



**PARLIAMENT**  
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



# **PARLIAMENT OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS**

## **OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**

**First Sitting of the Third Meeting 2022-2023 Session**

**Wednesday**  
**26 April, 2023**  
*(Pages 1-86)*

**Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, MP**  
**Speaker**

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PRESENT WERE:

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP  
*Speaker*

MINISTERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP	<i>Premier, Minister of Sustainability &amp; Climate Resiliency and Finance &amp; Economic Development</i>
Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP	<i>Deputy Premier, Minister of Education and District Administration &amp; Lands</i>
Hon. Bernie A. Bush, MP	Minister of Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, MP	Minister of Tourism & Ports
Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP	Minister of Financial Services & Commerce and Investment, Innovation & Social Development
Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, MP	Minister of Health & Wellness and Home Affairs
Hon. Johany S. "Jay" Ebanks, MP	Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing & Infrastructure
Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP	Minister of Border Control & Labour

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. Franz I. Manderson, MBE, Cert Hon, JP	<i>Deputy Governor, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of the Civil Service</i>
Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin, KC, JP	<i>Attorney General, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of Legal Affairs</i>

ELECTED MEMBERS  
GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS

Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP	Parliamentary Secretary to Tourism and Social Development, Elected Member for Savannah
Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, JP, MP	<i>Deputy Speaker, Parliamentary Secretary to Home Affairs and Planning, Agriculture &amp; Infrastructure, Elected Member for East End</i>
Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, JP, MP	Elected Member for West Bay West

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP	<i>Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town East</i>
Mr. Joseph X. Hew, MP	<i>Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North</i>
Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin, KCMG, MBE, KC, JP, MP	Elected Member for Red Bay
Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, JP, MP	Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, NP, MP	Elected Member for George Town South
Mr. David C. Wight, JP, MP	Elected Member for George Town West

INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION MEMBER

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town West
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**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**  
**THIRD MEETING OF THE 2022/23 SESSION**  
**WEDNESDAY**  
**26 APRIL, 2023**  
**10:28 AM**  
*First Sitting*

*[Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Speaker, presiding]*

**The Speaker:** Good morning. We will be graced with prayers this morning by the Honourable Deputy Premier.

**PRAYERS**

**Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and District Administration & Lands, Elected Member for Cayman Brac East:** Let us pray.

*Almighty God, from whom all wisdom and power are derived: We beseech Thee so to direct and prosper the deliberations of the Parliament now assembled, that all things may be ordered upon the best and surest foundations for the glory of Thy Name and for the safety, honour and welfare of the people of these Islands.*

*Bless our Sovereign, King Charles III; William, Prince of Wales; and all the Royal Family. Give grace to all who exercise authority in our Commonwealth, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety may be established among us. Especially we pray for the Governor of our Islands, the Premier, the Speaker of the Parliament; the Leader of the Opposition, Ministers of the Cabinet, ex officio Members, Members of the Parliament, the Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary that we may be enabled faithfully to perform the responsible duties of our high office. All this we ask for Thy great Name's sake.*

Let us say The Lord's Prayer together: *Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

*The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon us and give us peace, now and always. Amen.*

**The Speaker:** Please be seated. Proceedings are now resumed.

**ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS  
OR AFFIRMATIONS**

**The Speaker:** None.

**READING BY THE HONOURABLE  
SPEAKER OF MESSAGES AND  
ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**The Speaker:** None.

**PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS**

**The Speaker:** None.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS  
AND OF REPORTS**

**CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC  
POLICY STATEMENT 2024 - 2026**

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton, Minister of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency and Finance & Economic Development, Elected Member for Newlands:** Thank you, Madam Speaker and good morning to all colleagues.

Madam Speaker, I, on behalf of the Government, beg to lay on the Table of this honourable House the Strategic Policy Statement (SPS) for the 2024-2026 financial years, with your permission.

**The Speaker:** Please proceed.

Will the Honourable Premier like to speak thereto?

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Government's 2024-2026 SPS outlines the Government's fiscal plans, its policies, and broad priorities and outcomes for the next three years, for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2024, to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2026. This SPS will also guide the development of the detailed budget for the next budget period, which will cover the years 2024 and 2025. That budget, Madam Speaker, will be brought to this honourable House in the latter part of this year.

Madam Speaker, this SPS is the second produced by this Administration and it accords with the

principles of responsible financial management and the terms of the framework of fiscal responsibility. In both cases, Madam Speaker, we refer to those initial principles as “the Principles” and the Framework for Fiscal Responsibility as the “FFR provisions”, both as set out in the Public Management and Finance Law (2020 Revision).

Madam Speaker, the SPS also reflects this Government’s continued commitment to fiscal prudence while creating an environment for economic growth and PACT governance. Madam Speaker, governance from our perspective remains people driven, accountable, competent and transparent.

Madam Speaker, this SPS is built on this Government’s policies, initiatives and priorities that are for the benefit of our people and the improvement of their quality of life.

Madam Speaker, the PACT (People-driven, Accountable, Competent and Transparent) Government during its mid-term evaluation has refocused its efforts into five succinct and impactful broad outcomes. Over the next two years, this Government will direct its efforts to:

1. improving quality of life;
2. enhancing competitiveness while meeting international standards;
3. future proofing;
4. modernising Government; and
5. protecting and promoting Caymanian culture, heritage and identity.

Madam Speaker, over the next three financial years, the Economics and Statistics Office [ESO] has advised that rising global uncertainties such as geopolitical tensions—which we are all familiar with—and continued fears of a looming recession underpin the forecast for tempered growth over the medium term. Accordingly, growth over the SPS period is forecast to be 1.6 per cent in 2024 and an average of 2.1 per cent for both 2025 and 2026.

Growth in the domestic economy is expected to remain strong at around 2.3 per cent for 2023. Madam Speaker, the Government’s policy to prioritise the integration of Caymanians into the workforce, and enhancing training and mentorship should result in an unemployment rate of 2.2 per cent in 2023, and an expected average of 2.5 per cent annually between 2024 and 2026.

Madam Speaker, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) which measures the change in retail prices is expected to increase by 5.2 per cent in 2023; by 2.5 per cent in 2024, and 2.4 per cent in 2025, followed by 2 per cent in 2026. Thus, Madam Speaker, this reflects a declining impact of inflation over that period.

Madam Speaker, the Government remains committed to maintaining fiscal prudence and expects to be in full compliance with the Principles and the FFR throughout the SPS period of 2024-2026.

Madam Speaker, I will now highlight the financial forecasts that are contained in the SPS document which I just Tabled.

Madam Speaker, this SPS firstly, does not contain any new fees or taxes levied on the general public nor on business entities. Growth in revenue is in line with expected growth in the world economy.

Madam Speaker, Government’s total operating revenue for the SPS forecast period of 2024-2026 is forecast to be \$3.3 billion which is broken down over that period as follows: \$1.06 billion in 2024, \$1.09 billion in 2025, and \$1.12 billion in 2026. The individual significant revenue categories are: Other Import Duty which is forecast to be \$594.7 million over the period; Other Company Fees which is forecast to be \$393.8 million over the forecast period; Partnership Fees are forecast to be \$229.1 million over the forecast period; Stamp Duty on property transfers \$202.6 million over the forecast period; Private Fund Fees \$201.6 million over the forecast period; Mutual Fund Administrators Licence Fees \$166.4 million over the forecast period, and Tourist Accommodation Charges of \$136.4 million over that period, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Government’s total operating expenditure for the SPS forecast period is projected to be \$3 billion allocated across the period as follows: in 2024 \$982.9 million, in 2025 \$990.9 million, and in 2026 \$1.02 billion.

Madam Speaker, operating expenditures are expected to increase modestly to fund a number of new government initiatives in improving education, maintaining our market share in tourism, funding tertiary health care at local and overseas institutions, commencing full operations of the long-term mental health facility which is now called “The Poinciana”; and to start the operations of the Integrated Solid Waste Management or ReGen Facility probably around mid-2026, amongst others Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, over the next three financial years the Government would be committed to \$300 million in planned capital investments and capital expenditures. Capital investments into Ministries of that amount [\$300 million] along with SAGCs [Statutory Authorities and Government-Owned Companies] would include the continued investment in border control, maritime patrol and public safety; continued remediation of the George Town landfill, continued upgrade and expansion of the road infrastructure; development of a new Layman E. Scott High School in Cayman Brac, expansion and upgrades of various educational facilities throughout Grand Cayman; and investment in a new public transportation service.

Madam Speaker, additionally, the planned capital investments in relation to the SAGCs would include investments in Cayman Airways, Cayman Islands Airport Authority, Cayman Islands Development Bank, Cayman Islands National Museum, Cayman National Cultural Foundation, Cayman Turtle Conservation and Education Centre; the National Gallery of the

Cayman Islands, the National Housing Development Trust, Tourism Attractions Board, University College of the Cayman Islands, and the National Roads Authority.

Madam Speaker, during the SPS period, the Government does not intend to incur any new borrowings other than finalising the agreement in relation to the design-build, finance and operations of the proposed ReGen facility.

The Government expects to make principal debt repayments of approximately \$215.7 million over the SPS period. At 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2026, it is forecast that Core Government will have a debt balance of \$641.5 million. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the Government plans to introduce a debt sinking fund in 2023 to set aside an amount in the fund each year to enable a lump sum payment of \$75 million in 2026 towards the repayment of the construction cost of the proposed ReGen facility with the objective—obviously, Madam Speaker—of saving on interest cost over the longer period of the lifespan of that project.

Madam Speaker, the Government plans to contribute the following amounts to the debt sinking fund during the next four years: \$20 million in 2023, \$25 million in 2024, \$15 million in 2025 and \$15 million in 2026, for a total of \$75 million.

Madam Speaker, the Government is committed to maintaining full compliance with the Principles throughout the SPS period. The Act requires that the Government maintains a positive operating surplus and throughout the SPS period, the Government is projected to remain in compliance with the requirements to maintain a positive operating surplus. The operating surplus, the surplus of the Core Government, is projected to be \$77.4 million in 2024, \$98.2 million in 2025 and \$103.2 million in 2026.

Madam Speaker, that requires that the Government maintains a positive net worth as well. The Government is forecasting to maintain a positive net worth throughout the SPS period. Net worth, Madam Speaker, is forecast to be as follows: \$2.1 billion at the end of 2024, \$2.2 billion at the end of 2025 and \$2.3 billion at the end of 2026.

Madam Speaker, it's also a requirement of the Act that the entire public sector debt-servicing costs which consists of both interest payments and principal repayments measured annually, do not exceed 10 per cent of Core Government's revenues at that point.

Madam Speaker, the Government is forecast to remain compliant throughout the SPS forecast period with a debt servicing ratio for each of those years as follows: 9.5 per cent in 2024, 8.2 per cent in 2025 and 9.9 per cent in 2026.

Madam Speaker, there is also a requirement that the Government's net debt should not exceed 80 per cent of Government's operating revenues. Madam Speaker, net debt is calculated as the total amount of outstanding Core Government debt plus the risk weighted debt of statutory authorities and government companies less the liquid assets of Government.

For the SPS period, Madam Speaker, net debt is projected to remain well below this limit, achieving full compliance with the required net debt ratio of not exceeding 80 per cent of Government's operating revenue. The forecast Madam Speaker, for each of the years over the SPS period is 24.3 per cent in 2024, 36.8 per cent in 2025 and 70 per cent in 2026.

Madam Speaker, the Government is also required to have liquid cash reserves of not less than 90 days of estimated executive expenses. That is, the Government's unrestricted cash balances must cover a minimum of 90 days of its day-to-day expenses. Capital expenditures and capital investments are not included in this calculation and this is in accordance with the FFR provisions.

Madam Speaker, the cash reserves ratio is calculated at the point in a financial year when Government's liquid cash reserves are expected to be at their lowest point and that would typically be the 31<sup>st</sup> December of each year.

Thus, Madam Speaker, over the SPS period, unrestricted cash reserves are expected to be as follows measured in days: 117.6 days of executive expenses in 2024, 101 days of executive expenses in 2025 and 90.1 days of executive expenses in 2026.

Madam Speaker, our people are at the heart of everything that we do and the policies set out in the SPS document align with and reflect that sentiment and commitment. We are driven by a people-first agenda underpinned by prudent and responsible fiscal management. The financial targets set out in this SPS, Madam Speaker, allow for funding of key policy initiatives including improving and strengthening education programmes from early childhood to tertiary level, expanding and modernising healthcare and wellness; increasing the safety and security of our citizens, investing in upgrades to our infrastructure which would include roads—obviously, Madam Speaker—supporting the financial services, tourism and other emerging industry sectors; and investments in sustainable development.

Madam Speaker, we reaffirm our pledge to the people of the Cayman Islands to improve the quality of life for all, to support our jurisdiction's legally compliant, competitive edge in the global market across all sectors and to strategically position the Islands for future prosperity; to improve public services and to preserve our rich Caymanian culture, history and identity.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

*[Desk thumping]*

## **QUESTIONS TO HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET**

**The Speaker:** None.

## STATEMENTS BY HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

**The Speaker:** None.

### PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

**The Speaker:** I have given leave to the elected Member for West Bay West to give a personal explanation.

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, Elected Member for West Bay West:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I rise to make some personal explanations on a matter that was put in the public domain by the Leader of the Opposition and I think warrants me standing on my feet in this House to reply, since it pertains the work of this honourable House and one of its most important committees, that is the Standing Public Accounts Committee.

Madam Speaker, I am old enough and have given enough credible service for more than half of my life for the betterment of the people of these Islands and so Madam Speaker, I have learned not to respond to non-credible people, but I do so now in defence of myself, not because I see credibility from whence the criticism cometh, but because some matters warrants my response.

Madam Speaker, I have served several times on the PAC of this honourable House and this country has benefited from our work. In my time of being a member of the PAC, I even had the privilege to understand that when government gives an accounting firm a contract for them to perform, and that confidential document that is done is given out to a political group and they use it and the responsible person is elected, that political machination is an abuse of public funds. I have learned that— not hear much about it.

However, I'm old enough too, and know that the old makeup of this country has not entirely gone away. That is, that there are still those privileged or those who feel they are that privileged, that no matter what they do and have done, they don't get before the police and I am not part of that club. I am not from that side of the street, that they will hide anything for McKeeva Bush.

In the matter of treatment of women: I certainly beat no woman and the video showed that it was I who was shoved down and beaten by two— not one, two; and I say now, as I have pleaded not guilty in the present matter because it is not the way that this political-driven matter is made up to be. That's where it is at. So a court will decide, and all the political shenanigans and those involved, I am praying, all will come to light and we can see who is what, in regards to my treatment of women. Is he some angel? I don't see no little white in him.

Let me remind this House, the first woman who was elected as Speaker was done under my watch and then she became Deputy Premier, my deputy Premier.

I established the Ministry of Women's Affairs. I was the first Minister to see and to be responsible for the subject of Women Affairs. I caused to be appointed our First Speaker of the Assembly who was a woman; in later years, I made her a National Hero.

I set up a steering committee to guide the establishment of a Woman's Affairs Office. I obtained office space for the Women's Resource Centre as a place of public education and information.

I sent my Permanent Secretary, a woman, and she's in this House today in the gallery, Miss Lucille Seymour. I sent her as my Permanent Secretary to China to a United Nations Conference to find ways to address women's issues. We held monthly public education seminar starting July 1996, based upon the Beijing platform for action for women that Miss Seymour pushed and brought back to this country. We started work on a programme for elimination of domestic violence— although they believe it's only for women is for men and women.

We initiated a policy to pay a pension to former employees or their surviving spouse, men and women, but mostly of the women of the public service who had served for at least four years and most of them were women teachers who weren't getting anything.

We made specific benefits for women in the Labour Law, something that the masters and servants law was so much against— and we know who were the masters and servants in this country. In this George Town! We know; but I had that fight and I took it on, and the women are better off today in this country because of what I did when I sat in that seat over there as a Private Member, and it could only get put in place in 1992 when I became the Minister of Labour. Well, '92. Health and Human Resources, everything under the sun that five and four Ministers got today, I had to deal with it.

The last Speaker appointed by the party I led was a woman. She's in the gallery today too, Mrs. Mary Lawrence, JP.

In making the order of national heroes, I made the Honourable Mrs. Joyce Hylton and Honourable Miss Evelyn Wood, National Heroes. In making our national award, something that some people fought against; many women were the first awardees! And personally oh, they try to make the world believe that McKeeva is rich. Oh yeah? They should come see my overdraft, my mortgage and my other loans, but I have personally assisted women of all walks of life in various and productive ways.

Madam Speaker, I have been married 47 years to one woman. I have never abused my spouse, nor my only daughter who has passed away. Many cannot say that. Many got flogged with a horse whip. They should say why they got flogged with it.

It is a truism, Madam Speaker that people who live in glass houses shouldn't pelt stones. I am a duly

elected Member of this House. The Father of this House, as parliamentary protocols, practice and precedents are observed. More so, Madam Speaker, what of the victim, what of the fundamental legal principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty? Only in this country is not so! Only here that you must leave your seat, your family be derided. You be torn down! Only here. For political machinations, Madam Speaker.

I am duly elected, and I have never shunned my duty to serve when I am called; however, on this appointment to the PACT I thought hard about it because I didn't think I wanted to serve with an incapable Chair and I said I wouldn't, but that would go against everything I stand for. I am a servant of the people. If I'm called, I serve.

I was called to be Speaker with an Opposition party, I accepted. I was also called to be Speaker with this group, and thereby help form the Government, although I felt I was not wanted by some on either side; no big thing. They needed McKeeva, so they called, and McKeeva is a servant leader and for that reason and that reason alone, I still took up the position as an independent Member. Clearly, those politically motivated will always see something that they believe they can capitalise upon, and so the attack was back on. They nominated and they nominated and they nominated again and lost.

Madam Speaker, I was elected to serve, and over the years that is what I have done with dedication and pride. I have stolen nothing, and their corruption scandal was shown for what it was— lies! Because I was not the only one who used the credit card. They were used by every cat and dog that had one, personally, and paid back and that was the policy. That wasn't good enough, Madam Speaker. McKeeva has to go court and prove himself. That's okay. That's okay. Those things was only a big hullabaloo that could be made up at the polls to get McKeeva out.

The Member casting aspersions should be advised that I will face the courts and there a decision will be made, but because they can't beat me at the polls, the effort is to discredit me whichever way they can get— exaggerations and lies of people I have helped all my life; lies, exaggerations. There I will prove my innocence. They will see as you saw in the video that you will not accept, because you've got nothing else.

When there are thousands of issues for this country, you bring three Motions. Thousands of issues, and you get out there to lambast a decision made by this honourable House, and as far as I am concerned, discredits the House and pushes matters that he has no knowledge about. That the House is supporting some kind of criminality or such awful findings, that no other Member has ever done or been accused of. Oh, yeah? Which world is he living in? Which one?! Or any Member of this House? Which one? Tell me.

