory remarks to the Devonshire Recreational Club on the . . . sure. And I will associate honourable colleague in contingency 15 with these remarks, and the Premier as well.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: And in celebration of their contribution, not only to our community, being a beacon, not only of hope during times when in our history, there was nowhere else for our community to gather. And so, I recognise their 80th anniversary, and the contribution of the eight entrepreneurs, the eight Black men who saw fit to purchase that Frog Lane premises. Recognising also their contribution to sport, namely football and cricket in our community, as well as the Diamondettes who are a part of the history as well, and the legacy that the Devonshire Recreational Club has for our community. And specifically, as the Devonshire North West representative, I'm honoured also to represent them and their voice in this Honourable House. I look forward to joining them on Sunday among celebration of this history, this legacy, that they will continue to do for our community. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? Mr. Tyrrell—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Good morning, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I rose to my feet on Monday in this House to bring congratulations to four senior members in my Warwick area, just to express that the elderly are living longer, but today I have to add to that list that I brought on Monday of a person who is celebrating their birthday today. This person has much connection in this House in the likes of being the aunt to one of my Ministers here, Minister Weeks. She also lives in the constituency of either the Premier or Minister Jache Adams, so I'm going to associate them as well, but I want to bring happy birthday wishes to my mother-in-law—

An Hon. Member: Associate me, too.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Valeria Duffy Dill Butterfield who was married to the famous [Clarence] "Bussie" Butterfield. Today she's celebrating her 96th birthday. She's as sprightly as ever. She even promised to probably kick me if I did announce her name today and her age, but I have to do it because I love her so much. I want to wish her a happy day, and as I said, I'm associating the Minister and the Premier and Minister Adams as well.

So, thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister Weeks, would you like your three minutes?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to start off my remarks with being associated with the last speaker, acknowledging his mother-in-law, who is one of my aunts, my Aunt Duffy up there. She's from St. Monica's, but she now lives in constituency 18. So, happy birthday, Auntie.

Mr. Speaker, as the school year winds down, and when we recognise the greatness again, it's that time of year, Mr. Speaker, Harrington Sound Primary School—

An Hon. Member: Yay!

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And as I get started, I'm reminded every year that I should declare my interest. I kind of know the administrator of the school, and so I would like to associate the MP from constituency 15, Minister Darrell. I think his son also goes to Harrington Sound, and is an alum, but Mr. Speaker, in my three minutes, I just want to roll off some accomplishments that they have done.

The champions again in the primary school, interschool sports, the first in the Bermuda Day Parade Primary School Float category—

An Hon. Member: Yay!

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: They had a strong showing in the Bermuda Day Children's Marathon Race. They won the Boys Super 8 Cricket Tournament just this week, Mr. Speaker. Their students were on the winning team for the Education Minister's Debate Challenge. Top five in the Bermuda National Spelling Bee. Awesome work in the Primary School Art Show, and they brought down the house, Mr. Speaker,—

An Hon. Member: Who wrote that for you?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —at the Primary School Spring—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Al.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, yes—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: He should know. And just think—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, while I have got my one minute left. There have been many individual student firsts in many categories. So, congratulations to the Harrington Sound School for another outstanding year under the leadership, Mr. Speaker, of their dedicated and amazing principal, Mrs. C. L. Weeks. Thank you.

[Laughter and desk thumping]

The Speaker: Minister, Minister, Minister, you forgot to mention that they even had the Speaker come and address the class on a mock programme that they were doing . . . But go ahead.

Any other Member? Minister Darrell.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you and the listening audience.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this morning to recognise a couple of creatives in our midst, in our community, and the first is actually a young dedicated public servant who is a creative outside of her work hours, and that is Ms. Aalai Wolffe on the launch of her new song, which is called *Dum Da Da*. Like I said, she's a public servant, and we wish her much success in her continued singing career. I also associate the Honourable Deputy Speaker of this House, as she says that she is her constituent.

Also, I would like to congratulate one of . . . more popular footballers on this Island, Mr. Tre Ming, as some would have caught that he not only competed in the Bermuda Day half marathon, but he had an interesting event take place towards the end, and that was a marriage proposal. So, we want to say congratulations to him on his double victory that day, on finishing the track from St. George's, as well as proposing, and I believe she said yes.

Also, congratulations in the local footballing scene to Mr. Jarreau Hayward, who recently has been appointed as the new head coach of the Dandy Town Hornets . . . associating MP from constituency 2, I think also associating with . . . former executive at the Western Stars Club, Mr. MP Michael Weeks. I will associate them.

Also, I'd like to congratulate Bermudian midfielder, Mr. Willie Clemons, for his recent signing for the Southern League Premier Division Central side Leiston. So, I want to congratulate him. He is one of many Bermudians that although may not be at the levels of one Mr. Nahki Wells, but they are professional athletes nonetheless over there in England, and are continuing to fly the flag for Bermuda. So, congratulations to him.

And as you will get used to this one, another congratulations to RTwoG2, as well as Fire Wayne, on the launch of their new song, which is called *The Weekender*. It was very catchy. I think many of the Bermuda Day videos that have been taken by the creatives are attaching this song with it. It talks about it being a Friday, and with Bermuda Day being on a Friday, it was very fitting, and he did—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: You'd have to come down to Devil's Hole Club later this evening, MP Campbell, to hear me sing it. But I just want to congratulate him because they continue to do good work, and again, put Bermuda on the map.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? MP Smith.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to have a message of condolences be sent to the family of Edric White from Beaming Hill. He's been my neighbour for my entire life, a plumber from Wilfred White and Sons Plumbing. He is the father of my best friend. I know that his entire family was devastated with his loss. As somebody who . . . that pool that is at his house is where I learned how to swim. He's been an important part of my family, and I want to make sure that condolences are sent to their entire family at this time. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Swan, back of the room there.

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

Mr. Speaker, I would like to be associated with condolences that were already expressed in a previous session to Ms. Peggy Delpêche of the Paynter family from St. George's, whose family I know very, very well. Her husband I knew extremely well, and her brothers and her siblings as well. I just feel for them at this particular time.

I would like to have congratulations expressed to two Bermudians doing well in a community I have adopted called Bristol. My daughter lives in Weston-super-Mare and attended university in Bristol. So, Nahki Wells was honoured for his community service, and I can tell you in the school that my daughter teaches at while she's still doing her master's work—his name was mentioned. She mentioned his name, to a problematic student, eyes lit up, and where other teachers couldn't communicate with him, she had a natural in. He is an iconic figure amongst the young people of greater Bristol.

And now St. George's rooted Dage Minors is training there, living there, and winning there—won the Bristol 10k, which is an outstanding feat as he continues to go on to strength to strength.

And I would like to say thank you to Principal Shanda Simmons from Dalton E. Tucker Primary School, my alma mater from that greater White Hill, Death Valley, Rose Hill community who welcomed me to teach a few of their children. I have had the honour on two occasions over the last couple of Thursdays to take six well-behaved, very enthusiastic youngsters with the blessing of the chairman of government golf courses up to Port Royal, and with the likes of Dwayne Pearman, and Camiko Smith, and Cornel Bean, and Glenn Simmons, and Darren Woods, and myself, and many others coming out of that school, I see the future bright, and I see future Bermuda championship golfers coming out of Dalton E. Tucker just through this programme, just lighting a spark as the late, no not the late, but the great Lionel Turner did with many of us.

And I'd like to be associated with the 80th celebration . . . years of celebration for Devonshire Rec because Mr. Joe Christopher and Herman Basden certainly did a lot of work and shared that with me. Thank you.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Swan. Does any other member—the MP Reverend Dill.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning colleagues and listening audience.

It is with a heavy heart today that I offer condolences to the family of the late Dr. Melvyn Bassett.

The Speaker: Yes.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: He was an outstanding educator—

[Inaudible interjections]

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: —and we associate the entire House—

The Speaker: Yes.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: —with these condolences.

He was an outstanding educator and community leader. He was my deputy principal and has been an inspiration and mentor over the years, and he will certainly be deeply missed. In particular, his work in later years with the reintroduction of the Child Evangelism Fellowship here on the Island of Bermuda. So, we ask that condolences be sent to his family.

Also, I'd like to offer condolences to the family of Mr. Alfred Ambrose Scott. He was a member . . . and I associate several members, the Premier. And okay, I understand that that has been shared already, so I certainly offer my condolences to his family.

On a more positive note, I'd like to offer congratulations to the [College of Natural Health Sciences Bermuda] at their recent graduation, and I'd like to commend them on the work that they are doing in this community to develop natural health practitioners, and I also like to congratulate the individuals. They also, at their graduation, offered honorary doctorates to three outstanding athletes in our community who are Mr. Raymond Swan, Mr. Albert J. Donawa, and Mr. Kavin Smith, and we certainly congratulate them on this accomplishment, and we commend the [College of Natural Health Sciences Bermuda] on acknowledging their contribution to the community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

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

MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, I think this is the first time in this Honourable House I will offer congratulations. I've done an obituary.

It's with great pleasure that I offer congratulations to the Warwick Academy Class of 2025 . . . and I declare my interest because that is the one with my son in it. So, I will do that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, any other Member?

MP DeCouto.

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

I would like to associate with the condolences to the family of Mr. White, and I'll just add a quick anecdote. I had the pleasure as a teenager to sail with him and his family members as part of the Knight-White Syndicate. It is an actual name of a family member before people next door get fed up—

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —where they resurrected one of Bermuda's traditional fitted dinghies and built a programme from scratch, which is a bit of an act of madness if you think about it, and those who observed that programme will know it was a testament to Mr. White's intensity and passion and purpose, and my condolences go out to his whole family, most especially Jonathan.

I also send condolences to Mr. Phil Heaney and his family, and he was a well-regarded rugby player in his time, and he was noted for his sharp-witted personality, and having canvassed him a few times, I can attest to that as well, Mr. Speaker. He was not a gentleman to take for granted, and you had to earn it every time.

I also congratulate Ms. Jessica Lewis, as you know, one of Bermuda's outstanding athletes, recently at the World Para Athletics Grand Prix in Switzerland. She has won yet another gold medal in the 200-metres—

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —and a bronze medal in the 100-metre and 400-metre events, and as you know, she's a frequent occurrence in these congratulatory sessions, Mr. Speaker.

And another person who appears frequently in these sessions is also Mr. Kaden Hopkins, one of Bermuda's international cyclists. He had recently won the Grand Prix Jack Auto race in Guadeloupe, and again, also just came fifth in the opening stages of the Grand Prix USL race there, also recently, and I have no doubt we'll hear many more things about his successes in cycling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make—MP Pearman.

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

Mr. Speaker, last night I had the pleasure of attending the Spring into Arts Festival arranged by the Department of Education up at CedarBridge [Academy], and I see the Premier, who I was about to acknowledge, no doubt will join me in commending it because he was there as well. I believe maybe one or both of his children were on stage. It was excellent.

There were six or seven schools involved. I declare my own as one of my children was on stage as well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: It was excellent. There were six or seven schools there, but what I would like to do is give a shout-out not to my son's school or indeed to the Premier's son's school, but to the school that I thought just blew the doors off, and that was West Pembroke, and Mr. Robinson, who is their conductor. Their performance clearly, clearly took a lot of hard effort and time, and I think the audience was immensely impressed given the young age of those children and what they pulled off last night. That might have been before you were there, but it was excellent.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my commendations to all of those involved in putting on that effort. It was truly a great showcase of young Bermuda talent. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to—Opposition Whip.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you very much. Again, good morning colleagues and listening Bermuda.

I just want to send my condolences as well and be associated with Mr. White's untimely passing just out of the blue, seen him two hours before and then gone. So I would like to be associated with this, but I want to just, in honour to him as a father . . . not many may know, but Mr. White is the father of Johnny "Boops", as we call him, White, the owner of ESC, one of the well-known members up at Warwick Workmen's Club, always up there. So in honour to his father, just passing, to bring up his son in the likes of Johnny, who thought nothing of being a member of, all of us probably know who he is, a member of Warwick Workmen's Club, speaks to the fact that there are many of us in Bermuda who believe that we should be working with one another regardless of race. And so, to have a loss like this here is pretty devastating for Mr. White to have passed away and I know that his son, a very, very close friend of mine, Johnny, it's tough for him and the family. So, our condolences go out to the White family.

The Speaker: Any other Member wish to make a contribution? Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, although I've already been associated with the remarks, the whole House has been associated, I would like to add my comments, certainly, to the Honourable Member from constituency 36 on the passing, the untimely passing of Dr. Melvyn Bassett.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to associate myself with the remarks on behalf of the Honourable Minister of Education, who sits in another place, that were offered by the Shadow Attorney General, the Member for constituency 22, on last evening's Spring into the Arts show. He rightly recognised that both of my children were in the Northlands Primary School Choir, but there were certainly excellent performances that were from all the schools, and it is an important event that is put on every year by the Ministry of Education. And so, I would like to certainly commend not only all of the schools, but all the teachers, all the persons behind the scenes, and certainly the officials in the Department of Education, who make sure that our arts continue to be recognised and cherished in our schools.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to also extend and be associated with the congratulations offered by the Minister, who represents constituency 14, Honourable Minister Alexa Lightbourne, on the congratulations to the Devonshire Recreation Club on their 80th anniversary, which they have been celebrating all week, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Minister rightly stated the history of this club. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am well associated with the Devonshire Recreation Club, but they continue to go from strength to strength, wanting to do their best to serve the community, want to do their best, and they put on a series of events that is taking place this week, and I would encourage Honourable Members on both sides of the House to support those events if possible. If we get out early today, there is a fair on their field, and on Sunday, as was mentioned, there is the gala, which I will be attending along with other Ministers on that evening to acknowledge the 80th anniversary of this historic community club.

It is a club without question that has certainly resonance and links with Bermuda Progressive Layer Party, as you'd be well aware, but it is not a partisan affair. This is a club that has had a strong, proud, and rich history, and it is something that we should celebrate the achievements, especially 80 years on, from the founding of this incredible, incredible community organisation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Is there any other Member? No—MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good day, Mr. Speaker. I attended yesterday the Long Service Awards at Pier Six. The Honourable Premier and Minister of National Security were there for the uniformed services who received commendations for their years of service to this community. Thank you—hats off to all of them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Any other Member? MP Campbell.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to encourage everyone to come up to the National Sports Centre on Wednesday night to encourage our Gombey Warriors, our senior men's national team, who take on the Cayman Islands. They then follow that up days later in Cuba against Cuba. They are still . . . I'm congratulating them in advance and trying to get our people out there to support them to victory. If they win these two matches, they are in with a very good chance of progressing to the next phase. So, encourage all. Tickets are available on GPass. There's no tickets available at the gate. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Any other Member? No other Member?

Before we move on, I'd just like to be associated with the condolences that are expressed to the family of Dr. Melvyn Bassett and, of course, it goes without saying, a Somerset fellow as I am, I've had a long history of relationship with Mr. Bassett going back to my early years and then later when my wife and I came back to Bermuda. She was . . . and she taught at Sandys for a lot of years. I can't remember the number of years, but Mr. Bassett was there the entire time, starting as a deputy and then as a principal when she left. But our relationship continued right up until very recent years and projects that we've done with Mr. Bassett in the community. So, we feel his loss as the community feels his loss.

With that said, we will now move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

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

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Speaker: There's one Government Bill to be introduced by the Minister of Economy and Labour.
Minister.

BILL**FIRST READING****TRADE MARK 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 Trade Marks Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: That brings us to the business of the day, the Orders of today and the first item today is the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance. But I think it's going to be led by the Junior Minister. Am I correct?

Junior Minister, you have the floor.

BILL**SECOND READING****CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025**

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

Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation, I move that the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none. Continue, Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, as requested now to give the considerations of the Bill entitled Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025, the Bill proposes to amend the Customs Tariff Act 1970, the principal Act, with measures . . . that lower the duty rate on building materials and supplies, eliminate custom duties on all motor vehicle parts, lower the duty rates on air conditioning units and parts, increase the duty exemption for returning residents, provide the continuing duty relief available to the Bermuda Hospital's Board for the hospital's operation supplies, and lower the rate of duty for diesels and fuel oils used by BELCO for the production of electricity.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, it's more than \$6. As we said the other day, Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning.

The measure of the Bill affects both the First Schedule and the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act. Mr. Speaker, let me just say that it is this Government's goal to lower the cost of living for Bermuda. In doing so, we are confident that we will not only ease the daily burden of making ends meet but also offer new opportunities for our economic development. One of the major tools that we have at our disposal in achieving this aim is reducing the cost of selected imported goods by lowering rates of custom duties.

The Bill proposes to repeal and replace the First Schedule to the principal Act in order to lower the duty rates on building materials and supplies, and air conditioning units and parts, eliminate custom duties on motor vehicles parts, and increase the duty exemption for returning residents.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill provides wide range duty relief on a selected building materials, prefabricated supplies, and raw materials for both interior and exterior work. This includes, but it's not limited to block, stones, glass, plastic, fabric, wood, metal, chemicals, including glues, resins, and paint. The duty rates associated with 481 tariff codes will be lowered as follows: 429 tariff codes will be lowered from 25 per cent to 10 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimated \$4.9 million; 8 tariff codes will be lowered from 15 per cent to 10 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimate \$293,000; and 44 tariff codes will be lowered from 12.5 per cent to 10 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimated \$325,000. It is estimated based on our prior year's data that these amendments will reduce the cost of construction and building repairs for revenue by \$5.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill will provide duty relief on air conditioning units and parts. The duty rates associated with 6 tariff codes will be lowered from 35 per cent to 10 per cent. It is estimated based on prior year's data that these amendments will reduce the cost on these items by over \$1.8 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill provides wide-ranging duty relief on parts and supplies for motor vehicle repairs, such as I said, shafts, engine transmissions, electrical, glass, belts, tubing, and interior furnishing. The duty rates associated with 65 tariff codes will be eliminated as follows: 45 tariff codes will go to zero per cent from 35 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimated full revenue, \$2.5 million; 22 tariff codes will go from 25 per cent to zero per cent, providing cost reductions of an estimate \$217,000. It is estimated based on prior year's data that these amendments will reduce the cost of repairing Bermuda motor vehicles by a total of \$2.7 million.

Mr. Speaker, in order to effect the over 500 duty rate amendments necessary to lower the duty rates on building materials and supplies, air conditioning units and parts, and motor vehicle parts, a number

of consequential amendments to the First Schedule of the principal Act were needed in order to maintain the structure of the Bermuda nomenclature. This necessitated the proposed introduction of 26 new tariff codes, the deletion of one tariff code, and the amendment of 12 tariff codes. Further, while conducting the review of the First Schedule to the principal Act, a further 12 textual inconsistencies were identified, which did not impact on any rates of duty in our proposed for amendment.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill next provides for an increase in duty exemption from \$200 per person to \$300 per person, an increase of 50 per cent. This rate allowance was last changed in 2012. Based on prior year's travel, this is expected to ease the collective tax burden on returning travellers by an estimated \$2 million.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the measures of the Bill affecting the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act. The Bill proposes to repeal and replace End-Use CPC 4240 so as to remove the existing end-use condition limiting the period of duty relief for imported hospital operating supplies to 1 April 2022 through 31 March 2024 only. Honourable Members will recall that CPC 4240 was amended in July of 2023 after being introduced in April of 2022, to extend the duty period relief within which qualified goods must be imported to Bermuda to 31 March 2024 from 30 September 2023.

Mr. Speaker, after further consideration, the Minister of Finance, in keeping with the commitment of Government to ensure that our hospitals have adequate resources, considered it expedient to remove the end use condition requiring that hospital operating supplies be imported with a fixed time period. This amendment is intended to provide continued duty relief to hospital administered by the Bermuda Hospitals Board by offsetting operating expenses.

