

Ministerial Statement

Presented by

The Premier and Minister of National Security

The Hon. Michael H. Dunkley, JP, MP

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Recent Visits to Chicago and Toronto

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

I am grateful for your indulgence to allow me to make this Statement this afternoon, outside of the normal time for such statements, given that I was unable to be present this morning.

Mr. Speaker,

I have just concluded visits to Chicago and Toronto and am pleased to update this Honourable House on the outcome of those visits.

Firstly, on Wednesday, with the Minister of Tourism Development and Transport, the Director of the Bermuda Tourism Authority, and the General Manager of the L.F. Wade International Airport, we met in Chicago with key executives of United Airlines.

Mr. Speaker

You would be aware that United Airlines serves a major route for us from Newark, New Jersey. That route is of particular interest to us because it serves the business, leisure and resident markets out of one of our major catchment areas. You would also be aware that United Airlines curtailed its winter service, and has now resumed normal service for the summer. The reduction in service has caused us significant concern. The purpose of our visit, therefore, was to demonstrate to United Airlines our keen desire to work with them to ensure that the winter service is not eliminated again.

Mr. Speaker

We certainly appreciate the challenges faced by airlines today. We fully understand that they must utilize their aircraft in a manner that will yield the greatest return. We also understand that the aircraft used to service Bermuda in the winter could perhaps be more profitably used on other routes. Our message to United Airlines was that Bermuda is back in business, and greater things are to come. We spoke of the significant hotel developments that are poised to commence. We spoke of attempts to increase international business in Bermuda. We spoke of the significant impact the America's Cup will have on our economy, bringing teams, their families and their

friends to Bermuda, even before the events themselves attract new visitors. We spoke of the confidence that is brewing around Bermuda as a place for business and leisure.

Mr. Speaker

United Airlines, who cannot make strategic business decisions simply on the plea of a Government team, no matter how passionate and convincing, was most grateful for the data that our team presented in support of our optimism. It is now for United Airlines to consider our case before discussions continue.

I am hopeful that a solution can be found and I anticipate that the Minister of Tourism Development and Transport, my colleague the Hon. Shawn Crockwell, will soon rise in this Honourable Chamber to advise us of our progress.

Mr. Speaker

I must add that we approached our meeting with a degree of concern. You might recall that it was Wednesday that United Airlines was forced to ground their entire fleet as a result of a computer incident. A number of the key executives with whom we were to meet would have been actively involved in addressing this critical and potentially catastrophic failure. To their immense credit, our discussions continued unimpeded, and their flights were able to resume full service in short order.

Not only were we concerned about the meeting, but we were scheduled to fly to Toronto, via United Airlines, immediately following our meeting. I am pleased to say that our flight was not cancelled, and was only one hour delayed.

Mr. Speaker

That flight took us to the second purpose of my travels. I was honoured to have been invited, on behalf of Bermuda, to be a panelist at the International Economic Forum of the Americas-Toronto Global Forum. The focus of our panel was on a shared vision for the Caribbean. This provided an opportunity for me to share with participants the significant impact Bermuda has on the Global Economy. There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that Bermuda punches far above its weight.

Also on the panel were Prime Ministers and Premiers from Grenada, the British Virgin Islands and Aruba. As you would no doubt be aware, we share much in common with our fellow island nations. Clearly, there are factors that distinguish us, and we will be forceful advocates of those distinctions, but we can and must learn from and assist each other. We have a solid record of doing so, and this must continue.

Mr. Speaker

The International Forum of the Americas presented us with an invaluable platform to inform the broader Americas region of our strengths, and of the opportunities that exist in Bermuda. The

brand Bermuda is making a significant presence in not only the International Business sector, but also in the leisure travel sector. As we so well know, both of these sectors work synergistically together.

Through the efforts of our International Business partners, their professional associations, marketing teams, the Bermuda Business Development Agency, the Tourism Authority and the Government, we are reaching out to new markets, particularly in Latin America. So those present would have heard our message that we are open to new business, and are ready to welcome them to our shores, for both work and pleasure.

Mr. Speaker

The Forum was timed to coincide with the opening of the Pan American Games, also held in Toronto. It had been my hope to remain in Toronto to support our athletes as they proudly represent Bermuda.

However, our work here in this Honourable House is not yet done; much important work for the good of this wonderful country remains to be accomplished. So I am here to get on with the people's business.

Nevertheless, with the assistance of the Ministry of Community, Culture and Sport, the Bermuda Olympic Association, and their officials on the ground in Toronto, I was able to *visit* a number of our athletes in the Athletes' Village. Mr. Speaker, it was indeed a pleasure to spend some time with our young competitors, who are so thrilled and keen to represent their island home. Sport is able to elicit national pride in both competitors and the people of a nation in a way like none other. That pride was evident among our athletes. It is contagious, and I encourage all of us to support our athletes as they represent us in Toronto.

Mr. Speaker

Toronto provided another opportunity for me to experience national pride. I was aware that a Bermudian, Tim Terceira, was the General Manager of the Toronto Ritz Carlton. You would know that the Ritz Carlton is one of the foremost luxury hotels in the world, whose level of set service sets the standard for others to emulate. The Toronto Ritz Carlton rates as one of the best of all of the Ritz Carlton properties. That level of performance is directly related to the leadership of Tim Terceira, a Bermudian.

This is not just the boastings of a proud Bermudian. This is the assessment of one who would know, Mr. Bob Kharazmi, the Ritz Carlton Global Officer of Worldwide Operations. Tim was hand selected to open the Toronto property, and as a result of his leadership the hotel has surpassed all expectations in record time. It just so happened that we arrived to meet with him just as the hotel was about to hold a farewell celebration for him, as he has been asked to lead the Ritz Carlton's Boston property. Mr. Speaker, we know that Tim will continue to do outstanding things for the Ritz Carlton group, and we are so proud of him.

Mr. Speaker.

Reflecting on the past few days of meetings, I can say with assurance that Bermuda is roaring back; in business, in tourism, and in sport. While there remains much to be done, let us celebrate who we are as a people, all that we have accomplished, and all that we can and must accomplish, together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.