I will go, I will prove my innocence, Madam Speaker. I will face the courts and a decision will be

made, and contrary to the Member's biased declarations, I want to put a challenge to find anyone who was elected who did more for this country than McKeeva Bush; and more so, to ensure young women be afforded all available opportunities to acquire a good education in areas where they were failing before.

You know what they have done with the nation building, which was for the poor people in this country? Oh, they went to great lengths to find out who was stealing and who was doing this, and people who were there were getting something, they were getting something.

Madam Speaker, my appointment to the PAC is legitimate and appropriate, and goes with my experience and knowledge of the workings of government and of this honourable House. The House did nothing wrong. The Government did no more than what their government did. I am not a Member of the PACT. I am an independent Member. The Premier said that.

I sit on this side because what's the use, Madam Speaker, to go over and fight for what? So ten, eleven people can kill me? Am I that fool-fool? I see some things that I want and I mention now: I want a High School in West Bay; I hear the pronouncement made about one in Cayman Brac which I am going to support; but I hope they prepared to support my High School Motion for West Bay, so I have to stay here, right here. Right here.

Madam Speaker, as I said, I'm old enough and been here long enough to ignore persons who have no credibility in anything, but bringing a Motion that he himself voted against— can you imagine? Second a Motion and voting against it? And I must follow and be part of that? Not today, BoBo.

So... let them come, they have enough issues to talk about. Leave the things that are before the court, before the court. Let the court prove it. Let those who make those kinds of accusations and exaggerations, let the videos prove otherwise. Let it prove otherwise. He should be ashamed of himself.

As I said, I have been married 47 years and I have not abused anybody— and my wife never beat me with a horsewhip.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

## **OBITUARY AND OTHER CEREMONIAL SPEECHES**

***Passing of Kieron Watler; Mr. Rudolph Powery; Mr. Frank Conolly; Marquis McLaughlin; Matthew McLaughlin; Daniel McFarlane; Kenworth Connor; Sybil Harris-Jackson; Gene Thompson; Jeffrey Wood; Janis McLaughlin; Rena Alexander; and William Watler***

**The Speaker:** Members, I would like to just speak briefly on the untimely passing of our former Youth Parliamentarian who died suddenly yesterday, Mr. Kieron Watler.

Mr. Kieron served the Cayman Islands Youth Parliament for two years in the seventh session in 2014 and again in the eighth session in 2015. In both of these sessions, Kieron was the Serjeant-at-Arms; and so I felt that it would have been remiss of me not to pause today to offer condolences on behalf of the Parliament, the Clerk who has worked closely with the young people from Youth Parliament, and the former Chair of the Youth Parliament Committee. I would like to take this time to offer condolences to Kieron's mother, Ms. Jessie and his father, Mr. Kurt. May his soul rest in peace.

I am not sure if any other Members would wish to speak on Kieron. I have one more obituary that I would like to raise, but maybe we could just keep it with individuals. Does anyone else want to speak in relation to Mr. Water?

The Member for George Town Central.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Minister of Tourism & Ports, Elected Member for George Town Central:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

On behalf of the PACT Administration I just want to give our sympathies to the family as well. As a Member of the Government in George Town, I know the father of the deceased personally and on behalf of myself and my family, my prayers are with them on this untimely passing, but more importantly, on behalf of the whole Government, our prayers are with the family.

**The Speaker:** Member for West Bay West.

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Madam Speaker, thank you for raising our attention to the death of that young man, unfortunately.

In our district, Madam Speaker, you would know, as with other Members of West Bay, that we have lost several very upstanding citizens in our community in the last several months. However, I want to make mention of this last death of Mr. Rudolph Powery who was a dedicated environmentalists—but he was a sensible environmentalists. Rudy was also a great ambassador for this country in the tourism sector and in the public transport operations of the country.

As [a former] Minister of Tourism, I know how many letters and emails we used to receive about how he operated when dealing with people in the tourism sector; how informative he was, as a gentleman, how well he took care of his passengers. He passed away, to me, suddenly, and so I want to place on record our condolences to Mrs. Elvia his wife and their children, some of whom are public servants working for the government and doing a good job.

Our district has lost an outstanding citizen; a man who we could trust to be a Justice of the Peace in and for the Cayman Islands.

**The Speaker:** Member for George Town South.

**Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Elected Member for George Town South:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I, too, would like to rise and offer my condolences and that of the Official Opposition to the family of Kieron. I went to visit them yesterday—his grandmother and his father—and they were all very devastated by the shocking news of his tragic death; and his mother actually resides in the district of George Town West. Therefore, on behalf of all of us out here, the Official Opposition, I would like to extend sincere and heartfelt condolences to all of Kieron's family.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The Member for East End.

**Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, Deputy Speaker, Elected Member for East End:** Madam Speaker, thank you.

I, too, rise and I'd like to make mention of a significant number of deaths that we've had in our own community of East End.

Over a short period of time, we've had some stalwarts like Mr. Frank Conolly, Mr. Marquis McLaughlin, Mr. [William] Randal Rankine, Mathew McLaughlin, Daniel McFarlane, Kenworth Connor and Ms. Sybil Harris-Jackson; all stalwart members of our community.

Our community is in mourning because I can't even remember going through a period like this. They say that the only certainty we have is death but the uncertainty is when. Certainly, the when is what has caught us by surprise over the last two months.

Madam Speaker, I want to publicly take this opportunity to offer condolences to all those families on behalf of myself, but also on behalf of the Government, and I am sure the Opposition wouldn't mind me saying the rest of the House as well, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Thank you, Member for West Bay West for raising Mr. Rudolph Powery, affectionately known to me as Uncle Rudolf. My grandparents lived just down the street from him, and it's certainly a great loss in the district of West Bay. There has also been lots of other deaths in the district and as the Member for East End said, throughout all the districts.

I also just want to publicly offer again, condolences to the family of the late Gene Thompson who has made significant contributions to the advancement of health care in the Cayman Islands. As we all know, the establishment of Health City and more recently the facility that just opened in March—again [we] offer condolences to his family.

I recognise the Member for Bodden Town East.

**Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, Minister of Border Control & Labour, Elected Member for Bodden Town East:** Good morning and thank you, Madam Speaker.



I thought I should rise and say a few words. There's a wave of sadness in this country and I wanted to mention by name the family of Kurt Watler who is a friend of mine. I know him well—he worked at the airport for many, many years, met at Rum Point for boating many times—and also the family of Jeffrey Woods who passed away suddenly, Bodden Towners, and a great family in faith. I want to send them some words of comfort.

Also my good friend Gene Thompson, and the family of Rudolph "Rudy" Powery who was also friends of ours and all the other families in mourning. My public condolences from the Bodden Town East community. Yes, Madam Speaker, also the family of Janis McLaughlin who passed away suddenly also. May their families be comforted.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Premier.

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I just wanted to rise to join with all of the Members who have expressed condolences to the families of those of our people who are going through grief at this time. It is certainly a pain that too many of us know have experienced first-hand.

Madam Speaker, I thought I would rise as well to express condolences to the family of one of my constituents who has recently passed and that is Mr. William Watler, more affectionately known as Bill sometimes Billy; he passed on 9<sup>th</sup> April.

Madam Speaker, I want to join in confirming and sort of restating publicly, condolences to his family and to his wife, Ms. Derry [Ms. Darene] and to his two lovely daughters Danette and Kristen. He was a well-known man, served his country and worked at the airport. I think he worked for our national airline for a long time so he certainly has served this country well. He was also the son, importantly, of Mr. Desmond Watler, one of our national heroes. Therefore, I think it's appropriate certainly to make note of that.

Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Elected Member for Savannah.

**Ms. Heather D. Bodden, Elected Member for Savannah:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just rise to send and offer up heartfelt condolences from my people of Savannah and the people of Newlands, on behalf of the late Ms. Rena Alexander who was 106 years old. She passed away just a few days ago and I send our heartfelt condolences to her family.

Also to the family of Jeffrey Woods; Jeffrey was a dear, dear friend and he left us a little bit too soon. All those who have passed recently, heartfelt condolences [to the families] from my people and myself.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

## RAISING OF MATTERS OF PRIVILEGES

**The Speaker:** None.

## GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

### MOTIONS

#### GOVERNMENT MOTION NO. 4 OF 2022-2023 THE STRATEGIC POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE 2024-2026 FINANCIAL YEARS

**The Speaker:** Honourable Premier.

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move Government Motion No. 4 of 2022-2023 which is captioned "The Strategic Policy Statement for the 2024-2026 Financial Years". With your permission, Madam Speaker, I will read the Motion.

**WHEREAS section 23(1) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) states: that the Strategic Policy Statement for the next budget period shall be presented to the Parliament by a Member of the Cabinet appointed by the Cabinet to do so on behalf of the Cabinet not later than 1<sup>st</sup> May immediately prior to each budget period, for approval within two months;**

**AND WHEREAS the next budget period is with respect to the 2024 and 2025 Financial Years;**

**AND WHEREAS the Strategic Policy Statement Tabled during this April 2023 Meeting of the Parliament satisfies the legal requirement to encompass a 3-year timeframe and, presently this timeframe involves the 2024-2026 Financial Years; and**

**BE IT NOW RESOLVED THAT the Parliament approves the policy priorities, aggregate financial targets and financial allocations set out in the 2024-2026 Strategic Policy Statement as the indicative parameters on which the 2024 and 2025 Budgets will be formulated.**

Madam Speaker, I will await your invitation to speak further to the Motion. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Yes sir. The Motion has been moved and is now open for debate.

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, thank you.

Madam Speaker, this Motion seeks the approval of this honourable Parliament for the Government's 2024-2026 Strategic Policy Statement (SPS) which indicates the Government's key policy priorities

and Broad Outcomes. It also provides the Government's financial targets for the next three financial years: 2024, 2025 and 2026. These financial targets, Madam Speaker, will form the foundation on which the full-year budgets for the period 2024 and 2025 will be developed.

The SPS, Madam Speaker, has been prepared in full accordance with the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) and it is in compliance with the Framework for Fiscal Responsibility that was agreed with the United Kingdom government in 2011.

Madam Speaker, the SPS is a high-level document and its main objective is to enlighten the general public and business entities of the broad budgetary policies that the Government will consider when preparing its detailed 2024 and 2025 budgets. The SPS does not provide the same level of detail of course, as that found in annual budget documents or the two-year period budget documents; and the SPS will be utilised as a medium-term planning tool in contrast with the annual budget documents which contain extensive detail as we know.

Madam Speaker, in summary, the Government seeks to achieve the following Broad Outcomes with its financial interventions:

- Broad Outcome 1: Improve Quality of Life for Caymanians
- Broad Outcome 2: Enhance Competitiveness while Meeting International Standards
- Broad Outcome 3: Future-Proof to Increase Resiliency
- Broad Outcome 4: Modernise Government to Improve Public Sector Performance
- Broad Outcome 5: Protect and Promote Caymanian Culture, Heritage and Identity

Madam Speaker, serving as an elected representative of the people is a privilege; it is not a right. It is about service and it's about making the lives of our people better. When we chose to form a government, we agreed to hold ourselves to four overriding principles. Those were to be people-driven, accountable, competent and transparent.

Today, we stand before this honourable House with a growing economy, a budget surplus and ushering in an economy that has created thousands of jobs and opportunities for our people. Now this document shows that it is incumbent upon us to manage this growth.

We are called to be responsible with the people's money; we are called to reject imprudence, but we are also called to deliver real results that improve transportation in our society, address the cost of living challenges, improve education, take care of our seniors, provide better and more affordable healthcare, and build the necessary infrastructure that will build a healthier, more sustainable country. We are here to responsibly improve the quality of life for this and future generations of Caymanians.

The Strategic Policy Statement outlines our intended approach over the next budget period to do just that—responsibly improve the quality of life for this and future generations of Caymanians. Our vision is to be renowned as *one of the most sustainable countries in the world: a peaceful, prosperous place where everyone can thrive and live their best life.*

By most measures, the Cayman Islands remain one of the most attractive places to work, live, invest and visit. Our economic growth as measured by GDP was 3.7 per cent in 2022 and 4.0 per cent in 2021, and in the difficult year that was 2020 the economy contracted by 5.1 per cent.

Madam Speaker, our economy has created more than 8,900 jobs relative to the pre-pandemic period of 2019. When compared to the low of 2020, the economy has added over 14,700 jobs. The unemployment rate for Caymanians is at a record low of 3.6 per cent—when last measured. Our real GDP per capita in 2022 was estimated at US\$70,790; higher than the United States and many other advanced economies.

Therefore, while Madam Speaker, our economic success is clear, what's important to remember as former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair once said, **“Real progress cannot be measured by money alone. We must ensure that economic growth contributes to our quality of life, rather than degrading it.”**

Madam Speaker, we can measure success by many metrics but one of our objectives in this Government was to use a balanced approach to measure success, to ensure our success is in fact, making the lives of our citizens better and to find ways to measure that quality of life that Tony Blair was talking about.

Madam Speaker, it's clear since taking Office in 2021 that this Government sought to do things a bit differently. First and foremost, we put the most important aspect of our country, our people, at the epicentre of all that we do. I used the word “epicentre” intentionally here Madam Speaker. It is not sufficient to say that we put people first, instead, all that we do and all that we strive for, emanates from the needs and wishes of our people. They are at the heart of every Broad Outcome, every specific outcome and every project.

Madam Speaker, if what we are doing doesn't benefit, support, encourage, enrich, educate and empower our people, there's no point or purpose to it. The five new Broad Outcomes present our overarching aims for the future of our Islands.

Drawing directly from our vision for and commitment to the Cayman Islands, I will highlight again those [Broad] Outcomes:

- Broad Outcome 1: Improve Quality of Life for Caymanians
- Broad Outcome 2: Enhance Competitiveness while Meeting International Standards
- Broad Outcome 3: Future-Proof to Increase Resiliency

- Broad Outcome 4: Modernise Government to Improve Public Sector Performance
- Broad Outcome 5: Protect and Promote Caymanian Culture, Heritage and Identity

Madam Speaker, these outcomes encompass all aspects of life and living in the Islands from enhancing the basic elements of the human condition including housing, health and education; to maintaining our main industries' relevance in the global arena; developing as a jurisdiction structured for future growth and sustainability; maintaining a stable, efficient and transparent government; and championing the vital importance of retaining our Caymanian culture, heritage and identity.

Madam Speaker, it is important to clarify that the previous 10 Broad Outcomes which were set out in this Government's first SPS introduced in 2021 are still vitally important and have been retained as specific outcomes under the umbrella of the five new Broad Outcomes.

Madam Speaker, in taking a more holistic approach by communicating our desired outcomes more clearly, we hope that everyone in the Cayman Islands will better understand what the Government is trying to achieve on their behalf. This includes civil servants charged with planning, managing and delivering the Government's agenda; the customers who utilise and rely on our services, and most importantly, Madam Speaker, our people, as the ultimate intended beneficiaries of our policies, priorities and projects.

We are focusing on key areas that will make the most positive impact to the lives of Caymanians and ultimately build a stronger and more resilient economy. Madam Speaker, we have balanced our priority spending with the country's requirement to maintain fiscal responsibility. Indeed, our policies over the first half of this Administration have seen an adherence to fiscal prudence, to the principles of responsible financial management and compliance with the Framework for Fiscal Responsibility as set out in the PMFA.

However, Madam Speaker, as important as fiscal responsibility is, it is not the only reason why we are here. Beyond dollars and cents, Madam Speaker, lie the heartbeats and souls relying on us, their Government, to craft and put into practice policies and programmes that will ensure future prosperity and growth.

Madam Speaker, we are first and foremost in these seats of responsibility as the Government through the mandate of the people of these Islands, our Caymanian people, Madam Speaker. We are here to serve them, we are here to further their hopes, dreams and wishes; and to build, not only for today but also for tomorrow. This mid-term SPS, Madam Speaker, is this PACT Government's plan to address the country's immediate economic, social and environmental needs, and to position its people for a thriving and sustainable strong future, Madam Speaker.

To provide the public with a clearer understanding of the terms used in the SPS. I would like to provide a few definitions:

- A "Broad Outcome" is a state, condition or set of circumstances which the Government sets out to realise and achieve.
- A "specific outcome" is a measurable or observable objective, state, condition; set of circumstances or results which are necessary or beneficial to achieving the Broad Outcomes.

Also for greater clarity and understanding Madam Speaker, I would like to give some more details in relation to these five Broad Outcomes that we have set out in this 2024-2026 SPS. I would like to demonstrate what each one represents, why it matters, and how it benefits the people of the Cayman Islands.

### **Broad Outcome 1 Improve Quality of Life for Caymanians**

Madam Speaker, under the umbrella of improving quality of life, this PACT Administration's first commitment, as noted, is to being people-driven, which means that our people are at the heart of everything we do; whatever we do, our policies and initiatives must be for the benefit of our people.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Apologies, Madam Speaker.

Quality of life is defined by the World Health Organisation as, "**an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns.**" Aspects of a person's quality of life include wealth, employment, the environment, health, education, religious beliefs, safety, and more.

In the context of improving quality of life as a Broad Outcome, some of the specific outcomes include nation building initiatives, sustainability discussions, and socio-economic policies that demonstrate observable improvements in terms of: physical and mental health, access to housing, education, transport and mobility, employment or occupation; the natural and built environment; recreation and leisure time, social belonging; individual, household, or community assets; and safety, security and freedom—to close our very important improvements.

Madam Speaker, quality of life is an important indicator for any society as it indicates the overall happiness, health and wellness of a given population. It requires a balanced approach of both qualitative and quantitative factors which impact those living in a society. This allows us to pinpoint areas for improvement.

One current topical example, Madam Speaker, would be rush hour traffic congestion; that's a present day, local example of why improving quality of life is important.

Madam Speaker, yes, Caymanians are relatively well-off in most cases—not all, clearly—but there are enough to afford to buy a car, there is low unemployment, there is economic growth indicated by GDP. These are all indicators of a strong and growing economy. However, Madam Speaker, being able to afford a car to improve the overall quality of life, if they have to sit in that car for several hours each day, travelling to and from work, defeats the purpose.

Thus, there are several factors at play when evaluating quality of life. Therefore, a holistic approach is required that takes all aspects of living into account and the strategic deployment of Government's resources is needed if we are to make real and meaningful changes. The specific outcomes and priority projects in this key area represent this PACT Government's commitment to improving the quality of life of our people.

Madam Speaker, one of the key specific outcomes in achieving an improved quality of life is also in the area of employment where our objective is increasing social justice in the workforce.