The Bill next proposes to amend the End-Use CPC 4703 and CPC 4705 for the purpose of lowering the rate of duty for diesel and fuel oils used by BELCO for production of electricity. In the 2025/26 Budget Statement in support of the Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure, the Government acknowledged the frustration many feel when they open their BELCO bill. While the Government cannot control the cost of fuel on global markets, we're doing everything within the power to lower the underlying costs that contribute to those rates.

Mr. Speaker, in 2023 the duty on fuel used to generate electricity stood at 20 cents per litre, put up by the One Bermuda Alliance in 2018. Honourable Members will recall that in July of 2024 this Government reduced the tax by 60 per cent to 8 [cents] per litre. This Bill proposes to reduce the tax further to just 4 cents per litre. The combined effect of these changes will result in an 80 per cent reduction in this tax since 2023.

Mr. Speaker, this measure demonstrates the Government's commitment to delivering sustained relief on energy costs. While there is more work to be done across the energy sector, this initiative ensures

that the tax policy supports lower electricity costs for every household and business in Bermuda. It is estimated based on prior years' data that this will cut Bermuda's electricity bill by \$1.7 million in addition to concessions introduced during 2024/25.

Mr. Speaker, this further reduction in the duty paid on fuel is expected to reduce custom duty revenue by \$4.2 million. I will comment further on the measure of the Bill in Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

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

Shadow Minister DeCouto, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, and thank you to the Junior Minister for the brief.

I know that the Government can get quite anxious to know if we will support a Bill or not, so let me just start off with that, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We will as a whole . . . we do support this. There are some reservations, and let me talk about that, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: As you know, this Bill was tabled on Monday—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —and I need to say, because, Mr. Speaker, we have a duty as we are MPs, Members, to come in here to have adequately reviewed and assessed and taken a decision for ourselves what we view as to a particular legislation. And I know you appreciate the seriousness of that, Mr. Speaker. And I know that the Standing Orders and so forth, they make provisions, allowances, so that we have the appropriate time to consider those details.

The Minister made reference to 481 classifications of duty, and for those who are listening, the actual Schedule that's being amended is 461 pages.

We did reach out on Monday to the relevant people to get information to help us understand that better, because, of course, we need to assess and build our own understanding as to what we are agreeing to when we come into this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker. And I do want to commend the public servants who put the work in to provide us a breakdown of the actual changes in this Tariffs Act. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that breakdown in itself is over 50 pages.

I would say, unfortunately, we've only received that this morning, so while we are grateful for the work,

you can appreciate, Mr. Speaker . . . and while we are going to agree with this Bill, it is with some measure of goodwill and taking certain things at face value that, frankly, is not how this process is supposed to work.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Bill was tabled under the requirements inside of the House of Assembly. In addition to that, the Bill has been tabled with the time. The Customs Tariff Annex is always that long whenever it's amended. It is repealed and replaced. It is the same thing that happened when they were in Government and we were in Opposition.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: That is the exact same thing. It is the Customs Tariff. The Bill, in and of itself, is not 400 pages.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Of course, Mr. Speaker, you can appreciate if we agree to a Bill that says the Schedule is to incorporate the customs tariff, we are there, of course, agreeing to the customs tariff, which I've already stated we are going to agree to.

So . . . and I also stated we are grateful for the efforts applied.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But I hope you can understand, Mr. Speaker, we have to put a qualification. We have not had the time to fully investigate all of the things on the paper in black and white.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, we will take the Government's statement at face value and in good faith and in the spirit of collaboration. And we are also grateful for the work, as I mentioned—and I'd like to repeat it for the public servants—to break that information down for us.

I also know, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier and his Government have been quite clear about how they want to increase transparency and increase efficiency. So, I hope that going forward they can keep those principles in mind when they bring legislation to this House so that those of us who are tasked with this very serious . . . this very serious mandate to agree or disagree on legislation are provided with all the appropriate information. And I also know that they are talking about

government modernisation. I can only presume, and I hope that the public officers in the Customs Department have been provided with the appropriate tools and technologies to do this in an efficient and modern way.

So, moving on from there, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, generally speaking, we agree with the construction materials cuts. As you know, we like that. We do have a question, if perhaps the Government could consider further cuts, perhaps down to zero per cent duty for appropriate projects such as those perhaps to create units that would be under rent control. That would be one way to do it. And that would be consistent with our philosophy over here. How can we provide cuts that are targeted, Mr. Speaker? And that seems like that would be a great way to target cuts.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The hospital supplies, again, Mr. Speaker, that is an also excellent example of providing targeted relief to an area where we know the costs are becoming prohibitive and burdensome to those in Bermuda. [We] support the other cuts as well.

On the duty allowance exemption, to be honest, I wonder if the Government considered perhaps not doing that. We appreciate that inflation costs go up, and you could make the case that that allowance should go up with inflation. But perhaps those of us who have the wherewithal to travel on a plane ticket of over \$500 most likely are hired, typically take taxis, buy hotel rooms. Perhaps we don't need to save another \$25 on buying materials that are overseas and competing further with Bermuda's retail sector which employs Bermudians and pays taxes, Mr. Speaker. So that's something that we would like to see there.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is a question. That is a question. And yes, those are my questions on that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do join my colleague in the point about the duty relief at the airport. It does not add up in terms of the message from the Government about supporting the retail sector at all. And I'm curious as to why we feel that that's a necessary amendment. Again, it's buried within the rest of these rates, so we have to go along with it. I do not support that.

The second piece I query, and I did laugh a little bit during the budget when we talked about reducing duty on car parts. Good. But is it a tacit recognition of

the poor roads, which is perhaps why we need to make sure that people can repair their cars for a cheaper price because of the poor roads that we currently have? Yes, a bit of a churlish comment, but I think that's on most people's minds. Other than that, we have to go along.

Construction costs—again, the Shadow Minister has made remarks about the construction material duty relief. Again, it makes sense, but there are other ways that you can achieve the same goal by reducing to zero, as the Shadow Minister has said, in relation to particular projects, especially when we have the housing crisis that we do. There's a recognition by the Government of that by reducing those duties. I accept that. But we can go further, as we have said in this debate already in this House when we debated the budget line items.

In relation to energy, again, as part of the Shadow portfolio, certainly support continued duty relief in relation to fuel, and we will look to see again how that translates into people's bills on an ongoing basis. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Government Whip, MP Tyrrell.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognising me. I would like to speak very briefly on the Customs Tariffs Amendment Act.

This is not my subject of expertise, of course, but I do help the CEO of my house to run the household account, so I know how it will hit my pockets in terms of these reductions, and I want to commend the Minister for looking at these wide-ranging reductions, especially the one on returning residents, which my friend over there appears not to want to agree to, but I don't want it to go unnoticed. There's going to be a lot of joy there.

So, I certainly, again, support the Bill in total, especially as it lowers duty rates on things, and the new tariff codes, I certainly recognise them as well. So, I just wanted to support the Minister on this Bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? There are none? Oh, Premier—I was going to call you Junior Minister. Okay, Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, of course, this Bill is a culmination of the things which were set out, or one part of the things which were set out in the Budget Statement, which, of course, started this budget session on 2 May. And, of course, Mr. Speaker, I will not reflect on the debate which took place on Wednesday, but it must be reminded that this is one of a number of Bills to accomplish the reduction in taxes that is in excess of \$45

million that this Government is putting in place for the people of Bermuda. I want to repeat that again, Mr. Speaker, part of a package of tax cuts that is in the area of \$45 million estimated to benefit the people of Bermuda.

This Government is cutting taxes that will benefit every single person in Bermuda. And it is important because . . . because . . . this is important because we hear, my opinion, Mr. Speaker, pretty soundbites from the other side, but completely impractical.

And I have experience in this, Mr. Speaker, because I understand the desire to try to target tax cuts. The honourable . . . officer from the Department of Customs is here. He knows of the difficulty of which we've had on some of these measures. I recall that during 2022, when we tried to do targeted tax cuts and targeted relief and the amount of administrative burden and the difficulty of doing it outweighs the challenge of getting it done.

Now, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, if Bermuda had personal income tax, then these things would be far easier to administer because in other jurisdictions, they are able to target relief based on person's income.

Now, what I will state is it is also important to note that when related to matters of labour income, this Government has reduced taxes on workers and increased taxes on higher earners, which allows us to make sure that we have the budget capacity to continue cutting these taxes.

Let me just go to a particular suggestion that came from the Shadow Minister of Finance. He spoke about that we should cut building materials, not for all, not for the construction projects, not for the private sector, not for all the rest of things.

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

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier is misleading the House. In fact, I said perhaps they would additionally consider cutting to zero for targeted things such as construction to provide units underneath the rent control threshold. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am so happy that he reiterated that point.

I am so happy he reiterated that point because I'm going to go back again. Nice sounding soundbites, completely impractical in reality.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Here is the reason why, Mr. Speaker. You do not know if something falls under rent control until after it is constructed and assessed.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: So again, Mr. Speaker, it sounds nice.

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

Hon. E. David Burt: I do not yield. It sounds nice.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: It sounds nice. But again, it is impractical.

But here is what we have done, Mr. Speaker. We do provide customs duty relief to projects that are with the Bermuda Housing Corporation to construct affordable housing, and those are at a zero per cent duty.

We have end-use reliefs inside of the customs tariff. [They] don't need to be added as new because they are already there. That is important.

And the only changes to the end-use relief schedule are in the actual Bill. So, the Honourable Member does not need to say . . . does not need to say, *Oh, I could not read through the 400-something pages of the custom tariff in and of itself* because the changes to the customs tariff codes are the ones in which were outlined in the Budget Statement.

So again, what are we cutting?

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

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier, the Honourable Premier is perhaps misleading the House—

Hon. E. David Burt: Perhaps?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —because of course we're not here to vote on the Budget Statement. We're here to vote on this particular piece of legislation that was tabled without the full information that we knew in black and white was being associated with that legislation. Not prior statements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, that Honourable Member just has misled the House because it was tabled with the full and complete information as is in the Standing Orders of the House.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is misleading the House.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Bill referred to a Schedule. The Bill's Schedule referred to an online Schedule. The online Schedule is the prior customs tariff, not the tariff we were being asked to agree.

Now I am grateful to the Premier and the public servants for when we followed up on asking—

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading this House. The Honourable Member is acting as though his Whip did not agree to move forward with the Bill that we are discussing right now.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, therefore, we are discussing what this whole House has agreed to.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I will continue. But at some point in time, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we convene a Committee of Standing Orders so that both sides can be educated on what actually constitutes a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Several Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. E. David Burt: Because this is actually getting slightly ridiculous.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: This is actually getting slightly ridiculous. So now, Mr. Speaker, allow me to continue. Because I will take my time and start again.

This Bill is a culmination of the effect of the tax cuts that were previewed in the Pre-Budget Report, contained in a Progressive Labour Party Election Manifesto which returned this party to Government with 25 seats, and, Mr. Speaker, outlined inside of the Budget Statement. And so, yes, it reduces the duty rate on building materials and supplies.

And why? Because affordable housing is a major issue in this country. And we have to go ahead and understand how do we address those issues, Mr. Speaker. And it was the determination of the Government that to make sure that we are not only supporting the private sector in creating additional supply in

whichever way that supply is created. Because as we understand from economics, additional supply is what is needed.

So, whether or not that is in things that are in rent control, items that are not in rent control, whatever it is, more supply is better for the economy to deal with the matters related to house prices. And as stated in the budget, and as stated in the Junior Minister's brief, it's important to note that all matters will be reduced to 10 per cent. These are for things such as air conditioners, which were at 35 per cent. There are matters related to doors, and windows, and steel, and aluminium, and rods, and furniture, and fixtures, and tubs, and toilets. All of those particular items, Mr. Speaker, which are subject to significant custom duties are going to be reduced.

And I heard that on the other side they support this, but I know who does support this, Mr. Speaker. The building contractors, those who are looking to provide housing, those who are looking to build companies, et cetera, because it is good and positive for the economy.

Now let us move on to the next item, which was stated by the Honourable Junior Minister, and this is the elimination of customs duty on all motor vehicle parts. It is interesting that the Honourable Member from constituency 20, who used to sit in another place, called his own comment as *churlish*. That's not my word. That's his word that he used. But I would, if you would allow me to, Mr. Speaker, refer to the Budget Statement on page 13. And it says, and I quote, "Mr Speaker, recognising the strain vehicle repair costs can place on families and businesses, customs duty will be eliminated on all motor vehicle parts imported into Bermuda. Whether it is keeping a family car on the road or a company's fleet operating, this measure is aimed at lowering maintenance and repair costs while the Government works to repave Bermuda's roads."

An Hon. Member: Say it again!

Hon. E. David Burt: So, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, that is not the first time that was said. That was said inside the Pre-Budget Report. That was said when we tabled the Pre-Budget Report here. That was stated when we debated this. It is here inside the Budget Statement, and it is just a clear—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Speak—

[Laughter]

The Speaker: We need to hear, we need to hear the one Member who's on his feet.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the man will have as much . . . the Honourable Member will have as much

sound authority as he wants, but he had the opportunity to speak, and I am now responding. So, they can't have both ways.

They can't say you don't respond to the questions, and when you respond to the questions, they don't like it. But here's the reality, Mr. Speaker. The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that tax policy and economic policy has to—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —be in line with the things which are necessary and required. This budget, as you know, contains a significant investment in road paving. We just saw an announcement from the Honourable Minister of Public Works and Environment that the new road paving equipment has arrived on Island to even speed up further—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —the work of which we are doing. And we know that road repaving works are taking place.

Mr. Speaker, can you call for order?

The Speaker: The speaker's on his feet. We're trying to hear what he has to say.

Member, continue so we can hear what you're saying.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that call for order.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: You can call for order, too, if you wish. I just know the rules of the House, see?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And now, Mr. Speaker, moving on.

The next item that is covered inside of this particular Bill is the increase in the amount of duty-free allowance for returning residents, which has not been increased since 2012. It is right, it is proper, it is good, and I'm sorry that Honourable Members opposite do not support it.

But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, they talk about local retail, they talk about all the things. Let us not forget what this Government has done for local retail. Expansion of tax credits that we've done, reduction of duty rates, sorry, and payroll tax rates for that particular industry inside of a Bill, Mr. Speaker, that it should be reminded in 2023 that they did not support.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Important to note, when we change all of the taxes, increase taxes on high earners, reduce taxes on most workers of this country, reduce tax for every single local business in the country. Because we were raising taxes on high earners, they did not support the legislation.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Understand, but we reduce those taxes for retailers, Mr. Speaker. This is important to recognise and understand. So, it is a broad base of the work of which we are doing.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill provides continuing duty relief available to the Bermuda Hospitals Board for hospital operating supplies. This is something that is important, it is something that is contained. It is the continued expansion of this particular duty relief, which has been in place because we want to make sure we do everything to support our hospital. And I think that we can all agree that I do not think that a public hospital should be paying duty to the major government on the supplies which they operate. So, they can save that fund, those monies to make sure they can provide better services for the persons that are there. Combined with the increased funding that this Government has given to the Bermuda Hospitals Board contained inside of this budget, supported, Mr. Speaker, by the sound management of the economy underneath this Progressive Labour Party Government which has led us to record the second projected Consolidated Fund surplus in a row.

Let us move on, Mr. Speaker, to the final point.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And the final point, Mr. Speaker, is lowering the rate of duty for diesel and fuel oils for BELCO for the production of electricity.

Some history, Mr. Speaker, as I am certain that you do know. In 2012, when the Progressive Labour Party left Government, the—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely another history lesson for you, Honourable Member Fahy, because it may not just be for you. It may be for the people who are listening, because they deserve to know the difference.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The difference is . . . the difference is in 2012, customs duty taxes on fuel were 10 cents per litre. In 2014, the party opposite increased them to 15 cents per litre.

Some Hon. Members: No!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: In 2016, they increased it again to 20 cents per litre.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: They doubled the taxes on gasoline in this country, increasing costs to residents of this country.

But what, Mr. Speaker, has this Government done? In 2022, when gas prices were going up across the world, hitting record highs, we froze the price of the pump, saving consumers money throughout. Saving money for consumers throughout the country. And here's what's interesting.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: What is interesting is, they recommended that we freeze the funds, but they said the Government should reduce the cost, but they don't have the money to reduce the cost. Funny, we did have the money, and we reduced the cost.

Second, Mr. Speaker, what did we do? Last year, the fuel was at the tax, which was doubled under them, was up to 20 cents a litre. We cut that to 8 cents per litre. This year, we are cutting it in half again, a total reduction over in a year of 80 per cent on fuel costs.

Now here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, and I will quote for the members who are listening in the public, if you will allow me.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: "To date, government fuel due to relief has reduced average monthly electricity rates by approximately 6%. The additional reduction," (that we are doing today, Mr. Speaker,) "will bring the total relief to 8%, saving the average customer \$300 per year. This estimate is based on average residential usage, and the actual savings will vary depending on consumption."

So here we are, Mr. Speaker. All of these matters will benefit Bermudians, will benefit Bermudian businesses, will benefit Bermuda's households, seniors, and working families, Mr. Speaker. That is the record of this Progressive Labour Party Government. And of course, Mr. Speaker, I support the legislation in my name. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Premier, it's now that time. I was hoping we would have gone to Committee beforehand, but—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: You wouldn't want to move us into Committee beforehand, would you?

Hon. E. David Burt: No, I would not, sir. I know there are more persons to speak.

The Speaker: Okay.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House do now adjourn for lunch to return at 2:00 pm.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

There are none. The House now stands adjourned for lunch until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:31 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:00 pm

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members. I trust everyone had a good break.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now back in session.

When we broke for the lunch period, we were still in the House on the Customs Tariff Amendment. Is there any other Member who wishes to speak to that in the House, or are we going to the Committee?

Minister Hayward.

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

Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the Bill, the motive behind the Bill, the features contained in the Bill, and I am pleased with the impact that these changes would have on our community. The positive impact.

Bermuda is one of the countries in the world that maintains a high cost of living. As a result, there is pressure on both businesses and residents to continue to operate in an environment where both are finding their purchasing power diminished by the high cost of living. It is the Government's responsibility to understand what some of those pressures are which are leading to the stresses and put appropriate policy solutions in place that benefit, yes, our business community, but also the residents of Bermuda.

In order for the Government to exercise fiscal policy, it needs to be in a position to do so. So, what is being lost is that the Government now finds itself in a position where it has the fiscal capacity to make the necessary adjustments which are required so that we can provide greater levels of relief to businesses and the residents of Bermuda. These measures should be fully supported. It is a balance between providing relief

to residents and providing relief to our business community.

The measures that are contained within the Customs Tariff [Act] 1970 (which we are changing), to be clear, fall into six categories. We are lowering the duty rate on building materials and supplies. I first ask, who benefits from that change? The answer to the question is the entire community. Investors who are looking to develop, persons who are looking to renovate their properties, persons looking to acquire properties which may now be affordable because the construction costs will be lower. Those segments of our community benefit from this particular change. And so, this change should be well supported.

We complain that we have a housing crisis. We complain that we have reduction in inventory. And so, when we do things that are deliberately designed to support investment and development in a space where we have a need, it should be commended. If the Government has done an analysis and says that we can't go all the way to zero because that's currently not what our fiscal capacity allows, then it should be at least acknowledged that we are making a meaningful step in the right direction. It should be meaningfully acknowledged that we have consulted with the business community who have requested these changes, and we have acquiesced to those requests by facilitating the change through changing our legislation and rates.

The second would be elimination of duty on all motor vehicle parts. We ask ourselves, whom does that benefit? It benefits the residents who are required to make maintenance and repairs on their vehicles, who will now make lower payments.

I heard the chirping by the Honourable Member Fahy, who said because of our bad roads. However, maintenance and repair on vehicles transcends any challenges we may be having with our roads. And if you find yourself in the unfortunate position where you get in an accident that has absolutely nothing to do with our roads, this change still supports you. And so, what we do is we take into consideration what the community is saying, and we adjust to it.

Just like when there was a removal of a ferry route. I then saw the Honourable Member Fahy in the newspaper applauding the Government for restoration of that very same ferry. Do you know why? Because the residents complained and we responded.

So, we have a track record of understanding where there are pain points and adequately responding. That is what this Government is expected to do. And so, we are making those adjustments. We are also lowering the duty rate on air conditioning units and parts. A lot of us can empathise with coming up in an environment where we didn't have air conditioners in our homes. I had two misfortunes. You see, when you stay across the street from the dump, you don't have the luxury—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I hear the Honourable Member DeCouto laughing because I stayed across the street from the dump.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Honourable Minister is misleading the House. He doesn't know what I was laughing about and there was some sidebar conversation on an unrelated topic.

I know he's the speaker, but not everything is revolving around him today, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, it may be misplaced laughter, I'll accept that. But for the residents who lived on Parsons Road, like I lived on Parsons Road, this is not a laughing matter. Because not only did we have the dump, but there was a stream at the bottom of the dump called the pond. And on a hot summer day, the pond emitted an odour that if your windows were left open in your house during a hot summer day, you entered your house and you thought that a rodent had died and decayed in your house. So, our windows were closed on hot summer days without the luxury of central air conditioning.

Now we advanced from that particular space where we did get window units. And unfortunately, because I had a window unit on a ground level, I learned the hard way of having a window unit on a ground level of Parsons Road, where somebody kicked in my window unit, got into my house, took all my valuables and walked right back out of that window. So, this is the reality.

But had the duty rates been lower on air conditioning units and air conditioning parts, we may have been able to get central air conditioning, which didn't require a window unit, which would have allowed us to keep our windows closed to protect us from the stench of the pond, but also keep our houses safe from persons who are prepared to kick in our window units.

I then later learned that those window units are more expensive when it comes to your electricity rates. And so, I am pleased now when I see that when Government is reducing the duty on the fuel associated with our electricity, it also provides relief to those individuals. But I ask, who benefits from these changes? And I'm left with the only conclusion, and that is the people of Bermuda benefit from these changes. And we don't discriminate whom those people actually are.

When I look at the next measure, when we're providing duty relief to the hospital, we have a mantra that we want to see accessible and affordable hospitals

and health care for all. This takes us a step further in that direction. The hospital caters to almost the entire residential population. It also caters to the visitors to our shores. The entire country collectively benefits from us easing some of the financial pressures on the hospital.

The Premier indicated that altogether the relief that we're providing to the citizens of Bermuda equates to more than \$45 million . . . \$45 million. It has to be viewed from a lens where the Government has positioned itself to be able to provide relief to the residents of Bermuda. And while the Honourable Members on the other side may oppose extending the duty relief at the airport—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

The Speaker: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Minister is misleading the House. We did not say we oppose. In fact, I started my response in this debate specifically saying we support this Bill.

An Hon. Member: But . . .

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But we did suggest that they could have considered a different approach.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: His point was, he said that persons opposite may oppose the duty relief rate, not the Bill. He meant something specific.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member Fahy stood to his feet and opposed the relief to the residents of the people of Bermuda. And—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: What? No, he did not.

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

POINT OF ORDER

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I literally stood to my feet and said we support it.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait. You made reference to, not yourself, to the other Member. The other Member said he supported the Bill, but he was opposed to a particular piece of the Bill.

An Hon. Member: He said it too!

The Speaker: That's what he made reference to. He pointed out the piece that you made reference to, that you were opposed to.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: We have to operate with some level of integrity in this House, Mr. Speaker.

You cannot stand to your feet, oppose something, and then when somebody highlights that you've opposed relief to the residents of Bermuda, you're trying to draw back from that. The reality is we have a different point of view on that particular piece.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I know that my residents, my constituents, will be happy to take advantage of greater relief when travelling back from abroad. Sometimes, persons travel abroad to get goods because there is a lack of availability of those goods on the Island. This is not necessarily to reduce the successfulness of our retail sector because we've put other measures in place that actually support our retail sector.

It is this Government's desire for a vibrant retail sector. So much so that we're focused on embarking on putting a framework in place which we will consider to be our national entrepreneurship strategy, which promotes small and medium-sized enterprises in Bermuda. But we have given relief where relief has been requested from our retailers. And so, when you look at this entirety as a package, you have to say that this Government has taken practical steps to reduce the cost of living.

And then you say, how are they able to do that? They are able to do that because they have created a level of fiscal capacity.

What is actually heartwarming to me about this relief that we're providing now, it's on top of relief that we have provided over the last seven years while in Government.

So, the Premier highlighted, and it was also highlighted last time he was in this Honourable House, in terms of what we've done for the workers in terms of reduction of payroll tax for those who are working. How we've increased the minimum wage for those who are working. Two measures that benefit the workers of this country directly. And if you're unfortunate enough to be unemployed and you need assistance, we have also increased the eligibility and benefits that one can receive through financial assistance. I don't know how the actions of this Government cannot be viewed as ones which are human-centred and in the best interest of the residents of Bermuda.

As I move on, this is not the first time we've amended duty rates. We highlighted essential food items, and we've reduced the cost and the duty associated with those essential food items. Whom does that change benefit? It benefits the residents of Bermuda. It

benefits the families of Bermuda. It benefits mothers of Bermuda who are trying to feed their kids. This Government has been responsive. We have done a lot, and we have a lot more to do.

I think that when we come here, we have a responsibility to the constituents who elected us here to make the argument as it pertains to whether or not the changes benefit those constituents or not. And I'll challenge any Member of the Opposition to stand up and say, *I oppose these changes because they do not benefit the constituents who elected me to this House*. I can support that argument if they have come to the conclusion that this does not support their constituents. But they can't.

So, when persons oppose, I ask, on what basis? If they're here to represent their constituents and their constituents will benefit from the change, on what basis is the Opposition coming from? It is not based on the sound principles of good governance.

I spoke about the minimum wage. And we will come back to this House, like with other tax changes, to progress the minimum wage even further. I did a national economic update, and I highlighted that in every industrial sector in Bermuda, employment income was up. I continue to hear things surrounding a stagnant economy, but that's far from the reality of our economic situation. And so, our economy is growing, government finances are stable.

Don't take my word for it, Mr. Speaker. Standard & Poor's recently released a report as it pertains to their independent assessment of where we are as a country. I did not hear the negativity that is spewed and the rhetoric in that report that is spewed when I come to this House and the Opposition paints the picture of where we are. I saw sound and stable government policies. I saw words as such as *responsive*. I saw our rating and our outlook remain stable with no grave area of concern. [Do] you know why? Because we are on the right track.

Bermuda continues to be a high-performance jurisdiction. We continue to punch above our weight level in a number of areas. I, for one, Mr. Speaker, am proud to be a Bermudian. I am proud to be a member of the Progressive Labour Party and I'm proud of the work that we are doing to support the residents of Bermuda.

And as a result of that, I wholeheartedly support the changes which are in front of this Honourable House today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? MP Pearman.

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

It is interesting that this debate and the other one on Wednesday over tax issues have become

rather fractious. So, I'm going to try and just take the heat out of this a little bit and be a little bit more measured. And you will be delighted to hear as well, Mr. Speaker, that I intend to be brief.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Yes, I am delighted about that.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I just have two points of principle that I wish to make. The second one, rising perhaps unwisely to the hook that the Honourable Minister put in the water, but he's asked for an answer, and I'll give him one. And that's my second point but let me deal with the first.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a Bill of staggering complexity. It's a Bill about tariffs, and that is duty relief, and that is taxes. Right? So that is what we are talking about here. We are talking about taxes. And the first point of principle I want to make, because it got lost, I think, in the shuffle a little bit earlier before lunch, was the very valid point that was made about transparency and good governance.

When we come up here, all of us, to look at tax legislation and to impose taxes upon our fellow citizens and upon ourselves, we must be transparent about what we're doing. And therefore, when there is a Schedule to a Bill that is less than transparent, it is perfectly proper for anyone in this House to say, *Hang on a second, I can't tell what's going on from this Schedule*. And it's perfectly proper for anyone in this House to invite the Government—because they're the Government, we're just the Opposition—to do better.

Now one of the speakers earlier said, *Well, that is how we've always done it*. And doubtless, that speaker was right. And that speaker said, *Well, that is how the OBA used to do it too*. And again, doubtless, that speaker is right. I was not around then. But the fact that it has always been done like that does not mean that that is how we have to always do it.

Let's dare to be better. Let's dare to pass legislation that when an ordinary member of the public wants to see if his or her tariff duty on the item that is trying to support their retail shop is going up or going down, they can tell. Now that is not actually hard to achieve. You put one extra column in that Schedule saying what the duty is, and the column saying what the duty is going to be.

Now I can understand why some governments might not want that. If the duty is going up, they may not want to be attacked for the duty going up. But if the duty is going down, they may wish to be praised for the duty going down. And so that is why I make the point of principle about transparency. If you can tell . . . you should not have to be a lawyer to look at a law that we pass to understand it.

So, it is fair to all Bermudians to know, is the tariff on this item going up? Is the tariff on this item going down? And so, I would invite whoever is in charge

of these things, be it the Government, be it the civil service, be it this particular department or Ministry, to just bear that in mind. And next time, let us try and have a Schedule where we see what it was and what it becomes. So that's the first point of two points of principle. And I would respectfully say that it's a point that should echo with this Government, because of course this Government has been talking about fairness. And what could be more fair than being transparent to the people so they can understand the legislation we are passing?

The second and final point of principle, Mr. Speaker, is about the idea of passing on tax relief. Because there was a big debate, and I appreciate that there are differences of philosophy, and there are differences in policy, but it is a point of principle. If you are going to grant relief, you can do it in one of two ways. You can grant relief across the board. Everybody gets a tax cut. Or you can be targeted in your relief. You can ask yourself, *Who really needs this tax cut, and how can we make sure that the person who really needs it is getting this benefit?* So those are two philosophically different approaches to taxes.

And on this side, we are saying that where this Government . . . and we are not the government, probably won't be for a while.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You got that right.

Mr. Scott Pearman: But where this Government . . . and I hear from the Honourable future Premier, Zane De Silva. *Got that right*, he said.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: So where this Government decides to give greater relief to Bermudians, and where this Government has the benefit of the support of the Opposition, as it has had over this Bill and the last one, to give relief, it is not criticism, or unwarranted criticism, or unreasonable criticism, for the Opposition to point out that perhaps the tax relief, when given and supported by us, should be more focused, should be more targeted. Why? Because if you target relief to those who need it most, you can give them more relief.

And that is the point, with respect, that MP De-Couto was making. That there are people on our Island who do not need certain tax breaks. And there are people on our Island who absolutely need those tax breaks.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: And I have just been asked by the Honourable Minister, Jason Hayward, "who determines that?" And the answer is the Government.

The answer is the Government, right?

So, the old saying, the Government . . . you know, Opposition gets its say, the Government gets its way.

Listen, the Honourable Minister, MP Jason Hayward, who spoke before me, invited us to respond as a point of principle, and I am doing that. And if he wishes to disagree with me, that is fine. If he wishes to say, *No, no, all cuts should be across the board, because we should treat everybody equally, and everyone should get a cut*, that is fine, if that is his point of principle. But I'm respectfully disagreeing with that argument.

My argument is that you focus on the people who need the help most, and if you only focus on them, you can give them more help. You can expand the amount of help being given to those who need it, rather than taking some of that money away and giving it to people who really do not need it. That is the philosophical argument, and I think, I hope—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: No, no, I know. I know that the Honourable Minister understands that argument. I know that the Honourable Minister understands that argument. And so when we come again, and I am sure this Government has said they're going to come again and give more tax cuts. Great, and you will get our support if it is well intentioned. But let's try to target those who need it most, and ensure that they get more benefit, because we do not need to be giving tax cuts to the very wealthy on this Island, frankly. We do not.

One last point before I take my seat, and it's still on the second point of principle. One of the discussions being had here is around the retail sector, and the Honourable Minister is not taking the time to listen to the point I am making, and I would invite him to do so, respectfully, since he asked me to answer the question. And since I have answered it, he might want to just at least consider what I am saying.

So, the retail sector, they need help. They need a lot of help. I do not know what sort of consultation was done with the retail sector, but I would imagine that most people in the retail sector of Bermuda are not delighted that we can go and shop overseas, and bring more things in, and get greater customs duty relief.

And when I say we, I mean everybody. So, everybody now is going to get a bigger break at the airport, and I really doubt very much that the retail sector of Bermuda is going to have said, *That's a great idea*. I have a feeling they would have said, *Well actually, do we have to do that? Couldn't we do this in some other way? Couldn't we give us a bigger break on imports of the particular things that these Bermudian businesses, these Bermudian small retail businesses, medium-sized retail businesses, are bringing in?*

So again, it's a point of principle, it's a point of political philosophy. We may not agree, the Minister may not agree with me. But we believe that we need to help. We just think let's be targeted, let's help those who need the help the most, and let's give them more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Deputy Premier, would you like to add a few comments?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I would, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Honourable Member who just took a seat, I believe he just said, *Let's try to help those who need it most*.

Did I get that right?

Mr. Scott Pearman: You did.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: He's shaking his head and saying yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I'm nodding. Nodding.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yeah, you're right. Those who need it, let's see that those who need it most get it.

Let me remind the Honourable Member, in 2012, when they came into power, the first thing they did in the House, the first session, Mr. Speaker, was change the staggered FutureCare premiums that we had in place so that those that could least afford it paid the less. They changed it so that everyone in the country were going to pay the same amount.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now these are the same people who are now saying to do just the opposite. You see?

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, you see—

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, you see, Mr. Speaker, what this tells me is . . . an old saying comes to mind and it's called grandstanding.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, that is what it is!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It's grandstanding.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member, who was referring to me and precisely what I said, has now just imputed an improper motive.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Well, perhaps he would care to clarify who he meant was grandstanding.

An Hon. Member: Not a problem.

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, certainly you have been here long enough to know when someone's grandstanding. And I'll tell you what, from where we sit, it's a lot of grandstanding that's been taking place in the last 24 hours.

So, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order. Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. The Member has now clarified that he was referring to us and was referring to me in the last 24 hours and he's imputing an improper motive, which he should not do.

The Speaker: Member, when you speak, just remember the Member is entitled to his opinion.

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

The Speaker: On different viewpoints.

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

The Speaker: And that viewpoint . . . that view may differ from your view of the matter, but it doesn't necessarily mean it's a negative.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Well, let me clarify that. My view is that some of the Members opposite use this House on many occasions to grandstand. And I'm going to leave it right there.

An Hon. Member: No point of order?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, I find it rather rich.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I find it rather rich when I hear Members opposite say some of the things they say. In particular, the Member that just took his seat.

An Hon. Member: In particular.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Because, Mr. Speaker, we had a long debate last session that should have been five minutes, about \$6. For the Honourable Members next door, on the other side, to talk about helping those who need it most, and we should be doing this, we should be doing that. Imagine what we could do for the people of this country with \$250 million we have spent, and are still spending at Morgan's Point.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, \$250 million and counting.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier should be the last person to mention anything to do with airports.

An Hon. Member: Or music studios.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Or music studios, too, because I think he had his hand in that.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, is that—

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

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Did I hear the Honourable Member just say that I was involved in the music studio?

An Hon. Member: I think he did.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I just want to make sure I'm hearing correctly. This point of order, he's completely misguiding the House. I was nowhere near it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, I never said that.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes! You just said it! You did say that.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I did not say it.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That is exactly what you said.

The Speaker: Members . . . wait, wait, wait.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I did not say that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I did not.

The Speaker: Look, look, look. Members, we're fresh in the afternoon. Let's keep it at a tone where we don't get out of hand.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hey—

The Speaker: We had a—Aah, aah, aah, I am still talking.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, okay, sorry.

The Speaker: We had a reasonable morning. Let's have a reasonable afternoon. You got some points to make on the topic of the Bill? Speak to the topic of the Bill and leave the others out.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will gladly do that.

Mr. Speaker, but I think it is important that the people of this country never forget—

An Hon. Member: —Never.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —never forget—

An Hon. Member: —Never.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: When we are talking about helping the vulnerable, helping those who need it in this country, the \$250 million and counting of the very same taxpayers of which we speak about today are paying. Here as we sit, the clock is ticking. The clock is ticking. In fact, before today is over, I am going to work out what it is per minute that we pay because it's substantial, Mr. Speaker. It's substantial.

So, with that said, Mr. Speaker, let me emphasise the point. The points which were made earlier from this side of the House are that these tax reductions . . . I am looking forward to them driving this economy and helping the people of this country. And it may start from \$6, but it could end up at \$600, and that could be per

month. It could be \$6,000 for a month, Mr. Speaker, depending on what we use these additional tax cuts for.

So, as the Premier is going to continue to bring these deductions, as he did in the pre-budget, bring them to this House for passage, look forward to us helping the people who need it most in this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member . . . MP Cannonier.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to my colleagues, good afternoon, and to the listening public. Let me be as balanced as I should be.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: As I should be. The interpolating has already started.

Certainly, I do support this. But what I will do is clarify that in some of the comments that have been made in who this invariably is helping, I will say that my constituents probably are some of those who spend a lot of money importing goods from above . . . across the ocean, I should say, not above, but across the ocean. So, any kind of relief in that matter, they would welcome.

As I said, they probably spend more time flying than many of us who on average fly, maybe once or twice. So, they certainly will take advantage of the opportunity, and I think the whole idea of maybe a targeted approach does not fall by the wayside on anyone. There is opportunity.

Now, the Government has decided that this is the first tier of opportunity that they would like to take, and I take note of that. But I also take note of the fact that reducing diesel prices is not certainly going to fix the soot that's on people's roofs. So, we have got some big problems here that we need to resolve.

And I also recognise that when I hear the comments about small businesses, I have said it many times in this House, you know. We may be reducing tariffs and duty, but the biggest problem that small and medium-sized businesses have at the end of the day is cash flow. And so, we need to be looking at the opportunities to relieve that, because if we don't fix the cash flow for them to survive, which they are already in debt, those who have been able to survive up until now, they have no real way of being able to pay their debt back. And the relief may be one way of approaching it, but one of the other ways that we need to approach this situation is we need to improve the economy so that it is growing at a faster rate than our debt is for people and businesses. They've got to pay back—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hate to interrupt the Honourable Member, as you know, he and I have a good relationship. But what he just said was that we need to ensure the economy is growing faster than the debt. And guess what, that is exactly what is taking place in Bermuda.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: The business's debt, not yours.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, so . . . yes, yes, yes, that is what I am talking about.

So that is exactly . . . I prefaced it all by small to medium-sized business. So, my challenge is this, is that they are in debt—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —and they are unable to get to a point where they are at zero.

I did say, and I qualified my statement, these tariffs will help. But the cash flow problem is where they will go out of business. And unless we fix that problem, we are going to continue to have to go to an almost point of zero tariffs, zero duty on things, because we are trying to help people rather than getting the economy and whatever it takes to boost the economy at a rate that can keep them surviving and keep cash flow growing.

And so, the Premier has stood up, and he says, you know, we have a good relationship. I know and understand what it means to be a small and a medium-sized business owner. Certainly not a large business owner, but I know what it's like to have to meet the payroll when that time comes, and things are tough. And despite the fact that we have reduced tariffs, the challenge is that we still cannot keep up, and that's today's reality.