To gain equity for Caymanians in the workforce, the Minister of Border Control and Labour has been tasked with:

- Modernising the Work Permit regime with a new, fully integrated Online Job Portal for Caymanian job seekers;
- Increasing maternity and family leave provision;
- Revisiting the permanent residency points system;
- Amending the criteria for Permanent Residence and the Right to be Caymanian—which is associated with the point system as well;
- Implementing an Employer Accreditation System to reward employers who develop and retain Caymanians; and
- Implementing a gradual increase to the minimum wage and the mandatory level of pension contributions.

The Specific Outcome of **“building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands”** also directly impacts our quality of life, especially with regard to infrastructure issues.

Among priority projects under this Specific Outcome will be: to mitigate traffic congestion through the delivery of road infrastructure such as the extension of the East West Arterial, amending import legislation to restrict the quantity and types of vehicles that can be imported, and developing a reliable, quality public transport system.

The provision of essential services in the Sister Islands, such as the construction and maintenance of roads, and strengthening of other essential government services including public works, Hazard Management and the Department of Vehicles and Equipment Servicing, also falls under this area.

Beyond physical infrastructure development, Madam Speaker, the business regulatory framework will also be upgraded to make it easier for local companies to do business and to prosper. Part of this revamp would be to modernise the Liquor Licensing Act (2019 Revision) to align with other commerce-related legislation and to consolidate Commerce Legislation with regard to Local Company Control Licences and Trade and Business Licences.

Madam Speaker, important to our quality of life is **“strengthening, preserving and enhancing public safety and security in the community.”** As would be expected, Madam Speaker, priority projects within this Specific Outcome are largely task to uniformed services falling under the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Office of the Commissioner of Police. However, the Ministry of Social Development is also earmarked under this outcome to create a framework to protect and safeguard vulnerable adults.

Madam Speaker, the Office of the Commissioner of Police is responsible for ensuring safety on Cayman's waters through maintaining a 24/7, 365 [day] maritime patrol and response presence by the Cayman Islands Coast Guard around the Islands to ensure timely maritime search and rescue response up to 100 nautical miles off shore our Islands.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, our maritime safety would be supported by the creation of vessel safety regulations focusing on Vessel Operator proficiency; the drafting and enactment of Boating Whilst Impaired Legislation; and legislation addressing anti-social behaviour within specific maritime recreational areas, or proximity of the Islands' coastlines.

Madam Speaker, the fourth Specific Outcome aimed at improving Caymanian's quality of life is **“providing solutions to improve the well-being of our people so they can achieve their full potential.”** Priority projects under this Specific Outcome, Madam Speaker, includes the updating of adoption legislation, greater standardisation of care in residential homes and new standards for the Child Safeguarding framework to increase responsiveness to situations involving trauma.

Madam Speaker, public health initiatives in this key area will include providing comprehensive, multi-disciplinary care to people with Non-Communicable Diseases and to develop a model for the provision of equitable services in Public Health, in conjunction with the Older Persons Policy.

A strong focus would be put on our national wellness initiatives, including promoting physical and mental wellness across our three Islands; the development of wellness parks, providing community mental

health outreach, the completion and commissioning of the long-term mental health residential facility,—which as I indicated earlier, is now officially known as Poinciana—and introducing wellness programmes throughout the community, catering to the active and healthy lifestyles of our people, in particular our older persons.

Madam Speaker, expansion of clinical services offered within the community to meet the growing demand for mental health support is planned as well. The services will include parenting programmes, therapeutic groups, and school-based workshops in Cayman Brac, as well as for new groups with complex mental health needs, and programming for parents deemed to be at risk in our three Islands.

Madam Speaker, a major emphasis on mental health programmes is a key feature of the initiatives aimed at well-being including reducing wait times for mental health appointments and taking a more holistic approach to treatment and client care across the Department of Counselling Services.

Further initiatives include increasing engagement with community partners to provide community based parenting workshops in the eastern districts of Grand Cayman, as well as offering substance misuse and mental health workshops to employers who can recognise challenges amongst their employees.

Education, Madam Speaker, is a proven driver of increased quality of life, and relates to the specific outcome of **“improving education to promote life-long learning and greater economic mobility.”**

Madam Speaker, in the area of childhood education, mental health and support services will be at the forefront. Mental health education programmes will be provided to reduce stigma and to promote emotional wellbeing amongst children. Early education programmes will be increased and strengthened through the establishment of an Early Childhood Development Hub; and financial assistance will be offered to help working families offset the costs of day care services.

Madam Speaker, in secondary and tertiary education, increased learning support services will be provided through the establishment of a Key Stage 4 learning support class at both Clifton Hunter High School and John Gray High School; and Workplace Readiness and Technical and Vocational Education and Training initiatives at the University College of the Cayman Islands will be strengthened.

Madam Speaker, no surprise but housing is another very important component of an improved quality of life. One of our specific aims is to **“provide affordable housing and create new opportunities to access capital for home ownership.”** The key priority project under this Specific Outcome over the next two years is to launch an Affordable Housing Initiative in every district in the Cayman Islands. As most people are aware, the provision of affordable housing is well underway in North Side, Bodden Town and West Bay. In addition to the Affordable Housing Initiative which builds homes and makes them available for purchase,

we have also embarked on projects to make available affordable land lots across several districts; helping Caymanians to buy a piece of land at an affordable rate, on which they can build their own homes in due course. The first of these Madam Speaker, will start in the wonderful district of East End.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, in this environment of high interest rates, we are also working to bring about residential mortgage reform under the Registered Land Act (2018 Revision); and for those who rent, we are working to reform the Landlord and Tenants Act (1998 Revision) to ensure a more level playing field for both tenants and landlords, and to introduce rights and protections for both parties. Madam Speaker, mitigating and ultimately solving the home homeownership crisis for Caymanians has been of key importance to this Government from *day one*, and we will continue to keep that at the top of our list.

Madam Speaker, a vital Specific Outcome is **“protecting the wellbeing of Cayman’s youth so they can achieve their full potential.”** Key initiatives in this area Madam Speaker, include implementing the Cayman Islands Child Safeguarding Board strategy and plan; researching gangs and gang culture in the Cayman Islands to support a targeted response; promoting active, healthy, physical and mental wellbeing for the youth population; and providing opportunities for youth to voice concerns or speak on matters relating to them inclusive of those that may have disabilities.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we plan to continue **“utilising Sports to enhance the lives of our people.”** We have seen no better examples of Caymanian’s opportunity and excellence in sports than we have seen recently, particularly with the CARIFTA [Caribbean Free Trade Association] games.

Madam Speaker, priority projects under this Specific Outcome are to encourage a culture of fitness in communities through public education campaigns; to promote gender equality in sports; to ensure proper lighting and security at all public sports facilities; and to establish public/private partnerships to increase the number of sporting facilities available throughout our Islands.

Madam Speaker, we will learn more in due course about some of the partnerships which will drive things like new swimming pools to ensure that our people can be both healthy and participate in sports and maintain similar levels of performance as the team recently did in CARIFTA.

## **Broad Outcome 2 Enhance Competitiveness while Meeting International Standards**

Madam Speaker, under Broad Outcome 2: Enhancing Competitiveness while Meeting International

Standards, this refers to the need to continuously improve our economic, social, environmental and governance frameworks in order to ensure that Cayman Islands remains a viable, and attractive place to conduct and operate business and maintain a legally compliant edge against our international competitors. This not only applies obviously to financial services in which there is a global regulatory environment to contend, but it also equally applies to tourism, construction, technology, and other emerging industries.

Madam Speaker, this Government is committed to maintaining a private sector driven economy. Our Administration acknowledges the important role the private sector plays in generating the activity which produces the goods, services and productivity required to have a healthy and vibrant economy. This in turn creates employment as well as the most significant percentage of government revenue.

The revenue generated by a private sector driven economy Madam Speaker, is in turn utilised by the Government to provide public services such as education, healthcare, financial assistance. It also funds investments in affordable housing and infrastructure projects, such as roads.

Madam Speaker, because the Cayman Islands is one of many places that businesses can choose to operate within, this means we are competing on a global stage every day. We're not only required to meet international standards, but we must also clearly demonstrate our advantage over other competing jurisdictions, whether it be to attract inward investment or to generate greater numbers of visitors to our shores. This means, Madam Speaker, that we must ensure that our public services, our regulatory regimes and infrastructure meet international standards and support our Islands positioning as one of the best places to live, visit, work and invest in or conduct business.

It is in the best interests of Caymanians and residents, Madam Speaker, to ensure that our business and commerce environment is in compliance with global standards. The Cayman Islands Government inclusive of local regulatory authorities must continue to demonstrate leadership by engaging with international regulatory bodies to be involved in the monitoring and setting of global compliance standards. Madam Speaker, this will not only maintain the Cayman Islands leadership position in terms of competitiveness, but it is vital for the health of our economy and our public sector.

Madam Speaker, due to this commitment to enhance competitiveness, it is our intent to improve several public services in areas including health education, transport and technology. Additionally, initiatives to strengthen the regulatory regimes governing our major industries and the creation of platforms for the growth of new industries are being pursued.

Key to achieving this outcome is **“increasing the positive sentiment and trust of the Cayman Islands as a Global Business Jurisdiction.”**

Madam Speaker, we also need to **“improve our tourism, as an industry, product, an economic driver”** for our Islands. In order to achieve this, the Minister for Tourism and Ports has a plan to:

- Promote and grow sports and event tourism;
- To expand into emerging and secondary tourism markets;
- To market to high-net-worth visitors;
- Promote our Sister Islands in the area of tourism—and that is specifically obviously Cayman Brac and Little Cayman;
- To expand Cayman Airways routes;
- To diversify our tourism product with greater ecotourism focus;
- To reimagine cruise tourism; and
- To increase the regulatory oversight from a safety perspective of all of our Islands' airports to ensure that they meet internationally mandated standards.

Also key to meeting international standards Madam Speaker, is **“strengthening good governance for more effective government.”** Priority projects under this Specific Outcome are primarily related to:

- International standards for the financial services industry, including achieving a positive assessment on the FATF [Financial Action Task Force] Fifth Round Review;
- Achieving positive assessments on the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] and Global Forum International Tax Cooperation reviews;
- Improving oversight of the audit profession in accordance with trends in relevant international standards; and
- Implementing proactive, sustainable and effective financial services regulation to promote new financial services products and to enable the existing business models to continue to thrive and grow.

Finally, Madam Speaker, as a jurisdiction, we must **“modernise business processes and enhance information technology platforms and infrastructure”**, in order to stay apace with other markets.

Strategic actions in this priority area include:

- To streamline the licensing framework for local businesses through the reform of the existing commerce framework;
- Enhancing local intellectual property registration through enhancement of the legislative framework for intellectual property; and

- To conduct a technological position audit or review within the Cayman Islands Monetary Authority in order to develop and implement an action plan for the deployment of appropriate identified technological tools to improve their efficiencies in the delivery of service.

### **Broad Outcome 3 Future Proof to Increase Resiliency**

Madam Speaker, to future-proof our society is to anticipate risks, assess opportunities, and take steps to protect the health and prosperity of our country.

Madam Speaker, the PACT Administration believes it is a core responsibility of any government to address needs that exist today and to prepare for the needs of the future. Under this Broad Outcome are several initiatives aimed at the sustainability of both our natural environment and our built infrastructure, as well as programmes to improve available technology and services.

However, there is also a human element to the concept of future proofing, which involves preparing, equipping and empowering the Caymanian people to thrive. We want to encourage, enrich and empower our people through education, health, sports, youth and cultural programmes; and employment.

Being ready for the future, Madam Speaker, involves fiscal prudence, protecting our assets, and building in resiliency to our sources of revenue. We intend to establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund—and will be sharing more on that during the actual budget discussions later this year. We will focus on future-proofing our physical assets along with better physical infrastructure. Future proofing, Madam Speaker, also requires educated minds, healthy bodies, skilled workers and a strong sense of national identity including the belief in our own capability and readiness.

As the economy of our country continues to grow Madam Speaker, we must remain alert to geopolitical disruptions and consider the potential impacts these may have on our future.

Future-proofing acknowledges our vulnerability as small import-dependent Islands to external shocks such as natural disasters, supply chain shortages, global conflicts, and health or other economic crises. Therefore, Madam Speaker, future-proofing considers risks and creates a hardening of key infrastructure to provide security and stability for generations to come.

Vital to future-proofing is **“building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands.”** Key projects in this area of focus will relate to both hard and soft infrastructure.

In terms of physical buildings and assets these include: an increase in the Cayman Islands Govern-

ment land ownership to facilitate future needs of housing, parks, roads and public beaches; and improvements to ports of entry to enhance visitor experience.

Madam Speaker, softer infrastructure projects would include the implementation of the Cayman Islands Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2022-2035, and to review and to action necessary amendments to Planning Laws with regard to zoning density and height to help develop communities and make housing more affordable.

Madam Speaker, the completion or progression of the Integrated Solid Waste Management System [ISWMS] falls under this outcome as well. This is a necessary project that has been a *hot potato* for several government administrations. Though it represents a significant financial commitment, it represents the biggest project the country would have done at any one time ever. Madam Speaker, it is really the only viable option that we have available to this country to responsibly manage our solid waste given the previous decisions taken which included keeping the solid waste management at the current location or the decision to enter into an agreement with the preferred bidder in March '21.

Madam Speaker, despite comments made by various Members of the Opposition, what was left to be done following the execution of the project agreement 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2021, and the land transfer agreement prior to that, hardly left a deal nearly done. As was commented previously, Madam Speaker, some of the project team described that stage as an agreement to negotiate, finalise and sign 30 more agreements. After two years of analysis, evaluation and negotiation, we are on the cusp, we are very close to finalising mutually agreeable terms and getting to what is contemplated or considered as financial close under the relevant documentation.

Madam Speaker, the reality is, we do not have alternatives which can be developed, approved and made ready before the current landfill runs out of space. Though it is a significant project and as noted earlier, the biggest project the Government would have carried out, it is, as we have demonstrated with this SPS, a manageable project from a fiscal perspective.

Madam Speaker, for 40 years, we have kicked the can down the road on these problems and these issues and now we are running out of time. Now, Madam Speaker, is the time to solve the problem in a sustainable, modern, reliable way while we are just ahead of the tipping point.

Madam Speaker, to prepare for the future we need a healthy population, so to move on, we need to ensure an **“equitable, sustainable and successful healthcare system”**; that is vital.

Madam Speaker, falling under the Ministry of Health and Wellness, this will be achieved through a comprehensive review and update of the National Strategic Health Policy.

We will also need people who are well educated leading to the next Specific Outcome and that is, **“improving education to promote lifelong learning and greater economic mobility”**.

Madam Speaker, this will require several areas of government working in tandem with plans to promote lifelong learning, including:

- Expanding and enhancing the current National Tourism [Education] Strategy;
- The expansion of Prospect Primary School;
- Building a new Edna Moyle Primary School;
- Building the fourth academy at Clifton Hunter [School];
- Increasing and strengthening early education programmes by establishing nurseries at East End Primary School and Edna Moyle Primary School; and
- Offering free tertiary education at the University College of the Cayman Islands and International College of the Cayman Islands.

Madam Speaker, this will include programmes to expand the John A. Cumber Primary School which is reaching significant levels of school population. We are of course, in the process of building a hall at the Theoline McCoy Primary School in Bodden Town, and one will be built for the Joanna Clarke Primary School in Savannah as well.

Madam Speaker, vital to securing our future adaptability and success is, **“supporting climate change resilience and sustainable development.”** Projects to achieve this aim at a high level, include the development and implementation of the Climate Change Policy which will be going out to public consultation shortly; implementation of the National Energy Policy which has been undergoing a recent required five-year review; completion of the Cayman Islands National Weather Service Headquarters; and facilitating responsible management and sustainable use of the natural environment and the natural resources of the Cayman Islands.

We must also prepare for the future by **“protecting the wellbeing of Cayman’s youth, so they can achieve their full potential.”**

Future-proofing youth-related projects include providing grant opportunities for young people, monitoring to ensure vibrant programming and safeguarding practices and policies are in place for all youth-related organisations; cross ministerial and inter-agency collaboration and coordination on youth-related issues; and the development and implementation of a national policy and plan in respect of our youth.

**Broad Outcome 4  
Modernise Government to Improve  
Public Sector Performance**

Madam Speaker, under our governance framework, the elected Government is responsible for the formulation of policies and setting the priorities which the Government will focus on.

Under Broad Outcome 4 of modernising government and improving public sector performance, there will be an implementation and delivery of those policies and priorities which will remain the responsibility of the public sector and will include the core Civil Service as well as Statutory Authorities and Government-owned Companies.

While a growing population and expanding economy requires more public services, a sustainable approach dictates that greater emphasis be placed on increasing efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of those services. Madam Speaker, this Broad Outcome speaks to our commitment to good governance, and connected to that, at least two tenets of the PACT acronym, Accountable and Transparent.

Madam Speaker, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of government services help both the elected Government and all public servants to remain accountable and more transparent—and obviously the public benefits from that. This Broad Outcome serves to bring attention to the role that the public service plays in a successful, sustainable and thriving country. Its inclusion signals to the Civil Service and to the wider country that we are committed to continuous improvement, that we acknowledge that we can streamline certain processes to improve customer service and customer experience as well.

Madam Speaker, this set of specific outcomes are designed to help Ministries, Portfolios, Departments, and Statutory Authorities and Government-owned Companies re-examine *business as usual* and challenge themselves to innovate, to focus on the customer and to focus on outcomes.

The first specific outcome, Madam Speaker, is to **“modernise business processes and enhance information technology platforms and infrastructure”**.

Projects aimed at achieving this goal in the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development include:

- Creating an online portal that supports the financial assistance application process;
- Development of regulations to operationalise remote identity validation and supporting single stage submissions—in terms of applications;
- Improving online user experiences by designing government websites primarily from the customer's viewpoint. That would mean, Madam Speaker, they become more intuitive and easier to utilise and operate and therefore the experience of the customer is better; the outcomes are better.



- Implement an online content management system within core government that allows all levels of civil servants to manage and update information on a timely basis that is for public consumption; and
- Developing cloud storage options for relevant services to expedite online application submissions.

Madam Speaker, also key to improvement is **“strengthening good governance for more effective government.”**

The Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure (PAHI) is tasked with developing a more effective governance structure for agriculture in our Islands and will deliver a legislative agenda to benefit the agricultural sector including the Plant Protection Act, the Pesticide Control Act and associated Regulations; a revised or new Animals Act; the Veterinary Act; and the Agriculture Act, Madam Speaker.

Under its “infrastructure” remit the same Ministry will ensure that a legislative framework is in place to help design and deliver specific projects and to effectively execute the statutory requirements of the National Roads Authority (NRA), including corporate governance, land acquisition, road design, encroachments and other regulatory functions.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will also develop an NRA specific public communications plan to address issues, needs and solutions; and to ensure that the project stakeholders and the general public, importantly, are appropriately informed and/or consulted on various project activities along with any potential impacts that they may experience.