So, on the one hand, this is one part of the relief. But on the other hand, I believe that we can do more to grow the economy. Am I saying to the Government that they are not (under the numbers that they have presented) that we are not looking better? Certainly. But I do recall a time coming along when I was a student, I could pay for my tuition school fees because I was getting paid well to mow grass for people in the summertime, and pay for my sister's school fees. We are not at that point anymore right now.

And so, what we want to do is we want to be able to have a position whereby the private businesses, which is what these tariffs are for, essentially, outside of the hospital, are to help. But what we need to do is

find a way to get more money into small to medium-sized businesses, which invariably means more money into the private citizens' pockets, and we will have a much more healthier position.

So, what I would like to hear more about is rather than getting . . . you know, we are talking about fuel and diesels and these kinds of things. And I wanted to say about the fuel thing, you know, the Premier brought up the issue of the fuel. But when the fuel concessions came first to Bermuda when we were going through COVID-19 and the fuel companies decided to collectively say, *Okay, we are going to offer relief.*

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Sorry?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So the fuel company offered to Government relief. It was to hold the price of fuel.

Hon. E. David Burt: When?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Premier made a statement about it. I was a part of it, so I know what I am talking about. Maybe the Premier is not sure.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: But we, when the prices went up . . . when the prices were about to go up, the . . . I can't remember the exact year now. I will have to look at it. The insurance *[sic]* companies sat down with the Minister and said, okay, well, we can put some relief in place. You know, we'll give a—

The Speaker: The fuel company. Fuel company.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Sorry, fuel company. Yes, fuel company. We can put some relief in place. But that relief had to be paid back. So, you might have gotten a relief for two to three months. The public might have gotten a relief for two to three months on their fuel. But that relief, the public still had to pay back.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, point of order. Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I sincerely hate to interrupt this, but he is completely misleading the House and completely misrepresenting what took place. In 2022, upon my return to the Ministry of Finance, I found that fuel prices went up on something under the authorisation of the Minister of Finance without coming across my desk.

I went to the technical officers, and I said there will be no more fuel increases. And we came up with a fuel pricing mechanism which reduced the taxes on gasoline fuel that was imported into the country and no one has had to pay that back. That has come out of our customs tariff revenue. So, the Honourable Member should withdraw that statement. It is factually incorrect. I'm not sure what he's talking about, but it cannot be for fuel at the pump. That was not a discussion with the fuel companies.

We said, this is the action which we are taking and we said we are going to reduce the taxes, and we are not going to move the cap. It is going to go down. That is what happened. There were no funds that needed to be paid back.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Mr. Speaker, I will provide you with that letter with the relevant Government Ministers on it. For sure.

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: For sure.

The Speaker: We will leave it there until we get it.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh, yeah. For sure.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: For sure. We will call that out for sure. I was in that meeting.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, then we started talking. I heard some comments being made about the roads as well and the relief for parts, for cars and the like and rightfully so. I think that we should be implementing some kind of tariff relief when it comes to cars, especially with the situation that we are right now with the roads. On 24 May, as I watched TNN on their bike the whole way up from St. George's, it was visual. You could actually see the challenges with the roads as the runners were going up and the cyclists and the like.

Then the Premier talked about the amount of money that was being put aside for roadworks. Well, I must say that the amount of money that was put aside for roadworks is really no different than what was put aside the previous year. And in the previous year, Mr. Speaker, we only spent half of that money on the roads. So, if we are going to put \$5 million to roadworks, we want to spend that money.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I accept where the Honourable Member is coming from, but I think that it's important that people would hear that only \$2.5 million—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Is that a point of order?

Hon. E. David Burt: It is. Misleading the House. That \$2.5 million—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That is a point of information. I did not accept a point of information.

Hon. E. David Burt: No, no, misleading the House, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I did not . . . No, I am not.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

The Speaker: State your point of order now.

Hon. E. David Burt: He is misleading the House. Persons who would have heard what the Honourable Member said would have heard that we have not spent \$5 million in roadworks. That is not correct. The fact is that because the roadworks are done and because there are reimbursements that happen, the total value of work that was done last year is far in excess of the \$5 million that is recorded in the budget.

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

As I looked at the Budget Book, we can certainly go and take a look at the line item for roadworks. Five million dollars was allotted for roadworks and \$2-point-something million was spent. The actual number there. So, the Premier can say what he wants, but the Budget Book does stipulate that. He is trying to bring in invoices coming in for all of these other things. The [Budget] Book specifically states that we are going to put another \$5 million to the roadworks.

Quite frankly, for the next year, I am not sure we will be able to reach the level that the Government is saying. I hope that people . . . quite frankly, with the challenges that we are having, the businesses take advantage of this relief on the parts. But at the same time, I am not sure the private sector at the end of the day, with the way that the situation is, is going to benefit a whole lot at the end of the year, because of this here.

Parts are already here. You know how long it takes to get parts in Bermuda. You have to sit here and wait for Lord knows how many months just to get something here. We might appreciate the fact that the relief is being put here, but for the next fiscal year, let's just be clear, we will be talking about this next year and how much the roads haven't gotten done. I mean, we are still waiting for the asphalt plant to get up. It won't be

POINT OF ORDER

here until 2026, and we are hoping that it is here in the first quarter. But that deadline keeps changing and changing and changing.

So, if I go off of the record as some of our Government says, on how they are doing so wonderful, if I go off of the record of just roadworks alone, that thing is not coming any time soon because it keeps getting changed.

I appreciate this Bill and the attempt that it is doing. Hopefully, the relief that gets to people will reach them in a feasible time. We are already at May. We are already almost a quarter behind time. Let's see what happens. But what I can guarantee is this: Unless we start growing the economy so that people can get out of debt and these businesses in particular who are trying to make ends meet, if this economy does not improve at a faster rate, we're still going to be giving more and more and more relief.

Now, to anyone who would be interested in the Island and investing in the Island when it comes to the local economy, the local economy is struggling. It is struggling. And we see a lot of relief going into place. I have been saying year after year after year, the challenge is cash flow. And we haven't fixed it. We still haven't fixed it. I see it first hand. It hasn't been fixed. It's getting worse. And the banks are not friendly. It takes you . . . my goodness, you've got the money, some people. It takes you more than . . . almost a year just to get a mortgage sorted out. So, we are in some serious, serious challenges here going forward.

And so, I'm praying that people can make it throughout this next year with these reliefs. I know it sounds good when we list off all of these wonderful things for relief and especially in the construction industry. Yes, we can put all these things in. But guess what, Mr. Speaker? We just heard how many days it's taking for applications. So, this year might not even . . . this stuff might not even come to fruition for those who are putting in an application to build a house because it's going to take that long.

So, I am identifying that you are doing one part, yes, but there's a whole other part of it that is connected. And I am just asking the Government, as it moves along, there is another part here, which is what some of my colleagues are saying, we need to move with some more pace on helping relieve Bermuda by improving the economy because that way . . . now when I say . . . let me qualify that when I say improve the economy—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —by speeding up the pace of the improvement of this economy so that people can pay their salaries. Right?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So that people can . . . Listen, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda wants to pay its way. The only reason they are looking for relief is because they are struggling. So that is an admittance, if the Government is having to do this, that people are struggling. That is the reality.

I'm not knocking the Government because of this here. It is a reality. If we were doing wonderful, I am not sure all of these reliefs will be coming in place. My assessment and my opinion is that we are seeing these reliefs because they are hearing from the people, as we heard from Government already. They are doing this because our people are struggling. They are hurting, so they have got to do some stuff. That is what they are saying.

So, we still got issues to solve. And I tell you what, the best social programme I heard from an Honourable Minister who used to be in the House is a job. And a well-paying job. So that is the other part of this equation.

I support this Bill. I believe that this relief is needed, and I believe this relief is needed because people are struggling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Cannonier.

Before I call on anyone else, I would just like to acknowledge in the Gallery the former Member of this House, former Opposition Leader, Mr. Cole Simons. Welcome to the Chamber this afternoon.

[Desk thumping]

[Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025, second reading debate continuing]

The Speaker: [Would] any other Member like to make a contribution at this time?

None other? Junior Minister.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced whatever this Government does will never satisfy the Opposition. Never satisfy the Opposition.

A Government from 2012 to 2017, they talked about we listen and we heard and we are doing something about it. They heard the same voices, Mr. Speaker, the whole five years and never did anything about it but increased taxes year after year after year. We are here, we have heard the cry and we're doing something about it. That's the difference. And that's the difference.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That's why you're sitting on that side and we're sitting on this side because we're listening and making things happen.

Mr. Speaker, for those individuals, just to give you a few different points. Mr. Speaker, slate will go from 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. Paint will go down from 15 per cent down to 10 per cent. Don't you think people want to hear that? Sinks, you buy a sink, it will go from 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. Wash basin, 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. Doors, 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. There is a decrease and it's affecting the individuals who are going to do constructions. These are great benefits.

So, we spent so much time trying to convince a party on that side who seemed . . . they complain about the \$6, but we're giving more and they're still complaining. I don't understand it. Where are you satisfied?

Mr. Speaker, this Government will continue to listen and will continue to make decisions. We will continue to deliver real results for the people of Bermuda.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Deputy Speaker, would you like to take the Chair?

House in Committee at 2:55 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill entitled the [Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025](#) be committed.

Is that approved? Yes.

I call on the Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that all clauses be moved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider all clauses together.

Any objections?

There are none. Continue, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

This Bill seeks to [repeal and replace] the First and [amend the] Fifth Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act 1970, ("the principal Act).

Clause 1 provides the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 repeals and replaces the First Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act 1970 by the contents of

the Schedule to this Bill. The First Schedule is published on the Bermuda Government Portal at the following [web address]: www.gov.bm/schedules-customs-tariff-act-1970.

Clause 3 amends the [Fifth] Schedule to the Customs [Tariff] Act 1970 by repealing and replacing CPC 4240 (Hospital operating supplies) and by amending CPC 4703 (Goods of tariff code 2710.192 (Diesel)) and CPC 4705 (Goods of tariff code 2710.194 (Fuel oil)).

Clause 4 provides for commencement of the Bill.

The Chairman: Thank you.

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

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. Regarding clauses 3(3) and 3(4), the diesel and fuel oils, was there any consideration to do a graduated or a progressive way of looking at this tax that could have been adjusted . . . so that this duty relief could have been adjusted according to usage? Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Junior Minister, is a point of clarification needed?

Hon. E. David Burt: There is, yes.

The Chairman: I recognise the Premier from constituency 18.

Member, could you clarify your question so that it can be answered?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, referring to the Bill, Madam Chairman, the clauses I referenced adjust the tariff code on diesel and fuel oil usage respectively down from \$0.08 per litre to \$0.04 per litre.

My understanding of this, of course, flows through into your BELCO bill fuel adjustment rate and it is much touted by the Government as a tax saving to the end-user of electricity on this Island.

It is also well understood that those who have the privilege and the luck to have the larger, more expensive houses and run a lot of air conditioners and use a lot of electricity will have the same duty break, the same rate change from \$0.08 down to \$0.04 per litre will flow through into their bill, which will by a necessity be much larger than someone who perhaps makes less money and is in a smaller house and uses less electricity.

My question is, did the Government consider a mechanism by which those who use the most electricity might perhaps not get the same reduction as those who use the least electricity and perhaps struggled the most to pay their electric bill?

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

I recognise the Premier from constituency 18. Premier?

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

Madam Chairman, I tried to explain this in the full House. I'll try to explain it to the Honourable Member again, but I know the Honourable Member is, you know, trying to play to the media and trying to say X, Y, and Z. So let me help him out.

Number one, the way that these taxes are done is a question of imports. What he is suggesting is an entire remake of a tax importation system, which will not make sense, number one.

Number two, the reason why custom tariffs are amazing is because they are simple and easy to collect. We have one person versus the other mechanism to which he's speaking about. The second thing, which I am certain the Honourable Member is aware of, is that when it comes to retail tariffs for residential customers, those who use less actually pay less, not just because they consume less, because under 700 kilowatt per hours, it is a lower rate, and then it goes up, and then it goes up to those persons who need more.

So that is being done. And the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs, who is responsible where we saw matters, has written to the Regulatory Authority for further matters to look at how we can better address it.

So, I understand what the Honourable Member is saying. But people listening to him would think that the Government . . . everyone is paying the same. That is not correct. The retail tariff methodology means that persons who consume less do pay less. And as they do more the kilowatt hour charge on those rates goes higher and higher and higher. So, in fact, the persons who—

The Chairman: It's bands.

Hon. E. David Burt: Exactly. There are bands. The people who are large consumers of electricity are paying more.

So, the truth is that the overall reduction affects and impacts those at the lower level to a higher extent than it does to those in the upper level. What he's asking to be achieved is actually achieved through the mechanisms that exist.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

I recognise the member from constituency 25. You have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I actually did not ask for any particular thing to be achieved. I asked if the Government had considered that. I believe the answer is no, they did not, because it is complicated.

That's my takeaway. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

I recognise the Member from constituency 18. Mr. Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I would sincerely hope that this Honourable Member would come up with new tactics, because his tactics are very predictable. The reality is that the reason why he's posing "consider" is because I think he already knows the answer. And it goes back to what the Honourable Member said, that sometimes the speeches which are made are for the effect outside rather than actually dealing with the policy here. Because if the Honourable Member—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: If the Honourable Member was serious about the policy here, he would note and understand what I said. Because during the general debate they said to ensure that those persons who may be able to afford less are able to benefit from this relief. And the explanation that I just gave with the way that retail tariffs are done on electricity means that the impact will be greater for those at the lower level.

But it is across the board on the fuel adjustment rate. So, it also affects the small businesses, the same ones that the Honourable Member from constituency 12 was talking about in regard to cash flow. It applies across the board.

It is important when we're talking about electricity rates. But the retail tariff methodology does have lower rates for those persons with lower consumption, to encourage lower consumption as well.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you, Premier.

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

There being none, I call on the Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: Yes.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move the clauses.

The Chairman: You moved them for consideration.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I move all clauses be passed.

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

Are there any objections? There are none.
So approved. Continue.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 4 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: The Schedules . . . you are moving the Schedules? We will do the preamble but we also need to do the Schedule.

It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections? There are none.
Continue, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will move the Schedules also.

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

Are there any objections? There are none. So approved.

[Motion carried: Schedules passed.]

The Chairman: One more—you move that the—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: Thank you.

It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that?
There are none. So approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 3:04 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none. The matter has been reported as printed.

Thank you, Members, for your participation in that matter.

We will now move on to the second item to debate this afternoon, which is the second reading of the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 in the name of the Premier.

Is the Premier or Junior Minister doing it?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will do it.

The Speaker: The Junior Minister is carrying this one as well?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation, I move that the Bill entitled the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Any objections?
None. Continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting to this Honourable House the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025. This Bill will amend the Land Tax Act 1967 by decreasing the base rate tax for residential units, another tax reduction.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance stated in the budget speech, Bermuda's land tax is a significant revenue earner for the Government, but it also represents a burden for homeowners and renters alike. In 2019, a new base rate was introduced and set at \$300 a year. Given the Island's fiscal progress, more tax relief can be provided. The Government will reduce the base rate of land tax from \$300 per year to \$150. This reduction will apply to all homeowners and renters who pay land tax.

Mr. Speaker, as Honourable Members are aware, annual land tax is managed in two periods, from 1 July to 31 December, and 1 January to 30 June each year. The proposed change to the land tax base rate will go into effect as of 1 January 2026. This ensures that the Office of the Tax Commissioner has sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments to billing amounts and notices to be provided to impacted homeowners.

Mr. Speaker, we hear the cries from our people who are finding it difficult to navigate our economic landscape and offer assistance as we can. Once again, listening to the people, Mr. Speaker. This reduction will assist all homeowners and renters.

I also add, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of the workforce, which we can safely assume also includes a number of homeowners, have seen their taxes decrease in prior fiscal years. Having done this and achieved balance, we believe this is the right time to provide further relief. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Does any other Member . . . the Shadow Minister of Finance.

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

I believe it was stated by the Premier that they know what questions I am going to ask—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, I would have hoped they perhaps could address them in the brief so we could just get through all this.

But listen, we support this.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Don't give me the "but" now.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We support this, Mr. Speaker, but I want to talk about this: the base rate. And I guess the question is, or the suggestion to the Government is, why is everybody getting this break on the base rate? Again, it's the same principle which we discussed of targeting the relief to those who need it most.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was able to get a copy of the valuation list that's publicly available. Perhaps I had an out-of-date copy, I don't know. But by my assessment, about 55 per cent of the residential ARVs (Annual Rental Values) fall underneath the rent control threshold. Also, based on the number of units in the valuation list, again, my estimate of what this tax relief is costing the Government is about \$9 million to \$10 million.

Perhaps the Government could clarify what that cost is. But if you think about that, Mr. Speaker, that means about half of that \$9 million to \$10 million, that break is being given to people above the rent control ARV threshold. Now, we could have a spirited debate about, if you didn't want to give everybody this \$150 a year break, where would you draw the line? And that would be an interesting debate.

But I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Government, that there is probably a line of ARVs where this break will not impact people that much. Whereas underneath that line, the people impacted could have enjoyed and benefited in a much more meaningful way, a larger break.

Now, I won't get into it anymore because, of course, I think we've all fully discussed the principles behind that, Mr. Speaker. So, I look forward to the Government's response. But as I said, we do support, and I did think I had one or two questions in there as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister for Cabinet, would you like to make a contribution?

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

I know my colleague next to me referenced grandstanding, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I think for the listening public, I think the definition of grandstanding is important here.

The definition, according to Cambridge, is *acting or speaking in a way intended to attract the good opinion of others who may be watching*. And we definitely get to see this on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker. I do know that that Member has not been a Member of this House for that long. I do know that he prides himself in being the intellectual financial guru that all of us wish we could be, Mr. Speaker.

I am old enough around here, Mr. Speaker, to understand when we first brought the changes to land tax, and I'm sure my Honourable Member who introduced this Bill will be able to talk to this when he does reply, that when we did bring this, we heard the same argument.

But, Mr. Speaker, the changes that we made then greatly affect the persons at the higher end of the ARV listing than the people at the lower end. This was put in place to in fact give relief, back then when it was dropped to \$300, the base rate, to give relief to almost . . . and I want to say, if my memory serves me correctly, almost 70 per cent. Seventy per cent to 80 per cent of the people paid less than what they had ever paid before, while the people at the upper end paid almost double of what they were paying before.

An Hon. Member: That's right.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, Mr. Speaker, doing this creates even more relief for those persons at the lower end, unfortunately. And so, I would ask that Member to go back—and I know that he's really good at looking at Hansard—to go back when we first debated this, because this brings relief to almost the vast majority of persons that pay. Not, as he said, 50 per cent are under the threshold and 50 per cent above. It doesn't actually work that way, because if you look at the bands, it works on bands. And so, there are persons now who pay \$600 a year, will now pay \$300. That's \$300 more that they did not have. And that's all they will pay.

But the bands above that are not affected, and the way they are staggered is they increase exponentially as you go up. So, the people at the top of the list still pay a heck of a lot more than the people at the bottom of the list, Mr. Speaker.

And so, I'm actually . . . and I mentioned the grandstanding because we spent a lot of time in the last debate, and I am not reflecting on that debate, but the

Member from [constituency] 25 was speaking about, you know, why don't we do the tax relief on persons who fall under the rent control? We didn't hear that argument now, because everybody under rent control will see a \$300 difference this year. Everyone. And they will not pay a dime more.

An Hon. Member: That's significant.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Everybody above the rent control ARV, will still pay more. So, I don't know if it was good enough to mention before, but it's not good enough to mention . . . to argue now. Again, I'm assuming that's where my learned, my friend next to me gets the term grandstanding from, because it sounds like grandstanding.

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

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I do believe the Honourable Minister may be a little confused, because my understanding is this Bill impacts the base rate, and that base rate applies to all land taxpayers. So, in fact, even at the higher bands, the discount in this Bill would be received, is my understanding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that non-point of order, because I did say that it affects everybody when I was speaking.

The Speaker: Well, he was just clarifying. But go ahead.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, but this, once again, is tax relief that people will greatly appreciate. And especially, I know when I go out and canvass, Mr. Speaker, because I have a lot of . . . in my little constituency, in [constituency] 13 we have a lot of landowners, and we have persons who rent, and we have a lot of units that are under that threshold ARV. So, they will greatly accept that they're going to pay \$300 less per [year].

This puts more money in our renters' pockets to go out and spend in the economy, because they're not paying that. Some people do charge the tenants the land tax. The persons who do not charge, the persons who are living in their own home, that's \$300 more that they have. And I do believe that when we look at this from its entirety, I mean, we went from a previous debate arguing that, you know, \$6, and we said it all adds up. Now we're up to, according to this, we're now up to \$306, \$372 per year. And as we continue to have these

discussions, we will find that even more tax relief is coming to our constituents, Mr. Speaker.

But I thank you for allowing me that time, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to . . . I wholeheartedly support this, and I'm glad that we did bring this. And thank you, Junior Minister, for bringing it forward. And I hope we don't have any more discussion on this, Mr. Speaker, so we can just move on.

The Speaker: Everybody's entitled to add their comments to it.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Everyone's entitled. Yes.

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

My colleague already stated that we support this, but I just wanted to bring something forward from my time in canvassing that I've noticed a lot of seniors over the age of 65 who qualify for an exemption underneath the current legislation are not truly aware, and I've walked through this process with a lot of them. And I just wanted to bring that up because since this relief is coming in, it's going to mean a lot to seniors who fall under that \$45,000 ARV.

And I just wanted to know whether or not—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I just wanted to inquire and bring this forward to the Government as to whether or not they've considered making this exemption automatic for our seniors who qualify for it. Because what I've heard from constituents on the doorstep with mobility issues or all manner of things that prevents them from potentially getting this in or having to call in a younger member, I think that it would make a huge difference if we're talking about relief. I've met seniors who are 75 years old and older who haven't been getting their exemption at this time. And we have to fill it out for them and sort that out.

So, I just thought it would be a great suggestion to look into a way to make sure that that's automatic for seniors who qualify. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Would] anyone else like to make a contribution? Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: This particular Bill I am well aware of. The biggest challenge that we have when it comes to a person automatically at 40, 60, 65 getting an exemption is because there are individuals that own

10 houses in their name. So, it's the main residence. So primary residence, absolutely right. So, can you imagine what that would be? And I'm sure that Mr. DeCouto would be on his feet talking about that if he gave everybody who owns like 10 houses or 20 houses. So that's where you've got to own it. And if there are individuals, we would thank you for that. But there are people who actually do it.

Mr. Speaker, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that during the time of the OBA Government from 2012 to 2017, they had two major increases in land tax and affected every single one during that time. Every single one. Where the Progressive Labour Party has been more progressive in ensuring that those individuals, like some of you guys in this room, who have ARVs over \$120,000, be charged a significant amount more. Trust me, I felt the pain myself. And so, the increase went from 14 per cent over \$120,000 ARV to 25 per cent. Trust me. It was huge. Absolutely right. So, it was huge.

So, the Government has done progressive things over the years to ensure that individuals who have these higher ARVs pays more. So that benefited Bermudans overall. And I said for \$120,000, and then of course, what my honourable colleague said, are bands.

And so right now the base will be \$300 . . . sorry, \$150 per year. So, it would be \$75 per every six months. There will be a bill to these individuals. And you can work out that \$150 divided by 12, how much a person is paying. So, we've helped out a significant amount of people who fall within that bracket. And I mean significant.

Also, not only the owner, but mainly a lot of landlords pass on the land tax to the individuals who rent their property. So, this is a great move by the Government. And the reason why we are able to do these types of things, Mr. Speaker, is because as the economy improves and the Government gets more revenue, we are able to ease up the burden for individuals who pay tax. And that's the purpose. Once again, we are listening and making things happen.

I'll tell you what we did do, Mr. Speaker. In 2021, commercial properties were being charged 7.0 per cent by the One Bermuda Alliance. Their commercial friends had properties 7.0 per cent. This Government increased it to 9.5 per cent. So of course, at the end of the day, we were ensuring that those individuals who have property . . . and I am going to tell you right now, I met with them. I was very much involved in those days in meeting with individuals. And we were able to come to the agreement of 9.5 per cent.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, this Government has been progressive. We recognise the burden that falls on our people. So, we started with the \$6, as the Honourable Member complained about \$6. But as you can see that we've continuously . . . and I've still got one more to go, and there are more to come, that we

continue to give tax breaks to the people of Bermuda. I'm sure that they appreciate it.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those few further remarks, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 3:21 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Chairman: Members, it has been moved that the Bill entitled [Land Tax Amendment Act 2025](#) be committed.

Are there any objections to that? So approved.
I call on the Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, if everyone agrees, I will move all clauses.

The Chairman: It has been moved that all clauses be dealt with at the same time.

Are there any objections to that? There are none.

Continue, [Junior] Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman. The primary purpose . . . hold on.

This Bill seeks to amend the base rate for residence units under the Land Tax Act 1967.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 2 of the Land Tax Act 1967 by decreasing the base rate of land tax payable in respect of rental units within all annual rental value bands. It also amends a reference to the Schedule to the Land Tax Act 1967 to the correct column containing the rates for each of the annual rental value bands.

Clause 3 provides that the Bill come into operation on January 2025 [sic].

The Chairman: Six.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Six . . . sorry.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you.

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

There are no other Members who wish to speak to the clauses?

Yes, there's one other Member who wishes to speak to the clauses and that's the Member from constituency 18, the Premier. You have the floor.

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

I do note on these particular clauses, and I certainly wanted to provide for full clarity to the Honourable House, as I know the Junior Minister stated about the base rates. Certainly, these rates were increased in 2018 or 2019. They were one of the changes where we did an across-the-board change and this is around bringing further relief. It is a simple Bill. It is a nice Bill, but it will cut everyone's land tax bill in this country.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1, 2 and 3?

There being none, Junior Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be . . . clauses, sorry, be moved.

The Chairman: He has moved that clauses 1, 2 and 3 be approved.

Any objections to that?

There are none. So approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 3 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: He's moved that the preamble be approved.

Any objections to that? So approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: He has moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Any objections?

There are none. So approved.

[Motion carried: The Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 3:24 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none. The Bill has been reported as printed.

The Speaker: Premier—Junior—

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

The Speaker: We're doing a third reading?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes—

The Speaker: Oh, you're doing another Bill?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, one more Bill, Mr. Speaker. This is Payroll Tax.

The Speaker: Okay, so for the listening audience, we're doing the second reading of the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025, and the Junior Minister will lead us in that.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 29(1)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, again, I move that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended to enable the House to proceed with the second reading of the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
Continue, Junior Minister.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 29(1) suspended.]

BILL

SECOND READING

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, with the Government's recommendation, I move that the Bill entitled the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to this Honourable House the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025. This Bill will make amendments to both the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995 and the Payroll Tax Rates Act 1995.

Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members, the effect of this amendment is to exempt the employee portion of the payroll tax on payments made to employees on account of redundancy or otherwise in connection with the permanent termination of employment.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill represents our commitment to supporting employees during the uncertainty that comes with job loss. By providing payroll tax relief on redundancy and like payments, it ensures that more money stays in the hands of those affected. This Government, once again, is committed to providing a relief and assistance to the people who need it most.

Mr. Speaker, the first amendment will establish a special provision in the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995 for remuneration paid to an employee in connection with the permanent termination of employment on account of redundancy or otherwise. Under the current legislation, such payments will be subject to payroll tax on both the employer and employee portions for up to three years following termination. This amendment will now exempt those payments from the employee standard rate bands thereby providing meaningful relief to the employee during a crucial period of transition . . . critical period of transition, I should say.

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment pertains to the Payroll Tax Rates [Act] 1995, which currently outlines tax based on employee rate bands. This amendment introduced a significant change by prescribing a zero per cent rate on the employee portion of payroll tax for remuneration paid in connection with the permanent termination of employment.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that this Government remains steadfast in its commitment to listening to the people. We continue to act with fiscal responsibility and sound governance while delivering meaningful relief where it is most needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Would any other . . . Shadow Minister.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm almost afraid to stand up and voice my opinion that some people in the Government seem to think we're not allowed to express opinions up here.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We definitely support this Bill.

An Hon. Member: Yes, *but* . . .

Some Hon. Members: But.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Let him speak. Let him speak.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, we definitely support this Bill *and*—

Several Hon. Members: Ooh!

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —*and* we would like to congratulate the Government on bringing such a well-targeted piece of legislation.

Several Hon. Members: Ooh!

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: You like that?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: *And* while they are looking at payroll tax legislation, Mr. Speaker, I would make a gentle suggestion. Perhaps they could look at how things like health insurance impact people's . . . rises in health insurance are impacting people's payroll tax amounts paid or the setting of the payroll tax bands in relation to inflation and how salaries in some industries are hopefully connected with that.

But, of course, we support this well-targeted piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: All right!

The Speaker: Does any other Member—

An Hon. Member: Lightning and thunder outside.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: MP Ming—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Come on, Ming!

Mrs. Renee Ming: Yes, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and listening audience. I am . . . I actually am really glad to hear that the Opposition have supported this piece of legislation. Each and every one of us who sits in this space probably knows someone who has lost their job through redundancy.

And besides the financial impact that it has had, it's also what it does to our mental psyche to know that there is no further pay cheque coming at this time.

So, this Bill is, I'm going to say timely, but maybe overdue as well. But it's okay because we are now doing it and I think that those persons who have felt this will be pleased because there is nothing worse than if you are kicking a horse when it is already down and they can know that there's some savings that's coming to them during the time of redundancy.

So, I just want to say thank you to the Minister for bringing it. I know he's probably tired of hearing my mouth on it. I'll find something else to lend my voice to soon. But I think that in terms of our people and the impact that redundancy can have, like I said, not just financial but also on our psyche, this is good work, and I am sure that it will be appreciated.

And I just, like I said, thank the people on my side as well as the Opposition because most of you have heard from me on this and I appreciate the support, and I appreciate the Government for bringing it at this time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other? The Minister for Cabinet.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I will not be long. I just wanted to lend my support.

Thank you. And I know this is something that MP Ming has advocated for and I'm so happy to see it finally come to fruition.

It is an especially poignant moment for me is because today at lunch I ran into someone, and she gleefully said she had found a job and she started this week. The irony of this is I do not know who this person was when I ran into her a month . . . or about six weeks ago. I do know she stays in your constituency, Mr. Speaker. I just don't know who . . . and she said, *Hey, I just got made redundant. I heard that there is supposed to be some sort of relief for having to pay payroll tax and can you look into it?*

And that's when I realised we had not . . . I know it had been discussed, but we had not passed it yet. And so, I saw first hand, MP Ming, someone who said, you know, *I'm being made redundant. And when I got my redundancy check, \$8,000 was taken out for payroll tax and it's just completely unfair.*

And I just happened to run into this young lady today while we were buying lunch and I told her, *hey, that, you know, that thing we talked about is getting passed today.* And she was just absolutely ecstatic for persons to come after her. So, with that . . . that very real example of making a difference, it feels so much better when you actually know that someone was looking out for that and they noticed there.

Mr Speaker, I just want to say thank you for bringing this. Thank you, Junior Minister for shepherding this through. Thank you, MP Ming for your advocacy and thank you Opposition for your 1,000 per cent support along with the "ands."

The Speaker: Any other . . . Minister Hayward, Minister of Economy and Labour.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I support this Bill wholeheartedly. This is part of a government framework to increase both labour and social protections.

When we looked at what is required to ensure that we provide the proper social safety nets for our residents, we provide the necessary labour protections. This is one change that is in alignment with that philosophy that we want to increase the level of social protections available to the residents of Bermuda. This change goes in alignment with the change that was made recently to increase the maximum redundancy or severance payout according to law. And so now the amount of money one can receive in terms of the benefit that they are due will increase for some who have been long-serving employees and the amount that they retain as pertains to the take home pay would increase.

This has to be viewed by all in a very positive light. The situation surrounding redundancy is very precarious. We have tried to strengthen our law as it pertains to redundancy in terms of putting consultation periods in place so that we can better equip persons for the path to redundancy. We want to ensure that all options are exhausted as best as we possibly can. I think the legislation is written in a stronger manner than is actually practiced.

And so, these consultation periods which is supposed to lead to positive outcomes are not necessarily always meaningful consultations. They sometimes are used as a means to justify an end, which is redundancy. Notwithstanding, there could be other options worked out between the employer and the employee so that that person does not find themselves in a period of redundancy.

This has also got to be viewed in the light of what we have done in terms of the sudden hardship benefit that we have extended for financial assistance for a three-month period. If somebody's income or persons find themselves in a precarious situation, if the home breadwinner has lost their job, how do we ensure that they receive some level of support during this period of transition? And the period of transition can be rough for some persons, and it can be a period where you never fully rebound because you can get in debt in that particular period.

And missing your rent for a few months can be very detrimental to a number . . . you know, the impact can be felt in a number of years of your life moving forward. Not just the financial hardship it brings, but the social and emotional hardship and stress that it brings when people do find themselves in precarious situations.

So, I don't want this Bill just to be viewed from a tax standpoint. This Bill is part of a holistic set . . . a suite of policy measures to better support our residents and the people of Bermuda. Being the Minister responsible for Economy and Labour and having control over the Department of Labour, I have certainly not been immune to the horror stories. Being a former president of a union where you're sitting at a table and somebody's fate is at your hands and hearing an employer telling an employee that this is their last day of work and that employer leaves the room and the employee looks to you as the union rep and says, *What next?* And you don't have an answer for him. You provide a little bit of confident words, and you give them a process in terms of what they can engage, how they can engage in moving forward. But the real question is never answered as it pertains to what next and how that person moves on.

Now those persons who were in my position have a better story to tell in terms of the level of protection that they can provide. So, you can say, *Okay we can see if you qualify for the financial assistance short-term benefit. We know that based off of your length of service you may get a higher payout now.*

We also know that based off of the changes that were made today that there should not be any deductions as it pertains to tax to that particular payout. And so, the story is becoming better as you can explain to employees *what now*. There still needs to be a better method of how persons are treated during redundancy and we are looking at that as well.

I have been told a person comes to work, gets called into a room, gets told that they have been made redundant and do not even have the courtesy . . . don't even [get] the courtesy to go back to the desk and collect the stuff. They have somebody else . . . security collecting their stuff. Their swipe cards are gone. They do not [receive] the courtesy to even log out of their computer. And so, the way in which persons are treated, I continuously, when I meet with employers, explain that we must have a human-centred approach to our processes.

If you plan on making somebody redundancy, can you also provide wraparound services? Can you provide the necessary employment engagement services that may be required? You do not know if that person may have some social-emotional impact. Can you even give them, ensure that they have Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) assistance? It is very hard for somebody to hear who's going through a medical emergency that their health insurance, their major medical, will be cut off immediately as well. How do we transition to ensuring that this person at least have health insurance for a period of time?

All of these things are things that we are looking into. And so, I do not want persons view this in isolation. I think everyone who has advocated for progress in this particular space, because it does impact the lives, and not just segments of Bermudians. Bermudians at any stratum and tier within our society. So, I thank the Honourable Junior Minister for bringing this Bill, and I wholeheartedly support it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

There are none. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make sure that no one else wanted to speak before I got up, so that the Junior Minister can close out.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us today is what responsive and responsible government looks like. Because, Mr. Speaker, this is not something that was inside of the Government's 2017 or 2020 Election Manifesto, but it is something that was raised from a constituent to one of our political colleagues, the Honourable Member for constituency 1, who spoke in support of this earlier. And it is something of which we have added into our programme of work, something that was in our election manifesto, and something that we are delivering today.

It is important because in the exact same way that others have told the stories, Mr. Speaker, I too have a story, but mine is a little bit more recent. Mine was just from a week ago, out on the parade route at Bermuda Day, where someone had said to me, *Why are you charging me payroll tax on my redundancy pay?*

And I was able to say, unfortunately, it will not help you if you've already been made redundant. But when we go to the House next week, we are going to pass that change so that redundancy pay is not subject to payroll tax going forward. Again, what responsible and what responsive government looks like.

We are, Mr. Speaker, a labour party. We are a labour government. You've heard from the Minister of Economy and Labour, who just took his seat, of the various measures of which we are taking inside of this area. And this is just one more step that this Government is doing to ensure that Bermuda is made more fair. And so, I welcome the support of the party opposite. The party opposite had said that they support this. And I think it was an "and" and I don't remember specifically what the "and" was. Maybe it was around going further, or more targeted, or more relief, or other ways. But I think it provides an opportunity for those persons listening to reflect on the fairness that this Government has brought to the payroll tax system.

Because though, Mr. Speaker, many of us may not recognise and understand, we have many constituents . . . those persons who may be labourers on construction sites, who may be cashiers at our various grocery stores, who are making \$23 an hour. And I say \$23 an hour, Mr. Speaker, because it's important. Because I want to highlight, as we are talking about the general principles of this Bill, and we are talking about the Payroll Tax Act, what this Government has done insofar as making sure that we are targeted and help those persons who need the help most.

So, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. If you are making \$23 an hour, in 2018, we reduced your annual tax bill by \$360. In 2020, we reduced that tax bill by a further \$960. In 2022, again, making \$23 an hour, we reduced your tax bill by another \$240. And in 2023, we reduced your tax bill by a further \$480. That's someone making \$23 an hour. And I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, many of us know people who are making \$23 an hour—whether you're a student, whether you're someone in . . . whether you are in hospitality, whether you are somewhere else. And of course, we understand about payroll taxes on tips. I guess the gentlemen overseas may have taken that from the Progressive Labour Party Government. Yet I digress, Mr. Speaker.

So, the total annual reduction in taxes paid by someone making \$23 an hour, Mr. Speaker, is \$2,040 a year. That is real and meaningful relief. And that person, of course, they have a cell phone, will pay \$72 less a year as well. So we're adding on to that as well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And if that person has a land tax bill where they're paying, they're going to be paying, and that's going to be added on that as well, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, and if that person has a BELCO bill, that BELCO bill is going to be cut because we're adding on to that as well, Mr. Speaker. Relief across the board.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the cumulative savings for that individual making \$23 an hour since this party was returned to Government is \$9,480.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, \$9,480.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No point of order on that is there?

Hon. E. David Burt: That, Mr. Speaker, is what fair, responsive, targeted towards those who need it most government looks like. That is the record of this Progressive Labour Party Government, Mr. Speaker. For those persons who need the relief, we make sure that we deliver that relief. And how was it paid for, Mr. Speaker? It was paid for by increasing taxes on those making over \$200,000 a year.

And it is important to note, Mr. Speaker, because I will continue to repeat it as long as I have a place in this Honourable House, that those changes to reduce taxes on 86 per cent of workers in this country and increase it on the high earners was opposed by the One Bermuda Alliance.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. Yes, it was.

Hon. E. David Burt: So that \$9,480 of cumulative savings for that cashier at MarketPlace, that labourer on the job site, that person who's working in our hospitality industry otherwise was opposed by the party opposite but supported and delivered by this Progressive Labour Party Government.

Our labour roots run deep, and we will continue to deliver the relief across the board while also making sure that we deliver the targeted relief, because you can walk and chew gum at the same time.

And that, Mr. Speaker, is the record of this Government. Thank you.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Any other Member? Junior Minister?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
With all Members supporting this Bill, I move that the Bill be moved to Committee.