Madam Speaker, across its functions, the PAHI Ministry will develop a communication plan to include data collection, website and digitisation to improve data and technology; and foster innovation, improve customer experience and reduce manual input in its processes.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development will be undertaking its own modernisation project with the redevelopment of the Government Budget and Reporting processes.

Madam Speaker, at the Portfolio of the Civil Service there is a lengthy list of projects aimed at improving governance and efficiency.

Madam Speaker, the Portfolio itself will:

- Implement a new policy framework to govern the remuneration of persons appointed to public bodies including boards, committees or councils;
- Develop an Enterprise Risk Management Policy for the Cayman Islands Government;
- Provide training and support to embed effective risk management within Cayman Islands Government; and

- Provide Governance Training and Support for SAGCs

### **Broad Outcome 5 Protect and Promote Caymanian Culture, Heritage and Identity**

Madam Speaker, turning now to the fifth area of focus in terms of Broad Outcomes and that is protecting and promoting Caymanian culture, heritage and identity.

This final broad outcome, Madam Speaker, is one which we believe is vital to all of our plans and projects and is that of conserving and highlighting what defines Caymanian culture, heritage and identity. It is a shared goal, Madam Speaker, which cuts across all Ministries and Portfolios.

For centuries, Madam Speaker, the Cayman Islands were regarded as the *Islands that time forgot* but certainly within the last half-century—depending on how you look at it, perhaps even slightly less—our community, our economy and overall society have been transformed. They have been undergoing significant change.

Madam Speaker, one could easily describe the change as a veritable sea change. The scale and pace of societal and demographic changes in the Cayman Islands have proven difficult for many Caymanians to adjust. Many Caymanian fear being left behind, they fear being excluded, especially as it relates to our unique traditions, perspective and way of life. Therefore, we recognise that in order to effectively address the common concern for protection and promotion of Caymanian culture, heritage and identity, there must be tangible, intentional and transformative actions taken by Government, the private sector, civil society, and the community as a whole.

Madam Speaker, all Members of this Government share a passion and commitment to ensuring that the culture, heritage and identity of the Caymanian people is preserved and passed on to future generations. This Government also shares a collective sense of urgency given the rapid changes that our community has undergone, that includes the changes in the economy and the impact on overall society.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, we recognise that in order to effectively address the common concern for protection and promotion of Caymanian culture, heritage and identity, we must have these tangible transformative actions that I spoke about earlier.

It requires an acknowledgement that these three elements are essential for the continued success and prosperity of the Cayman Islands. With greater support for cultural activities, preservation of built history, and visual and performing arts, we will be able to more clearly define and present the Cayman Islands brand so that it is understood; and then can be woven into all of our economic drivers to shape the way we present ourselves to the world and to our competitors.

It is, Madam Speaker, also an acknowledgement of the importance of soft power, and the unifying power of Caymanian achievement and success on the global stage, whether it's in sports, the arts, academia or industry. Our education system clearly plays a central facilitation role and can be a driver for positive change in that respect.

With the Cayman Islands now hosting over 130 different nationalities, and remaining heavily dependent on a largely transient workforce, the need to unequivocally define who we are becomes even greater. Madam Speaker, this will support integration of those who come to live in the Cayman Islands, whether temporarily or permanently.

Culture, heritage and identity also take into consideration natural assets which hold social and cultural significance for Caymanians and this is a key element of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Our people must never question or lose who we are as Caymanians and what our national identity is. We must both preserve our rich culture and history and use the pride we have in ourselves and the achievements of our people thus far as fuel to sustain this for the future.

Madam Speaker, a key specific outcome necessary to strong national identity is **“providing solutions to improve the well-being of our people so they can achieve their full potential.”** A key priority project aimed at achieving this outcome Madam Speaker, is under the remit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, and will have Public Health partnering with related NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations] to promote public awareness within the community with regard to aging and disabilities and their impact on the preservation of culture.

Another vital specific outcome relating to national heritage and identity is, **“cultivate civic and national pride.”** All of these Madam Speaker, can be found set out in the SPS.

Madam Speaker, initiatives spread across a range of Ministries and Portfolios in the achievement of this objective, beginning with the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure improving the physical beauty and aesthetics of our communities through the stronger enforcement of existing laws and the amendment of relevant laws; and the development of a Policy and Design/Style that adopts the use of Caymanian architecture in government buildings.

The Portfolio of the Civil Service, Madam Speaker, will strengthen digitisation methodology for preservation and all-inclusive access to the Cayman Islands' documentary heritage for current and future generations.

The Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage will advocate for policy changes in the area of retrieving, retaining and maintaining historical and cultural artefacts, traditions and sites; and they will also adopt a multidisciplinary approach across all sectors by participating in and providing feedback on policy and

programming initiatives recognising that culture and heritage cross all sectors.

Madam Speaker, **“improving education to promote lifelong learning and greater economic mobility”**, is another outcome that is necessary for both the preservation of heritage and the forging of national identity.

In terms of primary and secondary education, the Ministry of Education will ensure that school curriculum includes courses, school programmes and extra-curricular activities which promote and provide exposure to Caymanian culture and heritage.

Madam Speaker, it is important to note that the achievement of these Broad Outcomes will necessitate the work and cooperation of several government Ministries, Departments and Units; some individually, some collaborating at the same time. Most of the specific outcomes and projects will require inter-ministerial cooperation and a cross-governmental approach. There can be no *working in silos*, we must instead work in tandem as a unified government in delivering public services to make these things happen. With the dedicated teams that we have and the commitment we have made to modernising government and increasing public sector effectiveness and accountability, we believe Madam Speaker, that this is all very much achievable.

One only needs to look at the work done and the resilience shown by our civil service during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to show that our Ministries and Departments of Government are fully capable of breaking down barriers and working together as a united team for a common goal. This can be just as true in times of growth as it is in times of crisis.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

Madam Speaker, I hope that the Strategic Policy Statement of this PACT Government for 2024-2026 shows clearly that we have carefully considered the challenges confronting the Cayman Islands as a whole, both from a higher level bird's eye view all the way down to granular levels; and we've developed both our broad and specific desired outcomes, and the strategies, projects and funding required to achieve them.

In doing so, Madam Speaker, we have not taken the political view as the cynics among us may suggest, but we have listened to the public Madam Speaker, the Caymanian people and the public servants who both advise on and execute the policies that deliver these transformational benefits to our Caymanian people.

Madam Speaker, in the past two years, we have seen what works well and also what doesn't. We are at the mid-point of this administration with the experience under our belts to see how our collective vision is shaping up and understanding where our strategies may need to be tweaked slightly or perhaps even slightly shifted. Such is the nature of any endeavour, Madam Speaker.

However, as you have surely seen and understood from everything that I have outlined today, Madam Speaker, our core values and our vision have not significantly shifted. There has been no wholesale change in what we as a unified government are aiming to achieve. We remain People-driven, Accountable, Competent and Transparent as a Government and in our policies and actions.

Madam Speaker, just to reiterate the Broad Outcomes: improve quality of life for Caymanians; enhancing competitiveness while meeting international standards; future-proofing to increase resiliency; modernising government and improving public sector performance; and protecting and promoting Caymanian culture, heritage and identity. Under these overarching aims fall all of the same people-centred objectives that were outlined to this House when we presented our first SPS back in July of 2021, plus more.

Madam Speaker, we have identified over the past two years, the need to robustly support our key industries and shore up our international reputation while also actively and thoughtfully preparing ourselves for the future, including any natural or man-made crises that may come.

Thus, Madam Speaker, we are continuing to focus on those policies, providing for those most basic human needs including managing the cost of living; supporting and improving education, and training for both children and adults; equity in the job market for Caymanians; ensuring the most vulnerable in our society receive the support and the protection they need; the necessity of access to quality healthcare; the importance of mental health; the need for affordable housing; the significance of a safe and secure community; and how vital it is that these Islands' development be holistically sustainable in terms of the environment, the economy, and the quality of life and benefits for our people.

Madam Speaker, we are continuing to support our pillar industries and protect them from future threats while also positioning them for growth. We are also laying a strong foundation for the development of new industries and revenue streams for our Islands.

We are focusing on vitally needed improvements to the technology available to us and to our infrastructure, while also improving the transparency and accountability of the public sector.

Madam Speaker, we are doing all of this in a way which is fiscally responsible and ensuring that the Cayman Islands remains in charge of its finances. We have struck a balance between necessary spending on both human services and capital projects while keeping an eye on the bottom line and ensuring that we have made the necessary provisions for a future rainy day.

All in all, Madam Speaker, I think I can fairly say that this Government has earned a passing grade on its mid-term report card.

Madam Speaker, have there been issues? Yes, undoubtedly. I don't think any government goes

through any administration with no crises, disagreements, scandals possibly, minor things sometimes hopefully, or sometimes divisions and disagreement. That is the nature of politics.

However, Madam Speaker, as I present this Strategic Policy Statement to this honourable House, this PACT Government has stayed the course, moving ahead in one direction. Each of us remains individually and collectively committed to the outcomes and vision presented in this Policy Statement and we are eager to move ahead to achieve these goals.

We have been through a lot as a country over the last few years, Madam Speaker, and yet we have emerged stronger; our economy is strong and growing again, and we've created jobs. However, we are continuing to have challenges related to sustainable growth like managing the traffic problems; and we have problems related to impacts of the global inflation crisis that is driving up prices from supermarkets to building supplies. Thankfully, as you would have seen, the forecast indicates downward trends in relation to these impacts. That is a very positive thing for our people.

Madam Speaker, as has often been said, *it is easy to criticise but hard to govern*. Yes, we have delivered a surplus, but that doesn't give us a blank cheque for fiscal irresponsibility. We cannot, we must not overextend ourselves and mortgage our future because we spend too much, too fast, today.

Madam Speaker, we only need to look at the SPS which clearly shows full compliance with all of the principles and the FFR provisions. What it also does is, highlights that even with what would be considered decent or significant surpluses—given where we have come from with the impacts, particularly related to the pandemic in the country and on the economy—we are still in a financial state which requires very careful management to avoid becoming irresponsible, to avoid making mistakes. That will bring trade-offs and significant impacts on this country, were we to make those kinds of mistakes.

Instead, Madam Speaker, what we offer in this SPS is a detailed, thoughtful, measured plan to address many of our most vexing challenges.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to say a very special thank you to the teams of people in each Ministry and Portfolio who contributed to the content of the SPS and to the teams in the Cabinet Office, and to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development who worked diligently on the evolution of the SPS. Obviously too Madam Speaker, I have to thank my colleagues who have been there with diligent eyes to ensure that what we put together is something that reflects their or our collective and desired outcomes for the people of our country.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to continued support of colleagues and the many hardworking public servants who are tasked with making these desired outcomes a reality for a better Cayman Islands in the coming years.

Madam Speaker, this medium-term fiscal vision in this SPS provides this pathway for the Cayman Islands to address these issues that I have outlined and to have a brighter financial future.

I therefore ask all Honourable Members of this Parliament to support Government Motion 4 which asks the House to approve these aggregate financial targets and financial allocations contained in the SPS tabled earlier.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Motion.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, we have reached the hour of 12.50 p.m. The House will suspend at this time to facilitate a photo session on the front steps which Members received notice for—it was arranged for 12.30 p.m. so we are running a little behind—after which we will have lunch in the dining room and we will resume at 2.15 p.m.

Before we suspend, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome to this honourable House, the former Speaker, Honourable Mary Lawrence and the former Member of Parliament and Permanent Secretary, Ms. Lucille Seymour, who have graced us this morning with their presence.

I would also like to extend an invitation to you ladies to join us in the dining room for lunch.

Thank you.

This honourable House is now suspended until 2.15 p.m.

**House suspended at 12.54 p.m.**

**Proceedings resumed at 2.28 p.m.**

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

The Motion remains open for debate; I will ask if any other Members wish to speak on the motion. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

*[Pause]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition - Elected Member for George Town East:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, before I begin, for the benefit of those who may be listening and watching, it is useful to point out that the Opposition only saw the Premier's SPS and the statement that accompanied it, right at the start of proceedings this morning. Therefore, in terms of my contribution to the debate on this Motion, there is very little that I can actually speak to, in terms of the promises and the policies that the Premier has set forward in his statement with regard to the Tabling of the 2024 to 2026 Strategic Policy Statement.

However, Madam Speaker, I listened keenly to the Honourable Premier and closely followed the many

promises he has made again to the Caymanian people—promises that he says will be delivered over the next two years. Madam Speaker, in some respects, I had a déjà vu moment. As the Premier spoke, I was sure that we heard many of these same promises two years ago, yet few of them got done.

The key question for me is, as I begin this debate, Madam Speaker, has the Premier at last found a way to achieve what he has so far been unable to over the past two years? The Premier seemed optimistic, perhaps hopeful, during his delivery, Madam Speaker, and I encourage the Premier to nourish whatever optimism and hope for success that he may have, but he should not overlook his reality.

The reality, Madam Speaker, is that he and the PACT Government have sadly been unable to deliver over the past two years, and so the majority of Caymanians are not hopeful or optimistic that the Premier and PACT can deliver for them over the coming two years, and I will return to these thoughts later in my debate, Madam Speaker— but I do thank the Premier for delivering his Government's Strategic Policy Statement this morning.

Madam Speaker, we have only just last week welcomed Her Excellency Mrs. Jane Owens to these Islands as our new Governor, and I know that she found a very warm welcome here. I am sure and certain that she will enjoy her tenure as Governor. Who could fail to do so in our wonderful Cayman Islands? I appreciate that Her Excellency has a job to do here, and my colleagues and I look forward to working with the Governor during her term in Office.

Madam Speaker, I would like to add that when some local voices expressed doubts about the relationship between the Cayman Islands and the United Kingdom, I would reassure Her Excellency that we in the Progressives remain committed to maintaining that relationship. A relationship that we believe brings mutual benefits to the UK and our Islands. Indeed, or national security and economic strength greatly benefit from that relationship, and I pray that it shall long remain so.

I would also like to record the appreciation of the Opposition for the work done by our former Governor, Martin Roper, during his tenure here. The role played by Governor Roper during the pandemic, working alongside former Premier Sir Alden McLaughlin, was essential in keeping the Cayman Islands safe, and ensuring that the vital air links to the outside world were maintained. These efforts allowed, as far as possible, the people of these Islands to go about their daily lives with some normality.

As a serving Member of the last Administration I recall well, the hard work that Governor Roper put in. Again, I want to record our thanks for what he did personally, and the support given to those of us in the elected government as we made those difficult decisions necessary in such uncertain times. Our actions in those early days of the pandemic were crucial for much

that followed, including the few deaths that we had, coupled with the many months of almost normalcy. That preparation, alongside the solid financial position that the country was in, provided the foundation for our reopening; but let me return, Madam Speaker, to the Government's Strategic Policy Statement.

Madam Speaker, I started my contribution with an essential question. Regarding today's Strategic Policy Statement. Has the Premier found a way to pull his team together and deliver on its promises to the country? This question is relevant, given, in my opinion, the chaos and lack of leadership that have characterised the last two years.

Madam Speaker, the Strategic Policy Statement should represent the collective view of the elected government as to its future direction. It has become the norm for the Premier to present plans and policies on behalf of the Government, after which the Finance Minister delivers the financial plans that underpin the policies in the SPS, to assure the House that the country's finances can meet the Government's planned agenda.

Therein, Madam Speaker, lay my first concern with what the Premier has presented to the House today. After all, the Premier is now also the Minister for Finance, and as such, he is a one man show with regard to the SPS, speaking on policy, and on the financial data that underpins the policy. So, Madam Speaker, please forgive me if I have questions about whether the SPS delivered by the Premier truly represents the view of his entire Government. Hopefully, this will become clear to us in the debate that ensues today, and in the weeks after.

If the Government has not bought into the Premier's SPS, and if he cannot lead a united team to deliver on the promises of the SPS, then this is a policy statement based on wishful thinking, rather than a coherent strategy.

I say this, because since inception it has been clear that the Premier has presided over a Government challenged by his leadership style, and so some of his colleagues have, in turn, challenged or at least regularly questioned his leadership, and so the PACT Government has been plagued by internal disunity and factional division. Madam Speaker, everyone in this room knows I speak honestly. No number of motions declaring confidence in the Government could hide this reality, nor could any number of public meetings with Government Members proclaiming *the PACT may have stumbled again, but is now back, and still intact*. It is all a show, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, while I would prefer not to be here addressing these issues, I must do so, because it goes to the heart of whether the Premier and the Government can achieve the promises made to the Caymanian people in the Strategic Policy Statement. Madam Speaker, you may recall that two years ago, when speaking to the Government's first Strategic Policy Statement, I said to the Premier and to this Parliament then:

**“We on this side understand that even when elected together on a common platform and common purpose, there will always be challenges but that common platform and purpose usually brings heads together, and through collaboration there is a resolution. I hope, Madam Speaker, Speaker for the benefit of the country and the benefit of the Premier, that despite the rumours that abound, about the divisions in the Government, that they are indeed mere rumours, and that the Premier has been able to bring his team together to achieve the same level of unity and ability to deliver for the benefit of the country as the two Progressive governments did, time will tell us.”**

And time, Madam Speaker, has shown that the problems that beset the Premier and PACT from the very start, have only worsened. This unfortunate state of affairs has been evident to everyone on these Islands; it has been obvious to the media, who report routinely on the latest expression of the internal problems that beset the PACT Government. Madam Speaker, it has been obvious even to those who take little interest in the political life of our Islands, and the Premier has repeatedly sought to reassure the country that things are otherwise, but let us examine the facts, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we see the division in what has become the routine of Ministers announcing things only to have to walk them back, days later, or to have the Premier step in to correct the record. Madam Speaker, these have fondly come to be known as the “*Say wha?*” announcements— you hear a Minister on the radio announcing something, or you read reports in the press, and your first reaction is, “*Say what?*”, then later, the embarrassed Minister may mumble an apology for getting it wrong.

I can focus right now on one example, Madam Speaker, and that is the Government's tumultuous relationship with the East-West Arterial Road. The House will recall the then Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism announcing on radio that they supported the development opportunities in the central Mangrove wetlands that could be made possible by building the East-West Arterial Road extension. As the two Ministers made their startling announcement, listeners were left spluttering over their coffee when they exclaimed, “*Say wha?*” Regardless of thoughts on the need for this road, the initial disbelief by the public is understandable given the Government's clear policy stand on mangroves.

Madam Speaker, this type of development would be so plainly contradictory to this Government's and the Premier's declared policy objectives, that the Ministers must have been aware of it. For a Premier who has declared his Government to be in the business of replacing lost areas of mangrove, the idea of building on acres of mangroves and other pristine natural habitats, was always likely to have been problematic at best.