The Speaker: Okay. Deputy.

House in Committee at 3:48 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Chairman: Members, it has been moved that the Bill entitled the [Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025](#) be committed.

Any objections? There are none.
Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that all clauses be moved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that all clauses be approved.

Are there any objections?
There are none. Approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, this Bill seeks to amend the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995 and the Payroll Tax Rates Act 1995, the "Rates Act," to reduce to zero an employee's liability to pay payroll tax on remuneration given in connection with the permanent termination of employment.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 inserts new Section 9E into the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995. This provides that an employee is not liable to pay payroll tax at the employee's standard rate, bans in relation to any remuneration falling within Section 7(1)(c) of the Act (payments made or things or value given in connection with the permanent termination of employment on account of redundancy or otherwise), but instead at the rate prescribed by the Rates Act. The employer's liability to payroll tax on such payment is not changed.

Clause 3 inserts new section 4D into the Rates Act which prescribes zero per cent as the rate of payroll tax chargeable to an employee for such remuneration.

Clause 4 provides for commencement on 1 July 2025 and confirms that the rate change will apply in relation to remuneration given to an employee or former employee on or after that date in connection with the permanent termination of employment, regardless of the date of termination.

The Chairman: Thank you.

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

There being none, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that all clauses be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that all clauses be approved.

Any objections? There are none.

All clauses are approved. Junior Minister.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 4 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

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

Any objections? There are none.

Approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections? There are none.

So approved.

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 3:51 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 being reported to the House as printed?

There are no objections. The Bill has been reported as printed.

The Speaker: Now, we will do our third readings. Junior Minister.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Okay. Any objections?

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title [only] and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Do your next item.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections? None.
Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL**THIRD READING****PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025**

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House do now adjourn until 13 June 2025, and I have been informed that there will be Members speaking to the motion to adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Minister Hayward.

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

GOVERNMENT'S STEADFAST COMMITMENT IN DEVELOPMENT OF DOMESTIC INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, since I took on the role as the Minister of Economy and Labour, part of my remit is to ensure that we have robust and sustainable economic growth and development.

When I took on this portfolio, the first step that I wanted to make was to ensure that we have a robust strategy. So, we went out to develop economic development strategies that would guide the vast majority of our strategic focus and priorities as it pertains to economic growth and development in this country.

Part of that is ensuring that we have more inward investment and we expand our business sector in Bermuda. We encourage more companies to domicile in Bermuda, and we assist those companies that are currently here to expand their business activities in Bermuda. Oftentimes I have the pleasure to meet with CEOs of local companies both in the international business community and in the small and medium-sized businesses which fall in part of the other sectors in our community. And I am able to directly get a first-hand understanding of the trajectory of where those

businesses are going, as well as explain to them some of the policy measures that we are putting in place.

Oftentimes when I'm on the road internationally and I'm meeting with persons who are determining where to domicile, I have to explain Bermuda's value proposition because it's not readily understood by all worldwide what Bermuda has to offer. They have heard of Bermuda in some way or another but from a business standpoint and a business ecosystem standpoint, there are certainly knowledge gaps. From an economic standpoint, they don't fully understand what's the drivers of our economy and the type of sophisticated business environment that we have. I think collectively we can all take credit for the current business environment that we have. That business environment allows us to champion Bermuda in a way which is deemed to be attractive to international business.

When we look at the economy, there is certainly a positive story that I'm able to tell those particular companies. I am able to tell a story that since the pandemic we have had strong and robust economic growth. I am able to explain that in 2021, our economy in real terms grew by 5.8 per cent. That's followed by a whopping 8.0 per cent in 2022, followed by strong growth in 2023 of 4.9 per cent. The real growth in 2022 was 6.5 per cent and we are projecting to have at least 6.5 per cent growth in 2024.

When that is viewed comparatively worldwide, we are exceeding growth of the majority of advanced economies in the world. That is viewed positive by potential investors. I then go into and break down the significance of our international business sector, how that represents roughly around 29 per cent of all economic activity in Bermuda. But then I am able to go into something that many would not appreciate. And that is we had a business sector who had employment of Bermudians [that had] less than 10 per cent in the 1990s to one that is at its highest level now of over 5,047 employees. That over 50 per cent of those employees are Bermudian.

It speaks to how we have invested collectively in the development of our human capital to power a thriving business community. Oftentimes, you hear individuals try to create this segregation between international business and our domestic economy, but there is a direct connection. The direct connection is the Bermudian talent that is actually powering that sector. And the Bermudian talent that continues to filter in that sector.

The opportunities now for young persons in Bermuda are greater than they have ever been before. Our young people now are taking their skill sets, going globally, applying their trade, and coming back to that same community. That is one of the stronger areas of value proposition when we are selling Bermuda as a jurisdiction.

We are able to promote the way in which we invest in human capital and the talent that is actually available on our Island to support companies when

domiciling in Bermuda. We are also able to promote and highlight our regulatory environment. The Minister of Finance laid [on the Table] today the Bermuda Monetary Authorities 2024 Annual Report, which highlights the significant body of work.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Oftentimes, in each and every one of those reports, it's a segment within those reports that outlines legislative changes on an annual basis. Those legislative changes come to this House of Assembly and are approved by this body. We are often asked or told, or this notion is raised, that the Government has nothing to do with the success of our international business community. But you cannot say that, if we create the regulatory framework that is appreciated, that enables business and attracts businesses into our environment. You cannot say that when we are investing in the human capital that that is actually empowering that particular sector. We have a large role to play in the success of that sector, and we have a large role to play in the success of Bermuda as a whole. You cannot detach the two.

We are experiencing some of the lowest unemployment rates that we have ever had, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of factors for that, but the reality is that the persons who have remained on Island are generally working.

We now have a greater imbalance as it pertains to the supply and demand of labour than we have had in previous years. And with the imminent opening of Fairmount Southampton in 2026 that problem is going to get worse. So, the Department of Workforce Development will be working in overdrive on training programmes, apprenticeship programmes, to ensure that we prepare persons for the opportunities that exist in our economy.

We will continue to work with our schools to prepare persons for the future and current world of work in Bermuda. I think the work that we have done thus far needs to be highlighted because we have done a fundamental job in terms of creating bridges to employment. More work needs to be done, but we have worked extremely hard in that particular area.

In the coming weeks I will be issuing the latest labour force survey. Many will be stunned by the result of that survey as they see the ongoing trend as it pertains to the number of Bermudians and unemployment decreasing. You heard the Minister responsible for Youth, Social Development and Seniors, when she tabled the annual report for financial assistance, regarding [how] the number of able-bodied persons on financial assistance decreased dramatically. All of that is trending in the right direction. When I looked at employment income by industry, in every industrial category employment income was up. It signals for us two things: It signifies an expansion of employment, and it also signifies wages progressing.

When we paint the picture of Bermuda, we need to paint an accurate picture. We need to tell the truth as it pertains to where we sit, where we lie, and where we currently are. Having an honest conversation, though, to get from where we are and where we desire to be is, I believe, critical, because it allows us to make the policy adjustments to close those gaps. Let's not just paint a picture of doom and gloom, and Bermuda somehow falling into the cracks, because that is not our reality.

And the success of our young people is something that actually needs to be celebrated. We have young people now in Bermuda who make more than their parents ever made. We have a record number of young persons in international business but also servicing other areas of our community as well.

The number of young persons who go away and get a secondary education is also increasing in Bermuda. The access to scholarship funding, the access to internships when they return home, all of that is increasing. That is a positive outlook for young persons who are looking to progress careers in Bermuda. This is part of a positive success story. We are creating opportunities for our young people, but Bermuda still remains a desirable place for workers throughout the world.

And as the Minister responsible for Immigration, I continue to ensure that I strike that balance, that I preserve and protect the opportunities for Bermudians as best I possibly can, while identifying gaps, ensuring that companies get the labour that they require. I think that approach is measured. I think that approach is reasonable. And I think that approach is actually appreciated by the community as a whole.

We will embark on a census in 2026 that will give us some better information on our population numbers, but also our demographic numbers. But there is always one correlation that remains evident in our census data, that is that individuals who have progressed levels of education have a higher economic outcome. That means, notwithstanding where persons are at their current stage, that we need to ensure that all boats are rising.

So, in my last meeting with my team in the Ministry of Economy and Labour, the message was that we have done well to have economic growth. But our main focus now is inclusive economic growth, ensuring that everybody else, or the entire country, feels the success of our economic prosperity. This is why we are going back to the drawing board as it pertains to how we better support small businesses and entrepreneurs by putting a national entrepreneurship strategy in place. This is why we are revisiting cooperative legislation. As an additional measure of economic diversification, having the legislative framework in place for when that option comes to fruition, persons can exercise their right to form or be part of a cooperative or invest in a cooperative.

We are going to make it easier for our small business owners to register their businesses. We are trying to streamline the government as best we possibly can. We will be embarking on a full Digital Economy Strategy. That Digital Economy Strategy will have four major pillars, Mr. Speaker. We will focus on ensuring that we provide enhanced digitized, automated government services. We will ensure that there is better digital access for private sector establishments, that there is better digital interaction between those establishments and our community.

I want to ensure that we increase our e-Commerce footprint. We want to ensure that we invest in human capital so that our people are moving forward with the technology that we are implementing. And we need to ensure that we have the infrastructure, whether that be a legal and regulatory environment, or putting physical infrastructure in place that supports innovation within our society.

Mr. Speaker, next week I will be off to the Global Entrepreneurship Congress. I will be engaging in a ministerial where I will understand how other countries are putting policy measures in place to support small and medium-size businesses. I will engage in a number of bilateral [meetings] with other countries as well. You know that we have set up memoranda of understanding for economic cooperation. We have set up one with Ghana. We are seeking to execute one with Nigeria as well. We have set up the Economic Cooperation Committees. And that is so that we can leverage the skills, the capacity that they have and the capacity that we have to ensure that their economy and our economy can benefit off of the knowledge.

Often, when I speak to the business community they are very much pleased with our financial and professional services that they can obtain, the level of legal representation that they can receive on Island, the level of legal precedent that exists within our community. They are also pleased with the level of accounting services they can find. They are pleased with the level of accommodation that they can get as it pertains to office space as well.

We do not want the city just as a place where people can work. We also want to transition the city into a place where people live, work and play. And we will be taking active steps to progress in that particular direction.

What I have embarked on is setting out a holistic plan as to how we move this economy forward. Anybody who says that we do not have a plan is either being naïve, manipulative or has not sought to understand the clarity of what we are actually doing. You just do not get continued economic growth by resting on your laurels and sitting on your hands and doing nothing. It takes active intervention into the markets to ensure that the engine continues to run.

No, we cannot take credit for everything. But we have to give credit where credit is due. We do have a long list of professionals who work on an ongoing

basis. We now have industry on board as ambassadors for Bermuda who actually share Bermuda's value proposition as well.

I am impressed by the increase of small businesses. If you have listened to what I articulated regarding the BEDC [Bermuda Economic Development Corporation] during the Budget Debate you would understand that over 600 businesses engage with the BEDC. We are increasing the capacity in terms of incubators and accelerators. We are doing what is required to ensure that we continue to create opportunities that benefit the people of Bermuda. The Government is laser-focused in ensuring that we have sustainable economic growth and development. And the Ministry of Economy and Labour sits at the forefront of that.

I view the Ministry of Economy and Labour as one that is transformative, one that is focused on the future, one that is focused on change and one that is driving how we actually get there, and how we bring our people along on that particular journey. I think from the purest standpoint, if we take a snapshot of where we are from an economic standpoint, we should be pleased. That's not to say that we should not recognise that more progress needs to be made in a number of areas. We are committed to making that progress.

But, Mr. Speaker, this Government has had a steadfast commitment in the development of our domestic international business community, and in our steadfast commitment as it pertains to our investment in people. The budget process highlighted the millions of dollars that we are putting in this particular space and we will continue to do so because that is in the best interest of the residents of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister Hayward.

MP King, would you like your 20 minutes?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

NEED FOR HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN BERMUDA

Mr. Robert King: It is not all doom and gloom.

I appreciate the comments and the statements made by Minister Hayward as it relates to improving the circumstances of young Bermudians with apprenticeship programmes, providing a means for them to achieve financial independence in agency and to become contributing members of the society, many of whom have come from difficult circumstances. And we know that education is the great equaliser.

Another thing that Minister Hayward said that struck a note with me is that it is important that the truth of where we are and where we need to go . . . we need to be transparent and accountable, recognising what

the problems are, what the issues are and providing a clear path forward so that we can address the needs of the community in a meaningful way.

Minister Hayward also spoke about international business and what a profound impact it has had on this country and how through international business we are able to create opportunities. And we appreciate the efforts and their contributions.

It is also important, Minister Hayward said, that we support local businesses and the local community. And the statement was also referring to the fact that unemployment is going down, this is the trend, and when the next labour force survey comes out this will be shown. However, there is another truth to this as well. Another thing that needs to be considered. Which is the fact that financial assistance, the number of persons who are on financial assistance, is currently over 2,000. And we also have approximately 1,000 people who are homeless or who are sleeping rough in unstable—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

What I referred to was the decline in able-bodied persons on financial assistance. I never mentioned the total population of financial assistance in my remarks.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister has clarified his comments for you.

Mr. Robert King: I am not sure why there was a point of order on that because what I was speaking to was the context of unemployment in relation to the number of persons who were receiving financial assistance. Not—

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The majority of persons on financial assistance, Mr. Speaker, are seniors, people who are not employed.

The Speaker: Have both helped? Were the comments . . . have the comments been helpful?

Mr. Robert King: The point is, Mr. Speaker, that persons who are receiving financial assistance are receiving financial assistance due to the fact of their economic circumstances. Were it not for the fact that they require public assistance to pay their bills they would not be on there regardless of age. That is the point. So, I will move on.

The homeless population is approximately 1,000. When we are looking at unemployment, yes, the trend is down. However, for the specific subset of 16 to 24 there is an over representation of young, Black Bermudian males, in particular. When you are looking at arrest rates from the police crime statistics recent and past there is an over representation of that particular age group as well, which needs to be addressed. How do we address that? We address that with apprenticeship programmes, educational programmes, attending to adverse childhood experiences. As the Minister stated, we need a holistic approach, absolutely.

The Minister will also remember that back in 2014 we sat down and had a conversation about a proposal that I had, Success through Academic and Vocational Education. What it sought to do was provide a clear path for at-risk persons to receive necessary skills and training and that jobs would be . . . there would be a clearing house for employment through a central hub so that persons would not be applying for jobs which existed, but all work permit category, persons would apply for that and be trained so that they could take their rightful place in the community.

The other thing that was mentioned in the proposal too was working with the Department of Corrections to ensure that incarcerated persons had access to a full-curriculum apprenticeship and otherwise with regularly staffed workshops so that persons who are incarcerated would be able to support themselves when they re-enter the community. As the system currently operates, the only requirement for persons to receive parole is that they have employment for three months, as opposed to persons who have served a long period of incarceration or to have the opportunity to engage in regular education and vocational programmes. At present, that does not exist. Efforts are being made to ensure that that does.

And we also understand the profound impact that will be had if persons can leave the correctional system as qualified masons, mechanics, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, et cetera, they will be able to support themselves and their families.

Many statements have been made about the intention, the vision and mission to have an empowered workforce. The One Bermuda Alliance, as Opposition, wholeheartedly supports the mission and vision. The concern that we raise is that there is no clear strategic plan with performance measures that will ensure the accountability so that these objectives can be achieved. We already know through the budget process and debate—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

We have an Economic Recovery Plan that has come here. We have had an Economic Development Strategy that has come here. The Minister has laid out those points, expanded on those points, has gone further into his comments today, has stated those, those matters were reported. He stated how they were reported.

The Honourable Member is misleading the House when he says there are no performance metrics. He has stated different things, youth unemployment down, from the Youth Employment Strategy. It is not correct for him to say there are no metrics. He can say they want more, but it is not correct for him to say there are none.

The Speaker: You get his point?

Mr. Robert King: Mr. Speaker, when I was talking about youth unemployment, I was speaking to the Labour Force Survey which spoke specifically to that age group, 16 to 24. Those statistics come directly out of that document. I am not speaking outside of the 16 to 24.

The statistics regarding crime came out of the Crime Statistics provided by the Bermuda Police Service. So, the point is, we have a convergence of that age group and an over representation in the criminal justice system and unemployment and that is where the focus needs to be.

We also know that that age group is over represented in terms of murders, violent offences, et cetera, and a comprehensive strategy with a holistic approach—as the Minister has suggested, and rightly so—needs to be resourced appropriately so that we can make meaningful changes and bring the trend down for the number of murders and violent deaths in this community.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: We debated a Violence Reduction Strategy in this House. The Minister has shared the implementation plan for that strategy. During the Budget Debate it was talked about, the resources, the increased resources that have been given for the execution of that strategy, the intervention into challenges

with families that was done by the Honourable Minister responsible for Youth, Social Development and Seniors. The Minister of National Security spoke during the Budget Debate about the increased funding that is going towards that. The Junior Minister of Justice, who sits in this House, spoke about the increased funding going towards corrections and rehabilitation and implementation of programmes. It is not correct for the Honourable Member to say that we need to put more funds there. We just passed the budget that increased the investment in all of the things that he is mentioning.

The Speaker: Thank you.

You got the point of what was said?

Mr. Robert King: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is taking out of context what I said.

Yes, Mr. Premier, I was not talking about funding at all. What I was talking about was a strategic plan with specific measurables to ensure that what we are trying to achieve, the goals and objectives clearly stated, are achieved. We have already during the Budget Debate—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: We tabled and debated in this House a Violence Reduction Strategy that contained specific metrics. The Minister has also offered to make sure for implementation plans, et cetera. There are specific metrics which have been laid out. He keeps on saying . . . first it was resources, that he said I took it out of context. We spoke about resources. Now he's talking about specific metrics and a strategic plan. We have one. We tabled it. We debated it in this House.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I just rise on a point of clarification.

The Speaker: Yes.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify.

The Member raised that he met with me in 2014 to present a report as it pertains to how we can integrate persons within our workplace. I just want to make it abundantly clear that I was not a Member of the Government in 2014. The One Bermuda Alliance was actually the Government at the time. So, I had no authority or power to implement any suggestion or recommendation which was made by that Honourable Member.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you for the clarification.

I am aware of that. I was speaking to the Honourable Member, Minister at the time, in his capacity as—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Yes. In the union, in the other place, and in terms of his influence and capacity to make great changes with that population.

So, it was in the context of that, that we had a conversation. He is correct. He was not in the Government at the time. And at the same time, I know Minister Hayward was very passionate about improving the circumstances of the underserved, especially as it relates to employment. So, that has not changed.

What I am speaking to, though, is an actual strategy on how to achieve the vision and mission. I know that we have a gang czar, a gang coordinator, sorry, Pastor Doctor Leroy Bean, [MP], who sits in this House as well. But we have never actually heard statistics and outcomes in terms of what specifically is working, how many people have graduated from the programme, how many lives were saved, recidivism rates reduced specifically as a direct result of being involved in the programme. We have not heard that.

What we also know is that there is an over representation of persons who are under the age of 30 at Westgate Correctional Facility. We also know that there is an over representation of young, Black Bermudian males who are being arrested—three times the rate of persons of other colour. We know the statistics—the Government-produced statistics—tell us that this is so. This tells us that we need to, besides providing funding which is necessary, have a comprehensive and holistic approach, as was stated by the Minister, and we have to have a clear, strategic plan with specific performance measurables based on best practice and data that will ensure that we reduce the number of deaths, antisocial behaviour, and at the same time create opportunities for the youth in this community to live a peaceful and just life.

Those are my submissions. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Premier.

SENTIMENTS OF THANKS TO CIVIL SERVANTS

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank all of the civil servants for their work over the last few weeks, and over the last few months. I do not recall us ever really thanking those who do a lot of the work for us Ministers in this House.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, you have been around long enough, that the budget process starts many months before budget day. And I am not so sure that we give enough highlights to the work that our civil servants do. And you will know, Mr. Speaker, that there are many in the community who give our civil servants a lot of flak. I just thought that, today, at the end of the session, that it would be good for all of us to echo sentiments of thanks to our civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, not only the civil servants who work throughout all of the ministries in the government, but in your place, Mr. Speaker, from where you sit, your team that you have that supports you over this period deserves a lot of thanks. And everyone, from the Sergeant-at-Arms, to the ladies up top, to long-serving members like Mr. Scott who just happens to be sitting in the chair today, Mr. Randolph Scott, that is.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, I have seen during budget times where we come out of this House sometimes and the sun is coming up. And whilst we all go through the process, the civil servants—your team, who have to endure those long hours . . . and, yes, everybody gets paid for what they do. But, the families have to sacrifice not having their family members around.

So, I take my hat off and give thanks to all of the civil servants throughout the government, and those who are in this House.

While I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Opposition Member, one of the newest Members in this House, Mr. Dwayne Robinson—

Hon. E. David Burt: Don't thank him too much.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I won't thank him too much. I don't want to spoil him.

But I would like to thank him and my fellow colleague, MP Famous, for inviting me to their . . . I think it is a weekly show that they have, last night, to talk about housing issues in the country. And I thank them for that. I think the more that we can lay out some of the initiatives that we will be pressing forward with from our side . . . and as I said last night, when these initiatives start coming to this House, I am looking forward to the Opposition participating in those debates. And I expect that when those things come to this House, we will get words of support without the [word] "but" added to it.

I think that I am excited about it, Mr. Speaker. I spent 12 weeks checking the lay of the land, talking to many of the boards and committees throughout government, especially under my Ministry.

ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO WORK HARD, SAVE AND SACRIFICE FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And whilst I am thanking people, I would also like to thank the people of the country who have an interest in housing in the country,

both affordable and otherwise, for reaching out to me over the last 12 weeks. I have made a lot of notes. My PS is probably getting a little bit tired of getting all sorts of WhatsApps and emails from me at all hours of the night, all hours over the weekend, because as I get ideas that are put to me, I immediately put them in writing. And I would just like to thank all of the people who have suggested, and I know there will be more, their ideas and views about how we tackle affordable housing in the country.

So, I would like to say thank you to everyone for their hard work and for their input.

And the last thing that I wanted to talk about, Mr. Speaker, because as Members Robinson and Famous will tell you, last night we had touched on because (what is the radio hostess' name? LA is it? DJ LA?)

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: DJ LA asked a question, As a young person how am I ever going to get a house in this country? And the only thing that I could tell her at this time, that I thought last night could hit home was my experience. And I will repeat that tonight because I think it is important in case there is anyone out there listening who is wondering how they can get my house, how can I get my piece of the rock.

Mr. Speaker, when I started working and started paying rent and had to go to Hitching Post to buy a loaf of bread and a bottle of mayonnaise for the week, I understood what it was like not to have. I understood what it was like to get my pay cheque and not have enough to pay rent. I knew what it felt like to have to work two and three jobs day and night in order to survive. And when I heard that young lady who was in her early 30s say, *How could she do it?*

My advice to her and my advice to any young person is, especially in this day and age when education is so much more important, first of all try to educate yourself as best you can. But, if not, put your head down, sacrifice and save. It is easy to go out there and work and find a job and when you get that pay cheque go out and try to compete with your friends who have the nice clothes, who have the cars, who have the bikes, who go out to dinner, who take trips. But if you really want to be serious about owning a piece of the rock, you must save and sacrifice.

And that is the experience that I had, and that is how I made it, by buying that first house up Broom Street, next to Amstel Brangman, as I said last night. And that was just a little shack. The windows were plywooded up, no water pipes, had to sleep on the floor because we didn't have furniture. My son who was born at the time, his crib was in the kitchen.

Mr. Speaker, if our people want to own they have to sacrifice and they have to save. And as I told my wife, I said, *Listen, if you want a house, there is no hair, there's no nails, there's no dresses, there's no new*

clothes. If we're going out to dinner, it's peanut sandwiches at Whale Bay Fort to watch the sun go down. That was it. But in order for us to get to that stage that is what we did. And I would tell all of our young people in the country that there is hope, that there is a way for you to do it, especially today. Financing . . . and if we have anything on this side of the House to do with it, we will press the financial institutions of this country to start looking favourably at how we can give our young people opportunities to own a piece of the rock.

Hon. E. David Burt: We have the mortgage guarantee programme.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, we do. And we have the mortgage guarantee programme going on. We have another two as I said in my speech on Monday. We have another two coming on. That is 32 young people who have gotten into their homes, now approaching 70-odd. I think it's 78. So, we are doing what we can.

But I implore our people, if you want to get a piece of the rock, save and sacrifice. Save and sacrifice. That is the way to do it. If you do not have a mother or father, or an aunt or uncle to say, *Look, here you go; here's a little starter home*, you can do it on your own. You have to put your shoulder to the wheel and you have to maybe do some jobs that you didn't want to do.

I washed dishes. I waited on tables. I swept floors. I painted roofs out in that hot sun. And the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier talked about how he used to mow grass. That's how I paid for school. I started going around Somerset knocking on peoples' doors too, *Can I mow your grass?* At the time it was five shillings.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, I did. I mowed that grass for five shillings. Yes. I would get three or four of those in a day and I was smiling. Trust me. I was smiling.

So, I would just encourage our young people to work hard, save and sacrifice. Look at what this Government is doing in terms of assisting and you can do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy [Premier].

MP DeCouto, would you like to make a contribution at this time?

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

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

SENTIMENTS OF THANKS TO CIVIL SERVANTS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I think the MP De Silva made a very good point. And I know that my colleagues, I am

sure, would like to join me in expressing our sincere thanks to the public officers who participated in this budget process.

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Who prepared the budget.

Mr. Speaker, you probably no doubt consider that I am quite a student of the numbers since I spent a lot of time with the details of the Budget Book and the underlying materials. I have developed a great respect for those. I know the Premier has called the various names of the public officers involved with it, so I will not do that [again] because I will probably leave somebody out. But we certainly appreciate, I know everyone in this Chamber appreciates the time and effort that gets put into that, and the amount of information out there that is available to the public.

As you also know, Mr. Speaker, we are also quite interested in the ways that we can make this process a more fruitful and efficient process for all involved, not least the public officers, and we certainly look forward to engaging with you, the Government and the public service on anything in that direction. And we are also grateful to the Ministers who I would say worked with us to provide an opportunity for a good and frank and fair debate which allowed them to put their messages out, allowed us to ask questions and elicit information on behalf of the people. So, thank you to them as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

MP Swan, would you like a contribution at this time?

MPs ABSENT FROM CHAMBER

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

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what Deputy Premier Zane De Silva had to say. I've often said in the House of Assembly I'm just a country boy from White Hill and I know he's a country boy from White Hill too. We both were goalkeepers for Somerset Eagles. And we both come from that community. And the people who showed us . . . we were raised in that community, I salute them, and I salute the people in the community that I live in now who have embraced me.

I might not be that popular with what I am going to start off with. But, Mr. Speaker, in 1973 when Lancelot Swan was the Minister responsible for Youth and Sport, and Dame Lois Browne-Evans was the Opposition Leader, it was the first time I ever met those two at Youth Parliament. But I will reflect on a debate that touched on Youth Parliament. It touched me because I know the contribution that was made by your family, your late wife. And your son continues that legacy. And I am mindful of that contribution.

I represented Warwick Sec after I had left Berkeley and they saw something in me that I didn't see in myself, notwithstanding all the family members who represented both sides of the House and sat in another place as well. I waited 25 years since first running in 1983 to come to this Honourable House . . . well, come to another place to serve nine years. I waited 25 years in between when I first ran to be able to sit in this House. And I get here early because I appreciate being in this Honourable House, notwithstanding I look forward to the day when young Members who sit in this House can know what it feels like to sit opposite and sit behind the front benches and sit in those rightful places and sit where persons have sat for centuries in the oldest Parliament in the west, outside of Great Britain.

I don't think I will be popular because it bothered me this Budget Debate. And I will tell you what bothered me about this Budget Debate. I come at 8:45, 9:30. If I have to go to work first, sometimes 9:45. And I stay until the bitter end. And it bothers me that I don't see these chairs filled. And that is not a fault of . . . the fault falls with my colleagues. And I am old enough and I have been around long enough that I am going to call him out.

You need to be here!

You didn't get elected not to be here.

People think that being a parliamentarian is all about just, you know, being somewhere else. You are elected to be *here*. You are elected to represent how your constituents feel.

When we talk about the ethos . . . we talked about the ethos. I took that seriously because you get the ethos from the people whose doors you knock on and then you have a responsibility to learn how the workability of that legislation impacts your people.

I listened to the Minister responsible for Labour and Economy. Yes. And a Member opposite made mention of going to him in 2014 in his capacity. He brings that capacity here. The Member that mentioned him brings his working capacity to this House. We all bring something. People always make fun that I bring golf here. Yes, I do. That's my trade. It taught me honesty. It taught me how to judge things. And things are not done by a cookie cutter. You can practice one way and then the wind is blowing a certain way, and the rain is coming down and someone is trying to put you off and you got to stay focused. So, I am encouraging persons who got elected that you should be in this House.

And I often speak about the benchmarks because the benchmarks cover employers. Employers should make a way for persons and ensure that they're here. I heard a young Member say, or someone say on behalf of another Member, that they had to be at work. And I understand that. He has to put food on his table. Those employers out there need to recognise that just like the military service, that is a responsibility that is held over a centrist to less than 1 per cent of the population.

And you do not get elected because you are bright. You get elected because some people trust you to carry their vote forward. Those persons might be businesspeople in greater numbers. They might be working-class people in numbers, but they put you there to carry them. If you are not here, you cannot represent them.

And I tell you what. I do not like coming here making sure running down here this week working at six o'clock in the morning, doing another appointment at eight o'clock, getting changed and running from where my car is parked to be here at ten o'clock and see that others do not hold that important.

Well, you said you know what, Swannie? You have been around here long enough to know that it is time that you tell them what time it is. All right?

And I quote sometimes speeches from other persons. Some of them I read at the library when we had a library. Some of those speeches that you would know, Mr. Speaker, from Dame Lois and Eugene Cox and others, L. Frederick Wade, because I read them. But many times, I was here to hear them as well.

And I said this when we first came back that there was a time when these benches were there so that people held you accountable. I know it is a lot more appealing when you are up on the hill. So, I hold out that it needs to be a matter of urgency that we go back up there too. We need to find the money. And I am saying that from the fact of being, and respecting being, in this Honourable House.

I was moved to say that because that wasn't what I had written down.

We need inward investment in this country to grow.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And where is the growth going to come [from]? Well, I am spending far more time because I am going up to Dalton E. Tucker to try to find the next Dwayne Pearman and the next golfers that can play in the Bermuda Championships. So, I am going to where they come from, that community. But right next door is property that my family and other families, the Beads and the like were part of, Morgan's Point. And the Premier would say that we have been saddled with \$250 million and a responsibility to find what is right and how that is going to work to the benefit of this country.

And I honestly believe that from the western side of Pompano on the water's edge, which leads out right out to the ocean, out to the great blue sea with only about a five-minute leave from a dock, right along to the port there that was finished, is the opportunity for us with inward investment from overseas. And you are going to only find that through relationships.

In tourism, where I speak, where I've been involved with all my life, it has been built on relationships. When I grew up, the relationships that I formed

caddying for people, even up in Southampton, although I came to Tucker's Town afterwards, were persons who were the movers and shakers of the entire world. Mr. Juan Trippe was one of the families that sponsored me in Europe. Well, they owned Pan Am and they owned Tucker's Point and many other things as well. So, when Pan Am had that flight leaving Bermuda at seven o'clock and US Customs had to be there, the Government didn't have to make that call. No! No, no, no, my *bye!*

If one of his executives was staying up Knapton Hill, it only took a few people to call a congressman who may have been on that board or whatever the case may be to move that needle. That's where you have relationships at the top end.

I talk about history and Bermuda's connection with golf and tennis and the like. When the United States Golf Association was founded in 1895, one of its founders was the person that built Mid-Ocean. He had a house that was just sold recently called Old Battery. His name was Charles Blair MacDonald from the United Kingdom. And it was an Act of Parliament. I had the book (it's somewhere around here) that has the Act that made it possible for his children, his grandchildren to be able to have that property at some point.

I am here to say this, that Mr. Charles Blair MacDonald used to hang in Bermuda in 1895. Woodrow Wilson, William Taft in 1912. We had shakers and movers hanging around here. You have to make friends with people who can make decisions. Otherwise, you're at middle management trying to move things and you can spin your wheels. We need some serious dollars.

And I have a vision just like my uncle Herman. They talk about, *Oh, you only talk about . . .* Herman had a vision in the 1930s when he taught golf at Whale Bay, where the Honourable Member lives. The Bascome family, with the young lady . . . the young Member from . . . the young Member from constituency 36, her family owned all that property over there, the Bascome family. They had a lot of girls, so the family now . . . a lot of names have . . . but they come from Gyro Bascome's family. Right to Whale Bay Fort.

And I'm here to tell you that when I talked about developing forts, it was that everybody doesn't have to be crowded and on top of each other at one beach. We need to diversify too. The Whale Bay Fort was upgraded and cleaned up for the Bermuda Championship because at a time when I had some oversight in that area, that vision prevailed. But once it was stopped . . . and I had the former chairman of the parks come up there, the young Junior Minister who sits right here, come up there and look. And we talked about the fact that why, just like Windsor Castle and visiting those places, you know, the forts as well, modernised, offices. Why couldn't Whale Bay Battery and other forts like the, Friends of St. George's are doing down there, clearing out, couldn't do what we did up at Whale Bay, because the showcase was on us, so that people who

might be coming up there to golf or tennis or pickleball, could go down to that beach down there at Whale Bay and come up to that fort.

And when we had home porting, the vision for home porting during COVID-19 was an initiative I advanced publicly. I talked about it, wrote about it. And thanked former Minister Lawrence Scott for acting on it with Viking.

Morgan's Point could very well be a home porting base, purposely built for them to base there and with those properties there. If they are coming to build a dock . . . Let me tell you, when I was a little boy watching Paul Leseur water ski on a Sunday afternoon, many a Sunday afternoon, I was watching seaplanes land out there too. And many a Sunday, with the base personnel who were living near and around us, we might even get taken onboard a destroyer or something like that. Or we might see some large ship out in Grassy Bay, out there.

We have the capacity. In fact, when they were building out at Morgan's Point, they were bringing their own ships right in port and offloading their materials. So, it is not like you need any dredging to do it. You know, Port Royal doesn't get its name from the Queen or the King visiting Bermuda. It gets its name from Port Royal harbour, which is right around Five Star Island. It was a commercial port going back centuries ago.

I declare my interest. I'm a country boy from Southampton. My families are the Halls and Burrowes and the Hughes and all those folks right around that way. And I am here to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the opportunity to get inward investment is to get the right people here. And we have a very dynamic Minister of Economic Development. Come, let me take you all on a nice tour of that area and show you what the opportunities are. And then let me introduce you to some of those persons that I happen to know around the world, and others in this country know as well.

That's why I keep saying that the Opposition have a responsibility as well, because they may know one or two more billionaires than me. They just might.

And do not let your legacy be the legacy of "no." If you . . . but let it be this "know." If you know somebody, convince somebody to invest in Bermuda during this Government's time. It would benefit all of us, that boat will raise everybody.

And listen, we have talked about taxes and tariffs and the like. When that tide rises in this country, the folks that are my family and cousins do not benefit like my friends that I know who are in a higher economic bracket.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Let me tell you this, I didn't like spending hundreds of millions [of dollars] on something that could have cost ten [dollars].

That's the answer. I didn't like spending \$40 million on something that was unnecessary.

I didn't like Minister Fahy.

I didn't like you telling seniors money doesn't grow on trees.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We descended on that just because I'm trying to be constructive and point out where they could be constructive. But if you are just intent on being destructive every week to find ways to hinder this Government, let me encourage the Opposition to do this.

Unfortunately, we don't have a library. But it would be nice, and I know the Honourable Member DeCouto does research. He is one of the most research-orientated persons in this country for a long time. He has a website, and he has a lot of things on there. And I would go there for years and find the Pit Report, Tumin Report, you want a report. Put up some of those speeches from Dame Lois, L. Frederick Wade and Eugene Cox as well, so that persons in the Opposition, and even some Members in my party, can see what a real Opposition did for 30 years—came with solutions!

Came with solutions. That a Government did take too.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: No, I'm not angry. No, I am not angry. I am just passionate. That's what we say. And I am loud, but Moses was loud. And I am here to tell you, what I speak of, I believe in. When I talk about volunteerism, I lead by example. And what I am here to say is this. We collectively can do more when we all tell persons out there that Bermuda is a great place to invest [in].

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And let me tell you, and I heard a little thumping. I want to say this, because many times when persons come to this House and look to find ways of criticising . . . let me say this: And you cannot argue with this one. The chance of what you say going on the front page is increased tenfold than what we say.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is correct.

If you get up and say something, it's far more likely that what you say is tidied up to mean what *The Royal Gazette* might want it to mean. And what we say is more than likely to be taken out of context, if anything.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise primarily for this reason: The Honourable Member, in previous statements that he made, is imputing [improper motive to] his fellow Members and colleagues in this House.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You weren't in the audience.

Mr. Scott Simmons: No, I am here now.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You weren't in the audience.

Mr. Scott Simmons: I'm here now.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You weren't in the audience.

Mr. Scott Simmons: And Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect to my colleague, who I have a lot of respect for, I'm asking the Honourable Member to withdraw his comment as it relates to his colleagues. He is imputing improper motive. He does not know why his colleagues are not in this House at this particular time.

It is a known fact that Members of this House have responsibilities. But I'm more than happy, Mr. Speaker, not on this particular point of order . . . I am prepared to take my seat after the Honourable Member. But I ask him to withdraw, and I ask him to take that statement back. He has merit to a degree, but to impute improper motives to his own colleagues in this House—on both sides of this floor—is absolutely abhorrent and unnecessary and is requiring a withdrawal.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Speaker, the Member was not here to hear when I said that . . . in fact, I referred to the benchmarks to say that persons need to be protected because there are persons who can't be here. And I made reference to a Member who was sitting right there, sitting right here at the time, who I understood why he couldn't be here. And I understand Members on this side can't be here because they have to be in their place of employment.

So, I accept what the Member has expressed.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order.

Will the Honourable Member take a point of clarification or information? I'm very grateful.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member may not be aware, but I know that there is a funeral this afternoon. I know a number of Members from both sides of the aisle are present at that funeral.

[Timer chimes]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Okay, well I'm just . . . the listening audience doesn't always necessarily understand what is going on. They do not know how many people are sitting in the Chamber this afternoon. It is fewer than normal, and I wouldn't want any comment unintentionally to be taken in the wrong way.

And I'm grateful for the intervention of the other Honourable Member. Thank you.

And thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, your clock ran out while you were sitting there just now.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Okay.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Okay. Mr. Simmons, would you like your 20 minutes?

MPs ABSENT FROM CHAMBER

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to speak for 20 minutes. I'm not even going to keep the Honourable Members in this House who have gone through an entire Budget Debate, who have spent the time in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to offer clarification on this particular point. Primarily because, like many of our colleagues who are not in this House, or during any particular sitting of this House, we are listening carefully on the radio. We are listening on our phones. And we are following our honourable colleagues on both sides of this House who are doing the bidding of the people of Bermuda.