It is no wonder, Madam Speaker, that some in his Caucus still have doubts about his steadfast support for the road. I will pause, Madam Speaker, to acknowledge that the Premier has commented several times that he supports the road being built. He has also said that the environmental assessment would be done by the end of this year, after which the planning and technical work would begin in earnest; but talking is one thing, Madam Speaker, and really taking action is another—and in the view of many Caymanians, the Premier, like others in the PACT, need much improvement in the *action* department. I suspect that it will be another important project that will not begin during this Government's term but again, I remain to be proved wrong and time will tell.

Madam Speaker, while progress on the road could be in doubt, the saga of internal divisions has undoubtedly continued. At the end of last month we read reports of the Honourable Member for Bodden Town East, the newly-appointed Minister of Border Control, telling his constituents that he intended to bring a motion to this House for sections of the East-West Arterial Road to be built without the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

He has the support of some of his colleagues in this, and I hear that he even had tee-shirts printed. Then the Premier arrived at the meeting to remind the Minister, his colleagues, and the Minister's constituents, of the Government's commitment to the EIA process. Hearing the newly-appointed Minister speak so boldly, the country may ask some questions:

- Who was speaking for the Government?
- Indeed, do the Premier and his Ministers not talk to each other?
- Do they not agree on the Government's policies and plans before making public statements?
- What has become of the requirement of collective responsibility for Cabinet Members?

Madam Speaker, it has gotten more interesting. It seems that the Minister for Bodden Town East has been reminded that he cannot bring a Private Member's Motion, and so it is the case he has asked his colleague the Member for West Bay West, to bring the motion on the East-West Arterial Road instead, and it is seconded by the Member for Bodden Town West, who has recently left the Government. We will see how the votes on the Government bench play out, Madam Speaker, but even if the Motion is accepted, it only requires that the Government "consider" the matter. The Motion can be ignored by the Government if it wishes.

Hence, Madam Speaker, these "Say *wha'?*" moments are merely a distraction. The announced ideas never seemed to happen and only help to illustrate how out of touch the Premier has become with his Government Members, and they with him.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, there are other examples of the Premier and his Ministers pulling in different directions, when the country needs to be working together.

One such example is the acrimony of the split between the Premier and his former Deputy. It was shocking but not totally unexpected, given the fissures within the Government that it highlighted. That neither of them was prepared to let the matter rest, and that both were prepared to bad mouth the other tells us everything we need to know about the depth of division between them and within the Government.

First came the question of whether there was a resignation or a firing.

Then we had the former Deputy Premier reveal that the policy differences he had left the Government over included a \$2 billion increase, a \$2 billion price tag, to implement the integrated solid waste management solution, Project ReGen—I will say more about ReGen later, Madam Speaker—and shortly after, the Premier took to the air ways to reveal that the former Deputy Premier had been fired over issues of misconduct but, while the former Minister's conduct is a concern, the bigger issue is the Premier's conduct in this.

Whatever the differences that bedevilled the relationship—

#### Point of Order

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, what is your Point of Order?

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** I'm sure that the Motion that is on the Floor says nothing about anybody's firing/leaving, so I don't know how the Member is relating that, because where he got his information from, I don't know. Maybe he can tell the House more about what he knows, rather than making a statement that does not address the Motion.

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, I do not think I am speaking anything that is outside the public domain. I made it clear at the outset that I think these things go to the very heart and to the ability of what I perceive to be the challenge that the Government will face in implementing and delivering on the promises, et cetera, contained in the—

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** —in the Strategic Policy Statement.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member for West Bay West.

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Madam Speaker, the Member might have something in his mind, but certainly we have orders in the Standing Orders that specifically addresses the scope of the matter and the matter is the SPS— not about leaving the Government and certainly, not about any Member's conduct, and he did refer to that.

Madam Speaker, I note that you were talking with the Clerk and I don't know if you heard what I said. It certainly does not address any Minister's conduct. I never heard the Premier talk about that.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Leader of the Opposition, please proceed with your statement, but refrain from making any comments in relation to the conduct of Members. Just stick with the scope of the Motion. Please.

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, I might as well sit down.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** I know that the Member would love that; I heard his comment.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Continue, Honourable Member.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** No, I'm about to continue, I just need to get to a convenient point, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in the run up to this Strategic Policy Statement the Premier has made several public pronouncements seeking forgiveness for the languid piece of delivering on his watch. He has stressed the importance of his mid-term review of progress, or lack of progress, against the Governments stated objectives. This review, he says, will provide a platform for accelerating the pace of delivery over the coming two years. An increased pace that his Strategic Policy Statement would ignite.

Madam Speaker, we know the routine: The confession and contrition are designed to show a statesman-like humility and understanding; then looking forward to a new dawn is designed to get us to focus on promises of better things to come, without digging too deeply into the past failures that have been apologised for and are glossed over—

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Premier.

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is making statements which I have a couple of issues with.

One is that he is making statements that I have gotten up before the House or before the public and asked for forgiveness and contrition, and an explanation for why something didn't happen. He is going to have to explain what he is referring to, because that doesn't immediately ring any bell with me.

Secondly, these suggestions reflect an improper motive. This is not the kind of behaviour I would expect, Madam Speaker. He needs to tell this House what statements he is referring to, rather than just getting up and making these sorts of spurious things. He's talked about many things that are completely irrelevant, and now he's going into making statements about things that, again, are purely speculative and suggestive of improper motive— to me anyway.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, one event that I can think of, specifically, where the Premier made statements regarding the lack of progress in his policies and the Government getting things done, was earlier in the year at the Chamber of Commerce. I know that was one event, so I share that as one of them that I know, for one. And I know I've heard it more than once; I cannot remember at this point what the other occasions were, but there have been statements made publicly over time with regard to it.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member for George Town Central.

#### Point of Order

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

By all means, I don't really mean to interrupt the Leader of the Opposition but I stand on a point of order under Standing Orders 36(1).

Madam Speaker, could you ask the Member to have a seat, please? Two Members cannot be standing at the same time.

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** Sorry.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Standing Orders talks about the relevance of the debate. It says, "Except on a motion for the adjournment of the House, the debate shall be relevant to the matter of question before the House or Committee."

Madam Speaker, the area upon which the Leader of the Opposition is going is outside the scope of what has been delivered by the Honourable Premier in respect to the Government's hopes, which is moving forward.

Now, Madam Speaker, I am not the judge of this committee [House], you are. I ask that you make a ruling in respect to what is within the scope of the debate as per the Standing Orders, because if not, we could be setting a very dangerous precedent to go into other areas of discussion. We know that there is a convention, in respect to the debate on the budget, which allows that latitude of everything to be discussed.

In my young political career as a young Member of Parliament of six years, I have never known that latitude to be given in respect to the Strategic Policy Statement, but more so to the budget.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member for Red Bay.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin, Elected Member for Red Bay:** Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Minister for Tourism did say one thing that is absolutely correct. We are going down a very dangerous road, in terms of shutting up the voice of the Opposition; putting in place artificial—

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** I am speaking Minister, please sit down.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Member, just let the Member for Red Bay continue, please.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, the Strategic Policy Statement, which is being delivered in accordance with the Public Management and Finance Act, sets out the broad parameters for what the Government intends to do over the next budget period.

The Motion before the House seeks the resolution of the House to approve those policy priorities, aggregate financial targets and financial allocations as the indicative parameters on which the next two budgets, the 2024 and 2025 budgets, will be formulated. Madam Speaker, in my respectful submission it is more than open to Members on this side to compare the success and progress of the Government over the past two years, with what is now being promised. It is perfectly within the Standing Orders, and the ability of Members, to speak to these issues.

If not here, Madam Speaker, where will we be allowed to challenge what the Government is promising? That is the role of the Opposition, and if the Opposition is not going to be able to debate this, I am going to urge my colleagues for us to pack our things and go down to the radio station and deal with it there.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member for George Town Central.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand again on a point of order where the elected Member for—

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, the Member incorrectly suggested that I was saying that we were going down a dangerous road by not allowing the Opposition. I never said such thing. I stood on a point of order in respect to what the Standing Orders say; but I would also like this committee [House] to recognise that there are other areas within the Standing Orders that give the privilege, and right, to the Opposition to make statements on other matters.

For the elected Member for Red Bay, who is a long serving Member of this Parliament, who knows that there are different areas for different discussions where they can have the right to, for example, criticise the Government and its unity— no problem, you put a statement before the House; but in respect to the scope of the debate, there are conventions to it and the Honourable Member for Red Bay is aware of that, Madam Speaker.

We are not stopping the Honourable Leader of Opposition who represents six Members of this Parliament from criticising or holding this Government to account. We are saying, do it in the right place.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members.

I do believe in good governance, and whilst Members have stood on points of order in relation to the scope of the debate, I ask the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to continue.

In relation to making references where you don't have anything to support it if questioned, I am going to ask you to withdraw that bit from your statement, but I would like you to continue with your debate.

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, I thank you for your ruling.

I did point out at the very beginning that I did not have the privilege of knowing what the content of the Premier's Strategic Policy Statement was, and it would be extremely difficult for us to comment in any meaningful way on it. The only thing I really have, is what I have seen and what has taken place in the last two years under the auspices of their first Strategic Policy Statement. Nevertheless, I will continue and will do my best to comply with your ruling and finish my speech.

Madam Speaker, I start by saying, that I do want to be even-handed so, before I speak again about failings of the Government, I would like to recognise



that the Government have completed a number of things that were promised at the last SPS, and there are a few, Madam Speaker, that can be ticked off. The point I wanted to make, Madam Speaker, and the problem is that these relative successes tend to be things that would routinely get done by the civil service left to its own devices, or the fruition of things begun under the previous Progressives-led Government.

I will acknowledge, that since this Government took Office, routine maintenance projects have been carried out in district centres; roads have been fixed in just about every other district except George Town; some new livestock have been added to the Islands, and the Government has piloted exercise programmes for older people, for example.

All these items and others, are worthy things that have been done but, Madam Speaker, they do not require authentic political leadership to get them done. Where major milestones have been achieved, Madam Speaker, many are the product of Progressives Government's initiatives and leadership, and we should not be surprised that PACT has sought to claim credit for the Progressives achievements, Madam Speaker.

As early as their 100-day report, the new Administration listed many tangible achievements that were the product of actions taken not by the PACT Government, but by the previous Progressives-led administration. Those included, for example:

- The three good ratings achieved by John Gray High School, Layman Scott High School, and the Lighthouse School;
- Work on the long-term mental health facility in East End; and
- The award of Darwin Plus funding for the Department of Environment to undertake invasive species' control on the Sister Islands.

Speaking of John Gray, Madam Speaker, last month, the new campus was officially opened. My colleagues and I were proud to tour that facility and the new campus is very impressive. The vocational training facilities, in particular, will provide a springboard into worth-while careers for future generations of Caymanians. The new campus is something to be proud of, but the House and the country will recall that the project was a Progressives' initiative.

Madam Speaker, towards the end of last year, the Minister for Investment, Innovation and Social Development brought to the House legislation that would provide a new modern framework for financial assistance to those in need. We commended the framework, though noting that it needed more real substance. That substance was to be provided in the regulations which were to follow—once again, the work to deliver this change was commenced by our Administration. The only surprise, was that it took 18 months for the legislation to be brought forward, when it was being prepared even as we left Office.

The Minister also advised this House in late 2021, that the Government was participating in the launch of a new Blue-green Investment Fund. To the Minister's credit, he acknowledged that the work on the fund had begun under the last Progressives Administration and, indeed, the heavy lifting had been done. We are pleased that the Minister took the baton over the line; we would like to know, however, what has become of the Blue-green fund and the millions of dollars of investment that were to flow from the fund into projects in Cayman—did the Government actually make the investment into the fund that it pledged? Perhaps the Minister could update us.

I commend the work that has continued within the Health Services Authority (HSA) to deliver new and improved facilities and services to meet the future needs of our people. Their ongoing delivery is the result of the five-year plan agreed to by the HSA and the last Progressives-led government.

Madam Speaker, I hope that the HSA will also continue to progress the work on a new district health centre for Bodden Town. That district is the fastest-growing on our Islands, and when added to the population of North Side and East End, accounts for over one-third of the Caymanian population. Bodden Town and the eastern districts need enhanced medical facilities to meet the needs of their growing population. Such a facility would provide better outcomes for people in the eastern districts that require medical care. It will also reduce the number of people needing to travel to George Town for medical care.

The Premier has proclaimed the virtues of the recently published climate change risk assessment, however, he neglects to mention that the research programme that yielded that assessment and the funding that enabled it to happen, resulted from the work of the last Progressives-led government, specifically, the now Deputy Leader of the Opposition working with the Governor's Office to secure UK expertise for the project. Sadly, alongside the things that have been achieved by PACT, there is also a long list of things they still need to achieve even though we have already done the bulk of the work.

I mentioned the long-term residential mental health facility just now, Madam Speaker. The facility was due to open in mid-2021, when our last administration signed the construction contracts. I accept that the pandemic caused new delays in the work, but the PACT's 100-days report I just referred to, promised an opening in the first quarter of 2022. Here we are, another year on, and it still needs to be opened. The Health Minister reported that she visited the site in February and said there is still construction work to do, but completion was near.

Last week she promised completion in June, but nothing has been said about the operational requirements and the funding needed there, such as the recruiting and training of suitable, trained, and experi-

enced staff, and the necessary clinical and family discussions about bringing patients back to Cayman from overseas. In the meantime, the long-standing Chairman resigned in January due to what he described as the lack of progress and lack of engagement at the Ministry—those Madam Speaker, are just a few examples of what we see as delays that are taking place throughout government.

Madam Speaker, I said earlier that I would speak about ReGen. There is no more significant example than that project. Earlier I promised to address the controversy surrounding the project, so I will do so now.

Madam Speaker, ReGen is designed to provide a series of built waste facilities that effectively end our reliance on harmful land filling. Instead of going straight to a landfill, garbage would be recycled, composted or sent to a new modern, waste-to-energy facility that burns all the waste that cannot be diverted to other purposes and creates energy. The energy would be sold to Caribbean Utilities (CUC), reducing the need for diesel generation in Grand Cayman. It is safe, it is sustainable. In this way, the project contributes to the goals of the National Energy Policy and the reduction in the use of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions.

In short, Madam Speaker, project ReGen has the potential to make the most significant contribution to the sustainability of the Cayman Islands, of any single government project that I can recall.

Madam Speaker, we had expected that the Premier and a Government as keen on sustainability as this one claims to be, might have embraced this project; but what we have seen right now, Madam Speaker, is that there have been two years of endless prevarication. Now, I heard what the Premier said today with regard to the project, and I am happy that from what I see in the SPS it would appear to me that the project is going to go forward, but still we have no indication at this point of when the remaining points that were to be negotiated can be brought to a close, that the project can be commenced. We are running out of time.

Madam Speaker, the Premier has repeatedly claimed that the last government misled the country by suggesting the contract was complete, and could move straight into construction. Madam Speaker that is nonsense. We never said there was a fully-negotiated contract that PACT could get on and execute, as has been stated in the past. In March, 2021, we signed the project agreement which sets out the key terms that form the basis of the full contract documentation, and crucially, sets out the agreed price. The final details were to be negotiated within the project agreement's framework.

Madam Speaker, this is how such complex negotiation and contracting practices work, and that is the reason, Madam Speaker, we hired technical, financial, and legal experts to advise on this project from begin-

ning to end. Madam Speaker my colleague, then Premier McLaughlin, made this crystal clear at the media briefing held at the signing of the project agreement. No one—no one—should have been surprised that there was still much detail to be closed off; but this was achievable in the time allowed, if the project has been carried forward at a pace. However, instead of months of negotiation leading up to the deadline for financial close, we got no action at all.

The Premier himself told the country at the time that he was not working on ReGen because it was too complex, and his Government had other more urgent priorities. We then told him this action was unacceptable, as it created real risks—risks from fires as well as financial and delivery risks.

At the time of the budget debate in 2021, I said in this honourable House, it is a complex technical project with a decades' long contract that needs to cover every eventuality. That is why it needs to be given the time and attention the project deserves not simply left to one side, but it was left to one side and the fact that financial close by the end of September 2021 was not achieved, meant that the project agreement terms had to be renegotiated.

Madam Speaker, most crucially, that applies to the price that had been agreed upon. The project agreement signed in March, 2021, gave the country price certainty. The cost to build the new facilities was fixed at \$205 million, with the financing costs for that being bundled-in with the operating costs, so that the contract would mean the government paying an average of \$163 per tonne for garbage processing over the 25 year life of the project. The expected total cost of the contract in cash terms at the point the project agreement was signed, was under \$670 million. At that point, only minor variations could have affected the price. Madam Speaker that was the state of affairs as we knew it, when we demitted office.

The cost we presented to the country in March 2021, had been reduced through the negotiation period by bringing some operations back into the Department of Environmental Health (DEH), including recycling, rather than putting them through the Regent purchase contract and paying them over the period. This gave us better value for money and guaranteed the jobs of 32 existing Caymanian employees at the (DEH). Instead of the agreed cost we had negotiated, the Premier has recently talked about a total cost of \$1.5 billion—more than double the expected costs when the project agreement was signed by us in 2021.

We look forward to the Premier's explanation. Have him show the reason for how the cost of the project has increased to this point. A mere two years after it was agreed. I have no idea today what the final figure will be, however, it will be clear that the cost of any price increases must rest solely with the delays PACT have caused, and the re-negotiation of things that were previously agreed upon. I sounded this warning very clearly during the budget debate in November 2021.

Referring to the passing of the deadline for financial close, I said in this honourable House: **“Whatever new deadline he has established, the Premier should also level with the country about the consequences of the delay that his inattention has created. We know that with any delay comes increased risk, higher costs, and more environmental damage, as a solution to the waste problem gets kicked down the road.**

**I have previously ask the Premier to set out for the country the answers to a series of questions about these consequences. Despite his professed commitment to transparency and accountability, he has declined to answer those questions to date.”** Time is coming, Madam Speaker, where these questions must be answered. The country deserves to know why this project’s cost has increased so much.

I still believe, and the Premier’s statement today indicated that it is the case, that provided the increased cost can be afforded, we have little alternative but to press ahead with ReGen. It is the right solution for our Islands, and I believe the Premier finally recognises that too. The responsible thing for the Premier to do then, would be to begin to provide for the increased future cost in this forthcoming budget, and for that I do a recognise what he said today, that he is going to begin and set up a sinking fund into which \$25 million per annum, I think, is to be paid into it?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:**

Yes; and I commend him for it, because at this part of my speech it is exactly what I was going to recommend— that we set up a sinking fund to which funds are paid, ring-fenced, to use to fund the country’s obligations under this contract. I commend the Premier for it.

The other issue the Premier keeps raising is that things were somehow left out of the contract. In one sense he is correct. As I mentioned and was evident at the press briefing in March 2021, the scope of the work to be done by Decco in the contract had been reduced; DEH would now operate some new facilities such as the recycling plant. The Premier claimed we had forgotten the Sister Islands— well, we had not. Things that could be done in the Sister Islands would be done there, such as composting but to get Decco to operate facilities for the Sister Islands was prohibitively expensive, so we left operations there with DEH.

The rest of the Sister Islands’ garbage would be collected at transfer station and sent to Grand Cayman for processing. We left the Sister Islands out of the ReGen contract with Decco, however, they were still an integral part of the overall solution that we had negotiated. I note the Premier stopped claiming we forgot the Sister Islands, and has recently shifted focus to say we failed to provide for DEH. Again, though, I reiterate that we gave an expanded role to DEH. An area of the site

that was expanded and earmarked explicitly for DEH operations, for those looking for it, is labelled “ancillary facilities” on the site map used at the time.

In addition, it was agreed by the project team that the DEH equipment could be serviced by the Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services, which removed the need for an entire bespoke maintenance facility for the DEH therefore, once again, DEH operations were fully accounted for when the project agreement was signed. Madam Speaker, the director of DEH was a vital project team member, and I am confident that if we were leaving out any part of his operation he would have been screaming, but that was not the case.

We believe, Madam Speaker that the earlier neglect by the Premier to engage with the project was a fatal error, and subsequent delays have only compounded the problem.

You will recall, Madam Speaker, I mentioned that the Premier had explained that he had been willing to ignore the need to focus on ReGen because he had other, more important priorities that needed his focus; therefore, Madam Speaker, the country might and had a reasonable expectation that we will see progress on those things that he deemed to be more important. He should have been willing to drive forward his own priorities.

Taken as a whole, Madam Speaker, the SPS broad outcomes announced by the PACT Government nearly two years ago, included some approximately 230 different commitments made by this government to the people of the Cayman Islands. It is unclear, whether some are single commitments or contained more than one target, so I’ve used the more conservative figure as my best estimate of the number of promises made there.

The Premier has told us that he has required his Ministers to account for their progress on their Ministries’ goals over the life of the Administration so far. In the run up to this debate on the SPS, I have tried to do my own analysis, Madam Speaker. I am sure the Ministers will claim that progress is being made on many fronts in the depths of the Government Administration Building, but let’s be honest: very little is seeing the light of day— and this is important, Madam Speaker, as it gets back to my central question of whether we can expect the Premier and PACT to achieve what he has told us they will in the remaining two years.

Again, I could see that progress has been made in some of the Government’s targets. I mentioned some of those previously, I will mention some more now.

Under the auspices of the Minister of Health, I welcome the HSA’s partnership with the Alex Panton Foundation to open Alex’s Place to improve access to mental health services for Cayman’s young people. I know this would have been close to the Premier’s heart, too.

We all want to see our young people able to access the care and support that they need, and with

that in mind, I encourage the Health Minister to continue that work, and to broaden it into a partnership with her colleague, the Minister of Education, to ensure that lower-level, non-clinical counselling advice and guidance is made available to young people so that we might prevent mental health issues from escalating to a crisis level.

Speaking of the Minister of Education, we continue to support our commitment to the policy direction she began under our previous Administration. Our increasing concern here is with a lack of pace. We are seeing less progress than we might have hoped for.

My colleague the Member for George Town South has asked several questions at recent sittings of Parliament designed, amongst other things, to ensure that the new national curriculum is properly rolled out; that a renewed effort to drive up the levels of attainment in mathematics is brought into focus, and that technical and vocational training is being properly supported. Her questions in this sitting include a concern for the quality of teaching, and the potential benefits of a new governance model for the Cayman schools. I hope the Minister takes these questions in the spirit in which they are intended— not as a criticism to be rebuffed, but a challenge to be welcomed as an opportunity for improvement.

The Minister of Education is also responsible for this PACT Government's one genuinely new achievement, and that is the Free School Meals Programme. The last Progressives-led Administration was discussing school leaves generally and in a very preliminary way, and I commend the Minister and her staff for the rapid rollout of the initiative. Indeed, so successful has it been, that it had been announced as a project to improve students' health and aid their focus on learning, but we have also seen it being advertised as a cost-of-living initiative.

All Ministers have now had two years in Office and by now, the country should be seeing the results of the political leadership they have been bringing and sadly, in many cases, the results are not encouraging. Madam Speaker, the PACT's 100-day report was full of network activities carried out by new Ministers, but first of all, I want to consider the Minister of Sports.

Special commendation must go to him. The most note-worthy achievements of his first 100 days were holding a strategic retreat, attending some meetings and delivering two sets of remarks. Maybe, though, the weight of his responsibility with Home Affairs was holding him back from delivering against his other commitments. I have tried, Madam Speaker, but it would be hard indeed to mark any of the Ministers twenty SPS targets as anywhere near complete.

Madam Speaker, throughout the course of this debate, we may hear Government Members jumping to defend their records as part of this debate.

I expect we will hear of meetings they have attended, overseas visits they have made, documents

they have reviewed, legislation they have been drafting, consultants they have appointed, strategies they have been preparing and plans they have been working on; but this afternoon, I will invite Caymanians to ask themselves: Is all of that apparent effort making any real difference to your lives? And what of the Premier himself in all of this? Certainly he will be giving leadership by pushing forward his own Ministries' objectives at a relentless pace.

At the time of the first Strategic Policy Statement, the Premier made the achievement of a new National Development Plan a flagship policy for his Government— so important was it, that he told the country that he would be driving it forward himself. Little was heard about the National Development Plan for months, despite the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's constant quest for answers, and challenging the Premier to get on with it by using the works started with Plan Cayman during the last Administration. Indeed, nothing was said for about a year, until the Minister of Financial Services was sent to a Chamber of Commerce event to speak on the Premier's behalf.

As an aside, Madam Speaker, even back then, there was chatter about in-fighting because the then Deputy Premier wasn't invited to give these remarks— but I don't want to get too distracted.

While the Financial Services Minister said nothing about the Government's record on the speech to Chamber members, in response to a question about the need for a new National Development Plan, the Minister did provide an update on the Government's progress. The Minister told his audience that he had expected the question and had a short statement from the Premier, who, of course, had taken over responsibility for preparing the development plan from the Planning Minister and speaking on his behalf, the Financial Minister told the Chamber:

*"It is no secret that is not quite off the ground yet,"* Madam Speaker, the Minister went on to tell the Chamber and the country, *"but with certain events passed us now, the Premier is going to be working diligently with colleagues and in Caucus to create a comprehensive plan."* That answer was given in the first week of July 2023— unless anyone wants to challenge me. I was there and I heard it. By last week of July 2022 the Premier told the media that the new National Development Plan would not be delivered during PACT's term of Office.

I tell the story, Madam Speaker, because it illustrates the two issues that undermine this government at every turn— two issues that bring the delivery of today's SPS into doubt.

The first is the confusion and lack of coherence among Cabinet and Caucus Members. In the case that we had here, an unfortunate Minister was sent out by his Premier to defend the woeful lack of progress on the flagship policy and told to make yet more promises of future progress, only to find his legs swept from under him just three weeks later— and who could blame

a Minister, if you were to get frustrated at being put in that position.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:**

The second and most significant issue this episode exposes, is that this Government is getting so little done. I referred to the National Development Plan as the Premier's "flagship policy"—that is not my interpretation, Madam Speaker, but his own.

Following the election, the Premier trumpeted the establishing of the new Ministry which would under his leadership focus on making Cayman **one of the most sustainable countries in the world**. He explained to the House how it would be achieved, in his SPS speech of 2021. He said, "**Most importantly, we are committed to reviewing and revising the national development plan, without which we would just be paying lip service to future generations.**" A year later, he conceded that he had yet to make progress during that year and could not deliver the new comprehensive plan that he had promised. The Premier must therefore accept, not on my terms but his own measure, that his Government is indeed just paying lip service to future generations.

As his Planning Minister, at least, subsequently identified, there is a way in which progress can still be made, and that is by simply picking up the Plan Cayman process which my colleague, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, started and championed while in Office. Madam Speaker, that process wasn't ours, we didn't develop it; it came from within the civil service. A way which they felt could be accomplished and put the country in compliance with the development law.

Let's just accept the Premier has not been able to reach his target to deliver the new national development plan and he has acknowledged that he won't but surely, he must have made progress on the broader sustainability front—but based on the evidence available, publically, Madam Speaker, that doesn't appear to be the case either. Halfway through the term, the best the Premier can claim is that he's working on formulating a comprehensive Cayman sustainability agenda. Two years in, we are still formulating an agenda. We have now got consultants to tell him what sustainability means and how to find the ways in which the current government policy is falling short of the United Nations, sustainability goals.

The other area I wish to touch on, Madam Speaker, is in fact a response to the cost of living crisis. The Premier in recent public remarks has acknowledged that families and businesses have had to face sky-rocketing inflation and a cost of living crisis.

He told the Chamber of Commerce in February, for example, "**Make no mistake. This cost of living increase is putting too many families and too many businesses on distress**", but acknowledging the reality now will come as little consolation to those

who have been suffering over recent months and who continue to suffer, as our Government has been asleep at the wheel. Their strategy for dealing with inflation is mainly to pretend it is not happening—at least until we force them to publicly respond.

Madam Speaker, when the Minister of Finance presented his budget forecast to Parliament, he told us that inflation would be 3.4 per cent in 2022 and only 2.2 per cent across 2023 and 2025. He reassured Parliament and the country that he was confident that inflation would remain under control enabled by relatively stable rental prices and declines in transport and electricity. Of course, Madam Speaker, the government got it completely wrong.

Once more, it is not hindsight that allows me to say this. In this House, in November 2021, I told the Finance Minister that his estimates would prove wrong and the consequences could prove disastrous. I was right.

In my response to the Government's budget, I pointed out that inflation in the United States was already at its highest level since 1990, at above 6 per cent. I told the Minister of Finance that this would inevitably lead to higher inflation in Cayman. Indeed, I pointed out that there was already evidence of that inflation in our grocery stores, at the gas pumps and on our utility bills. Finally, I warned the Government that inflation often hits our society's poorest, and most vulnerable, the hardest. As costs rise due to inflation, so too, must government support. That was November 2021, Madam Speaker. Rather than learning from this catastrophic blunder, the Premier and the former Minister still tried to wish the problem away.

The 2021 Annual Economic Report published by the Finance Minister in the Economics & Statistics Office (ESO) in August of 2022, forecasted a rate of inflation for 2022 of 7.9 per cent yet, the Ministry's own figures in the Ci Consumer Price Index Report published in July 29, 2022 already showed that inflation was running at 12.1 per cent for the first half of 2022.

To recap: one report published in July had a high of 12.1 per cent at the end of June 2022, yet a report published in August was projecting that inflation by year-end 2022 would be 7.9 per cent. At the end of September, the Minister finally caught up with what had been painfully evident to the rest of us for at least a year and so the government's first quarter economic report, issued in August 2022, finally adjusted the inflation forecast to 10.1 per cent for the year-end. In the end, Madam Speaker, we know that inflation rate for 2022 averaged 9.5 per cent.

Much of that general rise was caused by considerable leaks in the prices of groceries, clothing, gas, housing and utilities. In short, Madam Speaker, all the things that Caymanians need to spend on every day. Even as general inflation started to ease at the second half of the year, the data shows a staggering 14 per cent increase in the cost of groceries year on year to the end of 2022. This begs the question: Why has it

taken this Government so long to recognise the crisis going on all around them? This represents, to me, a failure of the Government.

Madam Speaker, I see it every day in the cries and calls I get from constituents and non-constituents looking for help and assistance. In my mind, Government collectively were blind to the evidence in front of them. They were deaf to the warnings that I and others had given them, and they remained silent on what, if anything, they might do to mitigate the impacts of ever-increasing prices on families and businesses. It has only been the actions of the Opposition that have forced the Premier and his Government's hands and got them to face up to the cost of living crisis that was gripping the country.

Madam Speaker, during the session of Parliament last June, the ESO released data confirming that inflation was reaching 11 per cent. In the absence of any word from the Premier or the then Minister of Finance about the crisis, and how the government might respond, the former Speaker allowed me to ask an urgent question asking what the Government intended to do about the looming catastrophe for families and businesses that these inflation figures represented. I not only asked what the Government would do, but offered several suggestions as well, Madam Speaker.

Those who watched that session of Parliament will recall that it took the Premier several hours closeted in a meeting room with his colleagues to come up with an answer to that question; and to be truthful, the answer he gave us that evening was inadequate and he returned the next morning to give a more fulsome answer.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:**

It is clear then to me, that the Government had not understood the pain that was being felt in households across the Island, and they obviously were not prepared for the crisis that had enveloped everyone else.

I do welcome the short-term assistance with the electricity bills that the government had given households and other measures finally put in place since the summer. Many of those measures were suggested by the Opposition, and they were supported by us.

Every Member here today will know that runaway inflation has caused real hardship for households and actual harm to businesses across our Islands. In that context, every Member here must also recognise that the PACT Government's response has been woefully late and woefully inadequate. This failure is particularly irresponsible because, as prices on imported items rise the Government has been earning more revenue on import duties from those higher prices, and everyday families and businesses are paying even more. Even property prices have risen significantly,

making it harder for young Caymanians to buy land or a home.

Yet, the Government has sat on a Motion brought by the Member for George Town West and George Town South to reduce the overall level of stamp duty for Caymanians buying property to five per cent that would save Caymanians \$2000 in duty for every \$100,000 in property cost. The Motion also called on government to increase the amount first time Caymanian property buyers would pay, zero duty to \$200,000 for land, and \$500,000 for houses and apartments, and for amounts in excess of that 2 per cent duty.

There was a provision too, to assist Caymanians joining together to invest in real estate. The Motion was accepted unanimously Madam Speaker, and would go quite some way to help ease the housing burden for first time buyers. I freely acknowledge it would not and could not solve the housing crisis or issue, but it would help in a very meaningful way; but here we are nine months later. Nothing has been done, that we are aware of, and many Caymanians have missed out on this.

More broadly on the economy, Madam Speaker, the Government has highlighted the jobs numbers which they say are a sign of economic recovery the government has overseen since the pandemic. Once more, I am willing to give credit where credit is due. The achievement of a Caymanian unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent should be a cause for celebration—and I say “should be” advisedly, Madam Speaker, because if we look at the figures published by the ESO in a bit more detail, we can see that the garden is not as rosy as we are being led to believe.

The headline Caymanian unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent in the Fall 2022 Labour Force Survey represents a significant reduction from the rate of 5.1 per cent given in the spring of 2022 survey yet, surprisingly, the survey also shows that in fact, there were over 200 fewer Caymanians in work in the fall, when compared to the spring survey.

You might find it as surprising as I did, Madam Speaker, to see a significant reduction in the employment rate is not, as you might have assumed, because more Caymanians are working. I say this again, Madam Speaker: The reported unemployment rate has fallen, but as the ESO reported, 200 fewer Caymanians are actually working, so what is driving the apparent reduction in unemployment in the fall report? That certainly needs an answer, Madam Speaker.

The ESO data also shows that Caymanian labour force fell by around 550 persons between the spring and fall survey so, while there were fewer Caymanians in work, there were also fewer who said they were unemployed and because the unemployment rate is calculated as a percentage of the smaller workforce, the reduction is actually quite dramatic, Madam Speaker.

There is another level of intrigue to this, Madam Speaker, and the question is why has the size of the Caymanian workforce shrunk by some 550 people in six months? Are people really leaving the workforce or is something else going on?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition:**

The ESO report suggests that the working-age population is actually falling at the same time as the overall population is still increasing.

There may be answers somewhere in the ESO data, Madam Speaker, but I could not readily make sense of what I perceive to be a conflicting trend—and I fully accept this may be my lack of understanding and I don't suggest in one way, shape or other that figures have been manipulated, so no one please ascribe that to me. However, I will reach out to the ESO to seek their help in understanding what I perceived to be a conflicting trend.

What is of concern to me, Madam Speaker is that those Caymanians in work, the Labour Force survey shows that there has been a massive jump in those who are categorised as underemployed—1,344 under employed in the Fall survey, compared with 905 in the Spring survey. That's an increase of nearly 50 per cent. Now, I don't know the reason for it, but I say it is of concern that you have that many who are underemployed. There may be some seasonality in it, I don't know, but it is worrying.

I should add that the proportionate increases in the under-employment of permanent residents and non-Caymanians are even greater, Madam Speaker. That is also a concern that needs to be investigated. So I ask: what is really going on in the economy? I fear that this level of under-employment represents Caymanians and others being forced to take whatever hours they can get to work, in order to be able to buy groceries, pay their utilities, just the common things we use for living and that probably is the reason why we continue to see so many calls and people seeking assistance.

Madam Speaker, what it does underpin and suggest as well, is that there is an urgent need to review, complete and uplift the minimum wage and again, I am glad to see an outcome in the SPS that is seeking to address that issue. It is long overdue. I accept that it is. I truly regret that we did not complete that work; but if I remember correctly, a committee was established and had taken steps to start to gather data and begin deliberations, but I don't think it made very much progress in getting to the end and developing a recommendation that could come to the government. I see that Government has gotten around to appoint a committee to examine the issue, and that they do expect the report in June, I believe.

However, Madam Speaker, let me return to the question of what is going on in our economy. Stay-over tourism is seemingly doing well but clearly, we do have

challenges that remain. We are not back to the level where we were in 2019 cruise tourism, however, according to what the Minister has told the country, will continue to decline, and will continue to bring less dollars into the coffers of the government. Past revenues from property transactions are helping to fuel the government surplus but anecdotally, we are hearing of development projects that have been put on hold due to risks and uncertainties caused by the government's lack of directions.

Several Ministers, I recall, have also noted their own concerns about a potential slowdown that is coming in the development sector and the negative impact this could have on employment and government revenues. The Government recently published financial results showing that the revenue on property transactions is 10 per cent lower in 2022 than in 2021. The detailed analysis indicates a \$22.1 million surplus on property transactions against the estimates at the year end. The mid-year results indicated that there was a \$17.5 million surplus against estimates.

This suggests to me, Madam Speaker that the bulk of the additional revenues were earned in the first six months of the year, and then slowed down in the second half of the year. Granted, there may be good reasons for this but nonetheless taken together, these two trends might imply a slowdown in the market in the second half of the year. What we should be asking is whether there are problems looming in the construction and development sector. If they are, we should be drawing up plans to mitigate the risk. What are they doing? I asked the Premier if he would address these questions in his windup.