The reason I rose before, and I want to make this clear so that no one is under the impression. I have a tremendous respect for the Honourable Member. He represents in the East, a constituency that he literally owns. He has done his job. He has done his homework. And he—

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Point of order.

Mr. Scott Simmons: I take that back, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Point of order.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Okay, he doesn't own it. I will take that back.

The Speaker: Yes.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I think the Honourable Member is unintentionally misleading the House. There's no one in this House, and least of all of me, who owns any constituency in here.

And I took his point that he made, and he may not have heard everything that I said when I referred to absenteeism not being supported by employers. And I made the point that it is covered in benchmarks. And maybe, Mr. Speaker, I will run a motion on benchmarks, if the Premier permits me, so that we can delve deeper into that matter.

And it wasn't particular to this particular debate, Mr. Speaker, it was across the board I was talking about. And I do respect the clarification by Member Pearman.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I take the Honourable Member's point of information as well as his point of order.

Mr. Speaker, as far as I am concerned, and I want to make sure that this is clear and I appreciate his clarification and the clarification of the Learned Member. The one thing that I want to be clear on, because I did not want this evening for individuals out in the public to feel as though there are elements of neglect by your colleagues. Whether it be the Frontbench or whether it be the Backbench. Members of this House have a responsibility inside of this House and outside of this House. We do not take any of that lightly and we govern ourselves accordingly.

There are those of our colleagues who are in this House that do have an opportunity during these times to be able sit in this House and to be able to stay from start to finish. When the business of this House is being discussed we are here, we are represented. And when a Minister travels and a Minister is not here, his portfolio and the issues for which he represents are ably handled in this House by those who are present.

I recognise that there is a protocol and there are procedures that are clear over at our party headquarters as articulated by the Whip. And the Whip has made it crystal clear, and he has re-emphasised it. I got it.

But, Mr. Speaker, beyond the . . . there are no illusions, I do not want the public to feel this. We in this House cannot continue with the narrative that presents the impression . . . the Honourable Member has risen to say that it is not his intention; I will take it on board. I will say this. We have to recognise that all of us have responsibilities that we cannot ignore. And we must in this House also state and defend when we, for other reasons, are not here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make it clear today that as it relates to responsibilities, as it relates to what we are doing in this House, we just went through three days (by way of explanation) and three days and more of a Budget Debate. If responsibilities pull us in this House on the Monday and the Tuesday, then on the Friday, we have to . . . if we have responsibilities to

another employer outside of this House, then we make it up during that time.

Mr. Speaker, I find I cannot agree with having to stand up in this House and explain to honourable colleagues, and to make honourable colleagues aware, who, in my humble opinion, understood what it feels like to be, first of all, elected to this House. And to realise that that one . . . and I say this with the greatest of respect to the Government and to the people of Bermuda and to those who represent everybody here. A salary that, if you added it up, could not and would not—and as a matter of fact, Members of this Honourable House have articulated that already—and does not cover. And so, if you are not with the opportunity of being a Frontbencher, as a Backbencher then you must take on . . . and I am not saying that all Bermudians should take on the national past-time which is to moonlight and to have all kinds of other opportunities. But until such time, until we have the discussion on full-time salaries in this House, so that each and every Member can pay all that they must do, and are able to sit in this House and be able to say, *We take on nothing else on board*, there will always be a responsibility to someone else in the private sector to whom which we assign proper time. We all know time management and we are all in this House very good at multi-tasking.

Mr. Speaker, all I am saying is that we have responsibilities. We accept that. And we need to also understand that we must live as well. What has occurred in this House most recently as it relates to getting an increase and as it relates to receiving further compensation, I thank those who debated it. I thank those who deliberated on it, and I thank those who were for and against. But at the end of the day Bermuda is not getting any cheaper. I recognise, as the Honourable Member highlighted, that there are responsibilities attached to that. If we have not conformed to the CPA [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association], or to whatever else there is out there that dictates that we should not be out then we need—

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Recommends instead of dictates.

Mr. Scott Simmons: I apologise, recommends.

Then we have a responsibility to look at that.

And also, Mr. Speaker, I want to allay the concerns of those in the public who feel as though, when pictures were taken of individuals falling asleep in the other House, that there are individuals who are not doing their job. And they may feel that their MP, or that the individuals who represent them in this House are not doing their responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, I can attest to the fact that Honourable Members on both sides of this House take their responsibilities seriously. Some of us attach different styles to the way that we canvass, different styles to the way that we deal with our constituencies. And that is because we become seasoned,

and we know how it is and what it is that our electorate require of us.

But it should never, *never* be assigned to the fact that because *I pay you* and because of that you feel as though we in this House are shirking those responsibilities, because, we absolutely are not.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that we do not have to rise in this House and have a discussion on this again. I would hope . . . and I hope that we can get past the fact that there will be Honourable Members in this House who, because of academic standing and because of requirements on the outside and because financial requirements, find themselves under the banner of another employer—a part-time employer.

I do not see that there is any indignity in it. And I think all Members in this House benefit from employers in this country who recognise that if they are employing us, any Member of Parliament, that they give us sufficient time to serve, to do,—

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Our civic duty.

Mr. Scott Simmons: —As the Honourable Deputy Speaker stated, our civic duty, and that we need not displace the dignity of that by making statements that can be misinterpreted and that may create the feeling that they are not getting *bang for buck*.

I believe we have demonstrated that in the last Budget Debate. I believe the new Members who continue to contribute and will be contributing and all of us in this House, the Frontbenchers and Backbenchers, I believe we have represented the country well. And we should *not*, we should *not* feel and leave this place this evening feeling as though we have not served.

We continue to serve. We take our call from the electorate. I spoke on it before; I am not going to get into it tonight again. That is a subject we have dealt with. But they have spoken to us, and this Parliament takes our responsibilities seriously. You make a demand, Mr. Speaker, that we act, that we are right and that we do the things for this country. And you make certain in this House that we represent the people of Bermuda in a way that they would be proud of.

We realise that they do not get to see everything that we do. And oftentimes we feel under appreciated. But, Mr. Speaker, we realise that they cannot see all and so we continue to work and do and be according to what they instruct of us.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate you giving me this time. I wish to formally, if I may, if the Member will be happy to take it, I was a bit agitated earlier. That agitation has somewhat lifted. And as a result of that, I want to let my honourable colleague from the east know, as with every colleague in this House—

An Hon. Member: We had a healthy debate.

Mr. Scott Simmons: —with every person in this House, is that we may disagree and that we may rise

to our feet. But, Mr. Speaker, in this House we will represent the views of our people. We will admit if we are wrong. We will admit if we are incorrect. But we expect that individuals will themselves rise up and say: What is right is right and what is wrong is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, enjoy the rest of your weekend. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Premier, would you like to add to this debate at this time?

Hon. E. David Burt: I am not sure if it is “add,” Mr. Speaker, I think it is “close.”

The Speaker: Oh. Well, you can close the debate.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: You are using up your time.

PLP— A GOVERNMENT THAT CONTINUES TO FIGHT TO BUILD A FAIR BERMUDA FOR ALL

Hon. E. David Burt: It’s all right. I can assure you I will not do 20 minutes, [Madam] Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, to commence my remarks today, I want to echo the thanks in the comments that were given by the Honourable Deputy Premier to the staff, not only of this Honourable Chamber, as you know it has been full throttle from Throne Speech to Budget Session, et cetera, all the rest, and also to all of the technical officers who do the work to prepare the briefs, to be here to answer the questions, and to make sure that Ministers are prepared so that the debate can happen. And so, from that perspective, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make sure I echo that thanks.

I am, of course, in the Ministry of Finance taking the budget team out for lunch when the budget director returns. But it certainly is a lot of work. And the challenge which we have for them, as they reminded me with a late budget, is that they have about one month off before the budget cycle for next year begins again. And despite the fact, Mr. Speaker, that we have been, you know, and sometimes you will say, *testy* between myself as the Minister of Finance and the Shadow Minister of Finance, it is my hope that in the future that we can improve the quality of the exchange of which we have. Because I remember the first time I was Shadow Minister, you know, it got better with time and able to make sure that we can develop a better working relationship so that we can actually have the level of debate and examination which is necessary in this Honourable Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to cover a few topics today. As we close out the budget session before we, you know, go back to the rest of the year where we will

be meeting every other week and dealing with other pieces of legislation.

But I will say this from the perspective, Mr. Speaker, that there are some who will get the impression, due to comments which may come from the Honourable Opposition, that the Government believes that everything is perfect. That is not the case. I remember listening to, you know, commentary around that while it says clearly inside of our Budget Statements, inside of our Throne Speech, inside of our public comments, inside of everything else, that we recognise that things are not perfect and we are working to make sure they are better.

And so, the summary of my comments, Mr. Speaker, is that we are not where we want to be yet. But there is no question that we are on the right path, Mr. Speaker. And as we all know, no government is perfect anywhere. No country is without challenges. But I think it is also important that you judge the work that is taking place compared to what is taking place in other jurisdictions, because we do not exist in isolation in Bermuda. We are part of a wider and broader global economy.

And what matters most, Mr. Speaker, of course, is whether or not you are standing still. But under this Government, Mr. Speaker, we are unquestionably making progress. And that progress, Mr. Speaker, does not have to come from myself. That message does not have to come from myself. The Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour gave a brilliant contribution speaking of the items which are taking place. [He] mentioned the fact that those persons who are able-bodied, unemployed on financial assistance are falling. [He] mentioned the fact that he is going to be coming out with statistics next week talking about the reduction in the level of persons who are unemployed in the country, the fact that our ratings continue to be confirmed. The fact that we continue to exceed our expectations. The fact that we are delivering the second consolidated budget fund surplus this year is evidence that we are making progress and moving in the right direction.

And so here is the thing, Mr. Speaker, we know that we are challenged with the cost of living. I think the entire world recognises that. We know it is an issue in the United Kingdom. We know it is an issue in Europe. We know it is an issue in Australia. We know it is an issue in Canada. We know that it is an issue everywhere. It is a question of how do you respond? What does a government do?

And what this Government has done, Mr. Speaker, is that we have taken action. Not with talk but with actual results. Because we know that we have cut taxes for most workers in every local business. And in this session, Mr. Speaker, we have built on that by reducing land taxes, reducing energy taxes, mobile phone taxes, and yes, Mr. Speaker, also customs duty. And we spoke about the combined value of what these will bring, \$1,000 extra for a family this year in addition

to what we have done previously, Mr. Speaker. That means something.

The Honourable Minister responsible for Housing is sitting next to me, the Deputy Premier. Record investments in affordable housing. Progress which is taking place. When speaking about home ownership our Mortgage Guarantee Programme, Mr. Speaker, 70 Bermudians on the way to the housing ladder, 50 of those already in their new homes, others approved for them, Mr. Speaker. That is the record of this Government. That is the progress of which we are putting forward. And we speak to this budget. It is the expansion of health care, investing more in the vulnerable, expanding prescription drug coverage, access to preventative care and expanding home health care options which have been called for inside of the community, Mr. Speaker. That is what this parliamentary session is about. That is the work of which this Government has committed to, Mr. Speaker.

So, these, Mr. Speaker, are not just promises. We have delivered already on the pledges that we made in February, and we will continue to do so throughout this particular session, Mr. Speaker. And this budget is proof that progress is happening. So again, Mr. Speaker, it is not a choice between perfect and imperfect. It is about a government that continues to fight to build a fair Bermuda for all.

And the importance of our time debating here, Mr. Speaker . . . and you can hear me get up often on points of order, because I understand what it is like to be a new Member of the House of Assembly. I was new once. But the reality is that the better and higher quality of debate that we have in this House is the better and higher quality level of decision-making governance that we can give. And it is important and vital that we are there dealing with the facts.

But here is what I will say, Mr. Speaker, we are not done. In this term, as you know, we are just getting started. Moving in the right direction.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right.

Hon. E. David Burt: Now Mr. Speaker, we know that there have been, you know, comments, and I am not going to reflect [on that] because I have a particular point that I wish to tackle today. We are not going to reflect on the conversation, discussions of which have been had. Because I think that we have been able to aptly state the fact that we are not dealing with matters that are across-the-board reductions. We have target items, but we have broader items, and this is wide relief across this country. And this Government has a track record of continually fighting for workers, continually fighting and making investments.

I remember the Honourable Whip got up on the other side, the Opposition Whip got up and was talking about how when he was younger, you know, he was able to mow lawns, and you know pay for university. And I asked a question you know; *Where was that?*

Because here is the thing, Mr. Speaker, Bermudians who cannot afford Bermuda College don't have to pay for it underneath this Government.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: What?

Hon. E. David Burt: It is an issue of upward mobility, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No point of order on that.

Hon. E. David Burt: A pledge that we made. I remember, 2007, I was Chairman of the Party.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh yeah.

Hon. E. David Burt: Made Bermuda College free. And the party opposite removed that.

An Hon. Member: Ah.

Hon. E. David Burt: We put it back in the First 100 Days. And this is around opportunity. This is how you build that opportunity economy that the Opposition spoke about. But we, Mr. Speaker, are actually delivering.

Now we know what we have done in this session. I am not going to cover that again. But there is something that is important. It is important, Mr. Speaker, because oftentimes, and this is the (I call it) *curse* of being a Member of the Bermuda Progressive Labor Party [PLP].

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Hon. E. David Burt: And that is whenever you speak about economics and finance, the automatic assumption is that you do not know what you are talking about, that you cannot be trusted to run the country, that you do not understand the funds. *How dare you state this, how dare you state that. Well, you do not know what you are saying. Why would you mention these things?*

Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that this Government has maintained its ratings, despite the fact that we have beat our targets, despite the fact that, as the Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour has stated, we have the best performing economy in the Americas—North and South American region combined, Mr. Speaker—we are still subjected to, *Oh, they don't know what they are doing.* It happens all the time, Mr. Speaker. And it is not just from Members opposite, Mr. Speaker. It is not just from Members opposite. It is from the public, from the media, from spaces and places, and I am going to quote specific facts.

I am going to call someone who has been a regular detractor. It was Mr. Peter Everson, I thought he disappeared, but he came back all of a sudden,

jumping on the Opposition's bandwagon on a particular point. And this came to my mind because I was in an interview that I did when I stepped out earlier, and I was asked a question. And I reminded people where this particular matter came from, Mr. Speaker.

So, now I am going to get there. Because in our Budget Debate, in our Throne Speech, even, Throne Speech items, things that were laid out, there was one particular mention, Mr. Speaker. And that was the reality that this Government believes that with the advent of corporate income tax, that it is entirely reasonable to expect that we can eliminate our debt and build a sovereign wealth fund within 10 years. Those are the facts.

Now here is what is interesting, Mr. Speaker; the chorus of disapproval was quick and loud. You know why the chorus of disapproval was quick and loud, Mr. Speaker? Because it was David Burt and the PLP saying it. That is the reason why the chorus of disapproval was loud.

But here is the thing, Mr. Speaker, here is the thing. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, when the first mention of a sovereign wealth fund was made?

You cannot answer me, Mr. Speaker, but I am going to share.

The first mention of a sovereign wealth fund for Bermuda did not come from David Burt as Minister of Finance, or the Bermuda Progressive Labor Party, or the Progressive Labor Party Government.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh.

Hon. E. David Burt: It came from a document that was tabled in this Honourable House in December 2023 called the Bermuda Fiscal Responsibility Panel Annual Assessment. From the Fiscal Responsibility Panel, a body that the Opposition loves to quote. A body that they set up. [A body] that we have continued, Mr. Speaker.

I am going to quote from that document, if I could, Mr. Speaker. On page 27 it says: "It would be consistent with reducing net debt to hold at least some additional revenues in a 'stabilisation fund'; this would help insure against the risk of having to borrow at high interest rates on the open market if volatility was such that revenues fell below base budget needs in any year, or if Bermuda were hit by an adverse economic shock. Beyond eliminating net debt, and accumulating liquid assets in the stabilisation fund, in time Bermuda should use excess revenues to build fiscal reserves in the form of a sovereign wealth fund."

Now that was in December 2023, Mr. Speaker. No comments from the media. No comments from Peter Everson. No comments from the Opposition. No comments from . . . No comments from anyone who finds a way to criticise the Progressive Labour Party's management of the economy.

But let the Minister of Finance and the PLP Government put it inside of a Throne Speech and watch the course of criticism erupt. Silence, when it comes to

the Fiscal Responsibility Panel, made up of persons from the United Kingdom, the United States Government and others—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: —coming in to give us advice.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier is misleading the House because he is implying something about our view [of] the Fiscal Responsibility Panel. But of course, this venue is not a place for us to come and present that view. This is where we come to present our view on the Government's plans and policies. So, the Premier is implying our view of various components of the Fiscal Responsibility Panel that we have perhaps not publicly discussed. So, he is basically misinforming people what our view of components of that are.

Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: That's not a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: I tried to follow—

Hon. E. David Burt: May I continue?

The Speaker: Let me follow on and see what it's saying.

Hon. E. David Burt: I got you Mr. Speaker.

So, here is the thing. See, you know you are getting close to it now because he has got it up. I do not need to say what his views of the Fiscal Responsibility Panel are. That is not what I am saying. I am saying this idea first came from the Fiscal Responsibility Panel. That is where it came up. Because governments take on advice. So, when that recommendation came, we said, let us ask our advisors what they think of this recommendation. It is not like I was just sitting in my house one day and saying, *Let's have a sovereign wealth fund!*

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You did not just dream it up.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you! It came from the advisors. The same people who the public says we should be taking advice from.

So, now let us go because the Honourable Member everyone can read what he said about the sovereign wealth fund in his Budget Reply. I am not going to take my time to go over his comments. What I am going to read, Mr. Speaker, is a document from the Ministry of Finance, which came to us in 2024, following

the report of the Fiscal Responsibility Panel combined with the estimate for the revenue that would come from the corporate income tax to advise the Ministry of Finance on the approach of which they should take.

I will read it, and, for your benefit Mr. Speaker, I will table it.

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

Hon. E. David Burt: It says, and I quote: "A growth and stability fund can secure Bermuda's economic future for generations." (It goes on to say.) "Setting up a sovereign wealth fund entails a rigorous process but the tax revenues from Pillar Two can be an unprecedented opportunity for Bermuda to transform its economy and achieve multiple, long-term prosperity. Multiple funds with different objectives can be set up to realise different benefits."

This, Mr. Speaker, is coming from some of the best accounting firms in the world.

So, here is the thing. We get the chorus of criticism from the Opposition. We get the chorus of criticism from the persons in the private sector who will find a way to criticise the PLP. But when the PLP is doing what they say we should do—listening to the experts who clearly know more than us—the criticism comes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am going to go ahead and read what this says. From the accounting firms. "The fund could become one of the largest in the region. In our example the fund may reach \$8.5 billion dollars in assets under management under certain assumptions and under these assumptions become the thirty-third largest in the world. Surpassing the Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago sovereign wealth funds."

Not from me, Mr. Speaker. Not from me. From the Fiscal Responsibility Panel and our accounting firms.

So, I will close by saying this, Mr. Speaker, and it is important that the persons listening understand. There will be many things that are said about the Progressive Labour Party in Government. But the facts are, as we close out this budget session, that we have proven that we can manage this country through a crisis. We have proven that we can manage transition. We have proven that we can deliver relief and make investments in this country. And we have proven that we can listen to advice and make the plans for the future that this country needs.

Mr. Speaker, I will see you in two weeks. Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Members for your contributions today. And we will have a two-week period before we return here. I trust you will all come back well rested for the session of the summer.

With that the House now stands adjourned.

[Gavel]

*[At 5:30 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am
Friday, 13 June 2025.]*