The weight of increased costs due to the high inflation also remains a concern, Madam Speaker. Government recently reported about the billion dollar government reviews, but they have not said how the Government will help relieve some of the economic stress that the Premier acknowledges is being felt by households and businesses.

I repeat what I said in this House in November 2021, Madam Speaker that inflation hits our society's poorest, and the most vulnerable, the hardest. As costs rise due to inflation, so must government support, and so let us, in the next budget, increase the assistance given to those now receiving the \$950 ex-gratia assistance. Let's be bold. Let's put it to \$1,500. For most, this is their only income and they are barely getting by today. What I have recommended is about the same percentage increase as we did when we were in Office, and taking it from \$550 to \$950 a month. In my thinking, it is something achievable.

You see, Madam Speaker, while we see that inflation might be moderating or declining, it only means that costs are rising at a slower pace than they were previously. It does not mean that prices have come back down, or that they will come back down. In fact, history tells us they won't. It is unlikely, highly unlikely, that the prices of every day goods and services,

including food and housing, will return to where they were in 2020 so one of two things must happen:

- Everyone is going to have to adjust to the new realities of the prices we pay; or
- Businesses, and even government, are going to have to dig deeper to pay employees more for the service and the work that they provide.

Recent news from the US indicates that the slowing rate of inflation primarily reflects the impact of lower fuel prices, which have been declining sharply since the peak of June 2022. Energy cost dropped 6.4 over the past year, however, the annual food index is still up 8.5 per cent in the US over the last year— and Madam Speaker, we are already seeing that oil prices and prices of fuel are starting to rise again to new peaks in the United States with the recent reduction/ production cuts in the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries. I suspect that when the ESO publishes their next set of inflation numbers, we will see a similar trend here.

Government cannot fix inflation that we import, but there are ways to give people some much-needed relief. So, I again urge the Premier in the next budget, to temporarily remove the duties on fuel, whether used at the gas pumps, or by the utility companies; that gives some real relief. If he doesn't believe, or if he thinks it is a bad idea, I would welcome hearing other solutions that the Government might put forward to assist those who are so desperately feeling the pinch of inflation.

My colleagues may speak more on the traffic situation Madam Speaker, but I am disappointed with the slow approach by the Member who had responsibility for transport. The new Minister responsible for transport, the Member for North Side, has sensibly continued the plans of the past Administration, regarding road work and that has benefited his reputation for action; but again, Madam Speaker, the roadwork plans he has completed began under the now Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

We shall see now, how well he does with regard to the task of modernising public transportation and though I remain disappointed at the Government's refusal to consider any of the proposals put forward when the traffic issue was last debated in this House, the report prepared under the previous Administration is there for them to consider nonetheless. We wait to see how swiftly the Minister moves forward with any plans to relieve traffic. The Member for Red Bay has filed a Private Member's Motion that we believe can help with this issue— that is for the Government to consider requiring private schools to utilise school buses like public schools. I look forward to hearing the debate during this Meeting.

The increased level of crime is a real issue in our communities and this too, needs attention. No excuse about the Governor being responsible for security removes elected Members from also bearing some re-

sponsibility in the eyes of our constituents and let's remember, we hold the purse strings. We must use whatever means of persuasion that we can to influence positive results regarding security for all who live in our Islands, including increasing resources if they are needed.

There are other looming issues of concern to our Islands, Madam Speaker, that need more than promises to act. That is what we saw from the last SPS, Madam Speaker. Let me go on to mention a few of the looming concerns that affect an important and fast-growing part of our population— that is Caymanians over the age of 65.

According to the 2021 census, the number of over 65 in the Cayman Islands population has nearly doubled in just a decade. These are our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and neighbours. Indeed, the generation that built our Islands. If we are lucky enough and we all get to that age someday— some of us here are already close to it, including me; so the issues that worry those over 65 will one day affect all of us. What are some of those worries?

Madam Speaker, we know that the current pensions' regime needs to be reviewed and a new direction taken to deal with the needs of retired Caymanians. Most of our people will unlikely have enough of a pension to live comfortably in retirement over the course of their remaining lifetime. This is an issue now, and it will only get worse. The pandemic has certainly made this much worse and brought it to the fore. We need to hear what the Government is planning to do about tackling it, but I note that they spoke about reviewing the Pensions legislation.

The health insurance regime is also a concern with insurance companies focused on serving younger people in good health, not older retirees. What is Government contemplating to assist elderly Caymanians on a fixed-income pension to obtain quality, affordable, healthcare in their retirement years? It needs considering and may need a somewhat radical solution in order for it to work.

Madam Speaker, I have to say within the past 6/8 years that I have been in this House I have seen, and we see it almost with increasing regularity, the number of people who no longer are able to afford healthcare coverage because of the increased cost. Whether people are even covered, the insurance company routinely rejects them once they get to a certain age and the only thing available to them is the standard health insurance contract and Madam Speaker, we know the inadequacies of that. We hear it and see it all the time.

Sickness in old age can financially cripple a family; I have seen it happen. Not just the elderly, but also the extended family who may be caring for their elderly.

A recent newspaper article reported that in the Caribbean, cases of dementia are expected to increase 150 per cent by 2050. Cayman is no exception. Madam



Speaker, dementia is an increasing health problem in our Islands and we need to focus on this as keenly as we are on preventing and treating heart disease, strokes, and cancer. There is also a huge need for facilities to help care for dementia patients and for the ageing. Are these health issues being looked at by the Government, particularly by the Minister of Health and Wellness? I hope to hear from her with regard to what her plans are with regard to these issues.

Madam Speaker, we have much to look forward to if the Premier and his Government are going to deliver on this SPS and we have to wait and see, over the next two years, how much they are able to achieve for our people, but I asked earlier whether the actions of this Government were making a difference in the lives of Caymanians. That is surely the yardstick by which a government is judged and it is not just my proposed test for this PACT Government.

In his message at the start of the 2021 statement, the Premier wrote, "*We are committed to improving the lives and welfare of all our people. It is our mandate, and what all of our broad policy outcomes are aimed at.*" UNVERIFIED QUOTE

I ask the same question as when I set out with my debate on this policy statement: After half the term is over, do you feel better off? Has your life and your welfare been enhanced? Are you confident that the PACT can put aside their differences and that the Premier can be allowed to lead his team to achieve, in the next two years, what he has not been able to do in the first two? Madam Speaker, as the saying goes, the buck really stops with the Premier, and I know he accepts that.

In my contribution, I have acknowledged that there are some achievements in the credit column of the PACT Government. Individual Ministers may perhaps believe they might have achieved more over the last two years had there been strong support; were there a government that was united and working together.

Madam Speaker, there is a warning common on most modern investment projects that past performance is no guarantee of future returns, however, Madam Speaker, in most walks of life we recognise that unless something fundamental changes, the best predictor of future performance is the past.

I hope the Government is able to transform the policies in this Strategic Policy Statement; that he is able to translate them into what is a very coherent and purpose-driven budget that will allow the Government to deliver on these projects, deliver on their commitments— to deliver on their policies. Madam Speaker, the challenges that face the country are far too big.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak? Does any other Member wish to speak? Does any other Member wish to speak? Does the mover of the motion wish to exercise his right of reply?

Sorry, Member for George Town South. I didn't notice that you had indicated you wanted to speak.

**Ms. Barbara E. Conolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to those parts of the Premier Strategic Policy Statement which concern education and social affairs. I will begin, Madam Speaker, by thanking the Premier for sticking with a policy direction on education taken by the Progressives during our last two terms in Office.

For too long in this country education has been a political football. Successive governments chopped and changed policy direction. New initiatives were introduced then abandoned, the instability that created meant teachers were unclear about what they were expected to do, and the result was that our students suffered. The last two Progressives-led Government's finally brought some much-needed stability to the education system, and some real vision for improvement.

Minister Rivers put in the hard yards during the first term to update the legislation and to establish baselines for improvements in schools. During the second term, Minister O'Connor-Connolly implemented a series of reforms that built up on Minister Rivers' foundation. Those reforms included the changes in the national curriculum and improving the pay and training of teachers so that Cayman could recruit, retain and develop the high-quality teachers that our students deserve.

I am delighted, Madam Speaker, that both the Minister herself and the policy direction we put in place have been maintained by the PACT Government. I say that not simply because this sees the continuation of the Progressives' policies, but because there is very clear evidence that those policies were working. Let me highlight the position as we left Office. Madam Speaker.

By the end of the last round of school inspections, there were no longer any public schools in the Cayman Islands graded as weak. When we began this process, the baseline assessments carried out under Minister Rivers found that most public schools would be placed in special measures were they in the United Kingdom. In our high schools in particular, there is strong evidence that our schools are getting better. That is the key to long-term improvement.

The round of inspections of our high schools carried out by the Independent Office of Education Standards Inspections in the spring of 2021 found improvements in all three of our public high schools. Both John Gray and Layman E. Scott Senior High School in Cayman Brac have achieved a rating of Good, and Clifton Hunter also improved, raising its rating from weak to satisfactory. While these improvements are the results of a lot of hard work by staff in our high schools, the consistent pattern of improvement demonstrates that improvement was happening as a result of the Progressives-led Government's programme, not just as a result of ad hoc actions by schools.

Improving schools were also delivering improved results, Madam Speaker. In April of last year, the Minister of Education released their data report for the 2020/2021 academic year—the final year of the Progressives' Administration. In the report, as well as telling the story of that year, the Ministry looked back at the trends and performance over recent years. Looking across a range of indicators for the level of attainment of our 16-year-old students at the end of Year 11, the report found clear trends of improving performance over a five year period.

Again, that trend of improvement indicates that results are getting better because of the systemic measures that successive Progressive-led Governments put in place. So Madam Speaker, a positive picture overall but as we now look to the future there are genuine causes for concern and I believe these must be addressed by the Minister as a matter of urgency.

I am sorry to say that the Premier's speech on the Strategic Policy Statement did little to reassure me that he understands what is necessary to push forward the improvements in education.

In his speech, in response to the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition suggested that some Ministers may be being held back by the lack of leadership that characterises this Government. I wonder if that has been the case in education, Madam Speaker. Maybe now that she has assumed the mantle of Deputy Premier, the Minister of Education will be able to exert more influence and ensure that school improvement gets the focus and resources it needs. I certainly hope that her new duties do not become a distraction from what she needs to get done in her own Ministry.

For today, Madam Speaker, I want to highlight the three key issues that I believe the Minister needs to address most urgently. As the Leader of the Opposition highlighted, Madam Speaker, I point this out in the spirit of constructive challenge and I trust the Minister will see them as such. Now is the time for the Minister to redouble her efforts in the budget discussions that she will be having with the Premier. She must ensure that she secures sufficient new resources to tackle at least these three interrelated issues:

- School improvement;
- The quality of teaching; and
- Improving levels of attainment, especially in mathematics.

Across Cayman's public primary schools we need to ensure that the initial momentum we saw in the drive for improvement is picked up once again. Inspectors noted that in the most recent round of inspections, 11 government primary schools maintained an unchanged satisfactory rating. Only one government primary school improved its rating over the period, as the Joanna Clark Primary School went from weak to satisfactory. That is totally unacceptable.

We all recognise that the recovery from COVID and the introduction of a new national curriculum

across primary schools were factors that disrupted progress, Madam Speaker, and we all can concur with that. In the circumstances, maintaining the satisfactory rating might, in itself, represent something of an achievement, but both of these issues are now passed, and we must now ensure that the pace of improvement is picked up once more.

We have rightly set an ambition that all of our public schools should be rated good or better. Indeed at the last election, the Minister and I both campaigned on a manifesto that sought to achieve that milestone in the lifetime of this Parliament. Is the Minister still committed to that target? If she is, what is she doing to reinvigorate improvement activity?

I have pointed out previously some of the systemic changes that will enable further improvement; one of those is the necessary reform of governance arrangements for our public schools. This is something that appeared as part of the first PACT Strategic Policy Statement, but has not been delivered. I have tabled a question for this sitting, Madam Speaker, asking the Minister to update the House on her plans. I look forward to hearing her answer in due course, but systemic structural change is only part of what must happen next.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, from a Ministry perspective, perhaps it is the easy part. Such changes only really help if we can improve what is going on in the classrooms, where learning actually happens. What then must we do to see the necessary improvements there, Madam Speaker? There is one significant clue from the inspectors' work that illustrates what is necessary.

The inspectors found that the quality of teaching in primary schools, in particular, is not improving fast enough. As we consolidate the introduction of the new national curriculum in primary schools, we must ensure that the quality of teaching improves alongside it. As I said just now, Madam Speaker, support for teachers so that they could improve their classroom practice, was the centre piece of the last Progressive Government's approach.

I am not clear that this is still true of the current Government's strategy, and yet it must be, Madam Speaker. The most important factor in improving levels of attainment in education is to improve the quality of teaching. I urge the Minister to redouble her efforts in that regard.

Similarly, while the Ministry's last data report showed an encouraging overall improving trend in results, a closer look at the data shows there is still much work to be done. To remind the House, Madam Speaker, the expected national standard at Year 11 is the achievement of five or more Level-II subjects including Mathematics and English.

While there is a clear trend of improvement in the achievement of the national standard, the rate at which this indicator is improving needs to increase sig-

nificantly if Caymans schools are to be regarded as delivering the quality of education that their students, our students, deserve. Students need to get to the standard level, including achieving the necessary levels in English and Math if they are to maximise future job opportunities.

Those core skills are vital, not just for the digital industries that are held up as being the future for our Islands— they are important skills for jobs in retail, in tourism, and in a range of service jobs. And we know from what employers tell us, that too many high school leavers are still not sufficiently skilled in those core disciplines to be as successful as we all want them to be in their future lives.

The single most important thing we could do would be to drive up levels of attainment in mathematics. It is clear from the data presented by the Ministry, that the key issue holding back overall performance is low-pass rates for mathematics. Improving mathematics attainment levels would improve both the level of national performance, and the life chances of those students concerned.

I raised the issue of mathematics directly with the Minister through questions I have asked in this House, Madam Speaker. I have been told that action is being taken, but it seems to me that there is still not a clear and consistent focus on the issue. I have previously publicly challenged the Minister to develop and implement a new national strategy for mathematics. The individual actions that the Minister has previously pointed to will not achieve all that is necessary, without such a comprehensive strategy.

Madam Speaker, I know first-hand how much hard work has gone into improving Cayman schools. I can attest to that. I have seen it from the Minister herself, from her Ministry team, from the Department of Education Services (DES), and the Office of Education Standards (OES). Most of all, I have seen it from our school leaders and our teachers; but now is not the time to take our collective foot off the gas.

The evidence of improvement that we saw resulting from the last Progressives-led Government should not be a cause for complacency now. If we fail to keep up the momentum for change, we risk our schools slipping backwards once again and I don't think any of us over on this side or over on the Government side would want that to happen.

It is a small thing perhaps, Madam Speaker, but I want to raise one thing that I think may indicate that there is not enough focus on driving improvement in the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, here we are at the end of April, and when I checked at the start of this week, I found that we are still awaiting the data report for the 2021-2022 Academic Year. These reports should be instrumental in driving improvement across our education system. They highlight where individual schools should look to raise standards and they indicate where more is needed from the Ministry, both to challenge and

to support schools. If we wait until we are just about to start the next set of exams before we release the analysis of exams taken the previous year, we are always going to be behind the curve.

I fear this failure illustrates the lack of urgency that I have been talking about, Madam Speaker. I would urge the Ministry to accelerate their analytical work and publish their data report in a more timely fashion in future years.

Perhaps more importantly, I would encourage the Ministry not just to publish the data. Helpful though that is, I believe they should also publish a comprehensive response to the data that sets out what they propose to do to build on areas of strength and tackle areas of weakness revealed in the data. In that way, Madam Speaker, the Ministry would address my concerns about pace directly, and they would reassure the country that every effort is being made to continue to drive up educational standards and improved educational attainment for our young people. Madam Speaker that is what our country needs— that is what our young people deserve.

I would like to now turn to financial assistance for those in need. Madam Speaker, as my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition, indicated in his remarks at the start of this debate, we on this side of the House recognise that the Government has in recent months made a significant step forward in terms of social assistance. I refer to the passing of the Financial Assistance Act last October, which went some way towards creating a modern, fit-for purpose legislative framework for future welfare provision in our Islands.

The Progressive Opposition supported that legislation when it came to the House and the Minister deserves praise for steering this important legislation through. We understand the complexities of the work involved. I recall occasions in the then-government Caucus when the former Member for Prospect, as a Counsellor at the time, would update us on progress with this necessary work to create a new financial assistance programme which he was leading on behalf of the government. What the counsellor described showed that the myriad of legislation that governed approach to go to social assistance in Cayman was hopelessly out of date.

There was no consistency between different laws over things like eligibility criteria, for example, while some of the requirements placed on both the applicant and the staff dealing with them were unnecessarily bureaucratic and cumbersome. An overhaul of that legislation was therefore essential. The work to complete that task was well under way when the pandemic struck.

At that point, it was inevitable that all the attention of the relevant civil servants in the Needs Assessment Unit (NAU), and elsewhere, was rightly focused on meeting the immediate needs for relief rather than on long-term reform. It was therefore left for the new

Minister to get that work over the line, and as I have said, we welcome the resulting legislation.

We were, in truth, a little critical that it took 18 months after taking Office before the legislation was presented; however, I understand that for the NAU the additional work associated with the pandemic had a long tail, and that perhaps the delay was understandable. What has surprised me, Madam Speaker, now that a new Financial Assistance Act is in place— and I think the Leader of the Opposition mentioned earlier— is that it is taking so long to put the regulations in place.

The House will recall that the legislation we passed is only a framework. The detail that will guide the operations of the new framework in practice will be set out in regulations. I had assumed that one of the good reasons that might lie behind the delay in bringing forward the legislation itself was that the regulations were being worked up in parallel. That would have made sense, Madam Speaker, as it would have allowed for swift implementation of the new Act. However, here we are, six months on from the passing of the Act, and it seems that no regulations are in place. The Bill we debated listed 14 sets of regulations that Cabinet needs to pass, to give real substance to the changes that the Bill envisaged. They covered everything from eligibility criteria to the categories of assistance to appeals procedures. The scale and breath of what is not included in the legislation itself was clearly immense.

Madam Speaker, this underlines the need for transparency and scrutiny over what is to be dealt with via regulation. I hope the Minister will bring forward the necessary regulations as a matter of urgency, Madam Speaker, and that before they are passed by Cabinet, the draft regulations will be subject to consultation.

The Minister when he was Deputy Chief Officer at the Ministry would have heard my colleague, the former Premier, say that the purpose of reform of social assistance should be to ensure that government gets the right help to the right people at the right time. We welcome the passing of the legislation as a necessary first step, but we must now be clear how that new legislation will help drive forward a more efficient and effective social assistance operation.

I would therefore ask the Minister what specific objectives he has set for the new Department following the commencement of this legislation, so that we can determine whether the framework he has put in place is achieving what was intended. Is the Minister also willing to publish monitoring data to inform us and the country as to whether the objectives he has set are being met?

Of particular relevance in light of the SPS' financial projections, is the Ministry's ability now to secure the investment necessary to support improvements in the operational effectiveness of the new Department the Act established. Madam Speaker, the key to achieving the objective of getting the right help to the right people at the right time is not just to change the

legislative framework for social assistance, but to invest in change in the administration of the new framework.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, we have reached the time of 4.30 and I have received notice that it is the wish of Members that the business of the House continue beyond this time.

Honourable Premier, can I have a motion for the suspension of Standing Order 10(2)...

### Suspension of Standing Order 10(2)

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, thank you. I rise to move the suspension of Standing Order 10(2) so that the business of the House may continue past the hour of interruption.

**The Speaker:** The question is that Standing Order 10(2) be suspended to enable the business of the House to continue beyond the hour of 4.30p.m.

All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, no.

**AYES.**

**The Speaker:** The Ayes have it.

Please continue, Member for George Town South.

**Ms. Barbara E. Conolly:** Thank you Madam Speaker.

Members across this House will be aware, from their constituents, of the problems that are experienced in trying to access assistance when it is needed from the NAU, as was the new Department as it is now. Those difficulties cannot simply be blamed on the staff in the Department; rather, they occur because the systems and processes that are operated in the NAU are out of date and are now inefficient and ineffective.

When in government, we put in place temporary improvements in the NAU during our term, but were cognisant that the introduction of the new legislation would be the time to invest in major change. Will the Minister now commit to driving through the necessary changes so that the new Department can deliver the real objectives of social assistance with efficiency and effectiveness?

At a minimum, the required investment should include ensuring the reengineering of all processes to be used in the new Department, so that as the new legislation comes into effect, those processes are lean and efficient. That must be tied to investment in new IT that enables better accessibility for claimants and recipients, more efficient processing of claims, automated payment of approved claims, and better management and control.

On that subject, Madam Speaker, thanks to work began by the previous Administration, the NAU was able to launch an online application portal at the

end of 2021. I am aware that that online application process, is not for everyone and that, in particular, for those who are struggling financially, it may prove more difficult to get online; however, the intention behind the creation of the portal was to make the process easier and that over-time, this would benefit more and more people. I have not seen any data from the Ministry or the Department on the take up and effectiveness of the portal for applicants. I hope the Minister might be able to share some information with the House on trends in the usage of the portal and whether applicants are finding it helpful.

Finally, the last vital component of driving through the changes that are necessary is a comprehensive training programme for all staff so that they fully understand the new legislation and regulations, and so they can operate the new processes and IT systems effectively. I believe that as a former senior civil servant in the Ministry, the Minister will recognise the value of the suggestions I am making.

I suspect that I do not really need to tell him what is necessary, however, I am conscious that the Premier himself now holds the purse strings and we know, Madam Speaker, that this PACT Government has not always been able to hold together the internal discipline it needs to discuss and agree collective priorities.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Ms. Barbara E. Conolly:** My purpose in being very specific in this public forum about what it will take to improve Caymans financial assistance system, is to press on the Premier, the need to loosen those purse strings and to ensure that the budget proposals that I expect the Minister to be bringing forward in the coming weeks are supported and properly funded.

I want to give some further credit to the Minister, as I am aware that the current budget for 2022-23 included money for process improvements that would be made by the NAU.

During last year, I noted the introduction of the continuation certificate for those clients whose long term disability means they are likely to remain dependent upon financial assistance. This is a worthwhile change and I welcome it as making a positive difference for some in our community who find themselves in the most challenging of circumstances.

Having dealt with those issues relating to the work of the Ministers of Education and of Investment, Innovation and Social Development separately, I want to close by raising an issue that concerns both of them. That issue, Madam Speaker, is early years' support.

I have previously raised questions with the Minister of Education about the development of the early years' curriculum and the provision of nursery and reception classes. I was pleased that in response to my questions, the Minister was able to point progress. As in so many cases, this work has built upon what was

achieved by the previous Progressives-led governments.

Under the last government, in September 2019, the Department of Education Services introduced a pilot nursery programme for three year olds at Creek and Spot Bay Infant School. The focus in that pilot was rightly on the emotional and social development of young children and I am pleased with the SPS today that on one of the outcomes (improving education to promote lifelong learning and greater economic mobility) the Premier is proposing increasing and strengthening early education programmes by establishing nurseries at East End Primary School and the Edna Moyle Primary School.

Obviously, the pilot programme in Creek and Spot Bay must be working and is a positive proposal or pilot programme, however, it is obvious, Madam Speaker, that such development is influenced by more than just what happens in an educational setting. We must, therefore, look beyond the Education Ministry, and I urge the two Ministers to commit themselves to working together, and with their colleagues, to produce a comprehensive government-wide strategy for early years' development. It requires leadership from both of them, since such a strategy needs to address support for families, not just provide more places in schools.

All available international evidence highlights the central importance of early years' development to a child's subsequent learning and future achievement. We do not want to see government taking over the responsibilities of parents, but we all know that many families need more help and support. Without a comprehensive approach, the effectiveness of the one-off actions taken within education is limited, so Madam Speaker, will the Ministers commit to this honourable House and to this country, that they will bring forward a comprehensive cross-government strategy for early years' development?

The Leader of the Opposition explained to the House that by his own measure, the Premier's dithering and lack of leadership means that he is simply paying lip service to future generations.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Ms. Barbara E. Conolly:** The Leader's remarks, of course, referred to the Premier's failure to make progress with a new National Development Plan which he has promised his Government would deliver.

I recognise it is for the Premier to establish the Government's priorities; however, in my view, if he wants to stop paying lip service, the best lip service the Premier could do for future generations of Caymanians is to give them the best possible start in life, Madam Speaker. That should be the purpose of the new early years strategy I have described.

Madam Speaker, in the absence of any leadership on this issue from the Premier, I urge the Ministers of Education, and Investment, Innovation, and Social

Development, to develop and implement that strategy as a matter of priority.

I thank you Madam Speaker for this opportunity to make my contribution to these two most important subjects, which are education and social development.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Member.

Before I continue, I want to remind Members of Standing Order 32 (1) in relation to standing when a Member wishes to speak. I just want to ensure that I don't overlook a Member, so if you wish to speak, please don't just turn your mics on, but actually stand, and then I will call your name.

Does anyone else wish to speak? The honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West:** Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, during my years of school in New York, when I first arrived there, I was reminded of a story where there is this Italian immigrant who, while in Italy, dreamt of going to America because someone told him that the streets in America were paved with gold. When he arrived in America, he found out three things:

1. The streets of America were not paved with gold;
2. The streets in America were not paved at all; and
3. They expected him to pave them.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to start out first by putting certain things into context, because at the end of the day, we learn in accounting very early that revenue is vanity, profit is sanity, but cash is reality. In short, Madam Speaker, it takes cash to care. Simple as it is, I can make that anymore clearer. You can have the best intentions as a government and as Members of this honourable House, but if you don't have the cash, you can't care for your people. It's that simple.

Madam Speaker, I actually had a long time to think about this SPS, and the remarks I have today I would say are probably influenced by my wife this morning. When I was leaving, she came with a lint brush and as she was brushing the suit off she said to me, '*Chris, be nice*'. She noticed that I was wearing the red tie and normally, colleagues will tell you that whenever you wear the red tie it is normally because you expect to speak, you want to look good and everything; but of course, I wore the red tie today because we were taking the Parliament photos and everyone knows the significance of this red tie to me and my late father.

Madam Speaker, before I get into my remarks, I want to clarify a few things that were actually said by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. While well-

intentioned, I think it would be irresponsible of me to allow those statements to go unchecked.

Madam Speaker, I want to make reference—actually, I took a picture of it so it is easier. I want to make reference to the forecasts that the Government was working with and Madam Speaker. I say that in light of the fact that none of us in here have a crystal ball and I have seen first-hand during my two years being part of the PACT Government, the hard work that is done by the Economics and Statistics Office and the team that they have. I do recognise that when we receive these forecasts, it is not always as accurate as we would like it, but nonetheless, they can only make the forecast based on information that they have at the time.

I say that to say, Madam Speaker, that I looked at the 2020-2021 budget that was actually delivered in this honourable Parliament by the Leader of the Opposition and then Minister of Finance. In that budget, Madam Speaker, I am going to give you the forecast that was used by him at that time: For the Cayman Islands they were projecting a Consumer Price Index [CPI] inflation rate of 3.1 per cent for 2019; 2.5 per cent for 2020; 2 per cent for 2021 and 1.8 per cent for 2022.

I say that to say, Madam Speaker, that the former Leader of the Opposition who was Minister of Finance at the time presented to this honourable House a forecast of 1.8 per cent inflation rate for 2022; that was the information and the forecast given to him at the time and that was the information he presented to this honourable House. Of course, we all know now that the 2022 inflation was nowhere close to the 1.8 per cent.

Now, do we get up and throw away the good work that the ESO has? No. Why? We have just seen recently that Janet Yellen (the [US] President's own Treasury Secretary) has completely gotten inflation wrong in the United States. I mean, at the time in which you are putting together your numbers, you don't factor in wars, you do not factor in these different issues; and we have to recognise that the world that we are living in, is a different place than it was back then.

Of course, back then they even had economic growth for 2020 for the Cayman Islands projected at 2.3 per cent. Of course, we all know what happened in 2020, the economy contracted by over five per cent because of COVID. I say that to say, Madam Speaker, that you will not always get these forecasts right, but I want to publicly thank the team of the Economics and Statistics Office, led by a very competent director, in the work that they have done. I do not believe that at any point they would try to mislead this Government or any previous government, based on what they have done.

Equally, Madam Speaker, I think the record can actually show, if there is one person who has spent much time even challenging the ESO numbers, it would have been me, and I draw reference even to after the 2021 election, when we were looking at the vaccination rates of what the Caymanian population would have been. We decided to put a target of 71,000. I remember

the then honourable Member for Red Bay, basically saying that that number was too high, and if the population turned out to be 71,000 he would have bought us lunch. I have not gotten that lunch yet, but of course the census proved that the population was indeed 71,000. I say that to say: you can only make decisions based on the information you have at the time.

Again, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition would understand this: when we previewed the pre-election economic forecast that was done just prior to the 2021 general election, it said that the government would have a deficit of \$98 million for the year. Of course, when the government came in at the time they realised that not included in the forecasted expenses was \$35 million of additional stipend, so the real challenge you were looking at was not a \$98 million deficit, but rather \$133 million in deficit.

Naturally, that would give anyone pause. I can say it actually gave me sleepless nights and something we came up with to really control costs, was to put in a policy where any expenses above \$5,000 had to be approved by the Minister. As Members of this honourable House would be aware, in Finance Committee the funds allocated are actually allocated to the Minister. It is the Minister who has to give account for the funds that are given to him.

I can tell people for a fact that some Ministers I know looked at it very carefully. I know that Minister Bryan went through his accounts line by line every single month. He is one of them who did not care where he was. Even if he was travelling, he took the time out to call— *“How are my numbers looking, how is this, how is this, no surprises”*, and so forth. I can say the same for Minister Jay. [Ebanks], in terms of going through his numbers. Many Ministers were going through their numbers line by line to control costs. At the end of 2021, Madam Speaker, the deficit was not \$133 million; it was not \$98 million; it actually came down to \$15 million deficit.

Equally, Madam Speaker, the pre-election forecast said that the country would have had a deficit of \$58 or \$59 million for 2022. I can say to you that the government didn't have a deficit of \$58 million, it actually had a surplus of \$47 million. So Madam Speaker, each of the first two years the government beats the forecast by over \$100 million; and if you look at those years in totality, it would have been over \$200 million that it came in better than forecasts.

Madam Speaker, I say that to say: before you can even start looking at policies the first thing you need to do is figure out how you are going to pay for them. As I said before, it actually takes cash to care.

Now, Madam Speaker, I can tell you upfront that I am looking at the numbers and the forecasted results would probably give me pause. I guess when we go through the detailed budget we will get a better understanding of what drives those numbers, but I can tell you that off the bat, I am concerned about the numbers. I am concerned in terms of the level of expenditure

within the country. Again, we will get a chance to dig into it when the budget comes later this year and, again, I'm going from memory.

As the Leader of Opposition indicated, we only received this document today and it is quite an extensive document, so we pretty much will have to debate it on the fly to some extent, which is fine, because the Standing Orders actually don't allow much reading. I don't really mind having this discussion, giving contribution to this debate— being environmentally friendly, we are almost being paperless to some extent.

Madam Speaker, I want to say this: When we look at the full financial year pre-COVID in 2019, the government had total expenses of \$701 million, roughly \$862 million in revenues, and roughly about \$160 million in surplus, but the number I want to take away from 2019, Madam Speaker, is the \$701 million. Naturally when the Government came in, in 2021, we were still in the COVID [pandemic], still a massive amount of assistance being given to many people within the country— the displaced tourism workers and so forth.

As a result, Madam Speaker, total expenses in 2021 was \$978 million. Again, I am only going by memory at this point, so I don't want anyone throw me off, if I am off by a little bit; but, in a nutshell Madam Speaker, in a two-year period total expenses in this country went up by \$277 million. Naturally, again, that in itself would be a concern.

In 2022, Madam Speaker, total expenses were actually reduced to \$973 million so it came down by \$5 million and the target at the time before my departure, Madam Speaker, was roughly for \$915 million this year. I see that the amount now is \$975 or thereabouts. So again, we will wait until the budget to get a much better idea in terms of what is driving the numbers, but what I want to say Madam Speaker is this: If I look at the total government financial activity between 2018 and 2022, that five year period, government increased total expenses by \$301 million and increased revenues by \$183 million. If you were to take that five year run rate and map it over another five years over a 10 year period, you are talking about revenues of \$260 million and expenses of \$600 million creating a shortfall of \$240 million over 10 years. None of us know what the world will look like in ten years.

One of the litmus tests being imposed at the time that I look out for, Madam Speaker, is what we call maintaining positive jaws. What is positive jaws? In a nutshell, Madam Speaker, it is when your percentage increase in revenues are greater than your percentage increase in cost. In other words, if you have your expenses growing faster than your revenues, at some point it will overtake it. It is just a matter of time before it will overtake it and for countries around the world where that has happened, unless you find oil like Guyana, it would be very difficult to reverse that trend.

I say that Madam Speaker, and again just going by memory, if I look at government revenues from

2021 compared to 2020, government at the time increased revenues by about 20 per cent and increased expenses by 14 per cent so there was still a +6 per cent in terms of positive jaws. If you look at 2022 compared to 2021, Madam Speaker, government increased revenues by 6.1 per cent and cost was actually reduced by \$5 million; so again, there was a differential of 6 per cent in terms of positive jaws for both '22 compared to '21 and 21 compared to '20. That is the trajectory that you want.

If I were to look at the previous government, just comparing 2018 to 2019, during that period of time, the government actually had increased revenues by roughly 3 per cent and increased cost by over 6 per cent so it was not trending in the direction that you actually want. Madam Speaker, don't care what plans you have, as I said before, it still requires cash to care and when I look at page 51 of the compliance responsible for fiscal management 2026, Madam Speaker, it scares me.

First of all, we need to maintain a debt/service ratio below 10 per cent—in 2026 we will be at 9.9 per cent; and we need to maintain cash above 90 days—by 2026, we will be at 90.1 days. Madam Speaker, one emergency, one major hurricane, one disaster, one *anything*, it is sailing very close to the wind, and being this close will prevent future governments from moving forward on any major things. Again, I will wait until the budget to really drill into these numbers to get a better understanding

Madam Speaker,—and again, I am going by memory so they can always double check it—when I look at the PPM's (Progressives) last two years in Office, to give credit where credit is due, they had— well, taking the COVID part out— roughly \$260 million in surplus and their total capital and equity spent was \$165 million. In short, Madam Speaker, they financed their capital and equity injections from surpluses and again, give credit where credit is due, that is the right way to finance anything. Basically, you do it with your extra money.

Recognising, Madam Speaker, that after the 2021 elections, with the COVID [pandemic], et cetera, Cayman definitely had its own challenges. If I look at 2021 and 2022, during that period of time, looking at the \$47 million surplus for 2020 and a \$50 million deficit for 2021, the combined surplus was actually \$32 million between those first two years, but the capital and equity spend was over \$300 million during that period of time. Again, Madam Speaker, it comes with its own challenges in the sense that we are no longer financing capital and equity with surpluses, which is where we were prudent in the past.

I look at this SPS, Madam Speaker, and I think the total amount of surpluses as actually budgeted during the SPS period is roughly \$77 million for 2024, \$98 million and \$103 million, so that's roughly \$200-something million— probably \$250, \$260 million of surpluses thereabouts.

[Inaudible interjection]

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders:** Yes.

Equally, Madam Speaker, we are talking about \$300 million again of capital and equity injections. So once again, Madam Speaker, we have seen over this SPS period that the total amount of surpluses being generated do not cover the capital and equity. Madam Speaker, if you are spending on capital and equity and is not coming from surpluses, it means you are taking money from savings. When you factor that in, we are going down a road that makes it very difficult and unsustainable.

Madam Speaker, Members of this honourable House and the public would have seen the press release that went out concerning the government's financial performance for 2022— \$1.02 billion in revenues and the surplus was \$47 million. Now, Madam Speaker that was one of the press releases that I could not find the right words at the time to send that message out and thus the reason that result wasn't posted when I was there as Minister of Finance but the new Minister of Finance, the Honourable Premier sent it out.

Madam Speaker, what gave me the most pause in that \$47 million surplus is that when you break down how it came about, \$45 million out of that \$47 million surplus was largely better-than-expected stamp duty collection and better-than-expected work permit revenues. In short Madam Speaker, \$45 million out of \$47 million was basically selling Caymanian jobs and Caymanian land and that, Madam Speaker, is unsustainable.

Equally, Madam Speaker, when you drill into the 2022 numbers, what is not lost on me is the fact that for the revenues that we collect from Customs we didn't hit the target and as you know, Madam Speaker, our tax base is largely consumption driven, which kind of indicated, for the first half of 2022 it was running around 17 per cent above what it was the previous year, and in the second half of 2022 you saw the slowdown. It indicated that the effects of inflation were beginning to take place; you could see where the consumption rate had started going down and the customs duty rate had fallen from the previous six months.

It basically said that we were, I don't want to use the word *slowdown*, but we were looking at how people are not being as spendthrift as they were before. When you look at it and break it down, people have less money to spend. I mean, interest rates alone, Madam Speaker, is a challenge. I know people whose mortgage payments have gone up several hundred dollars per month. That in itself is a challenge.

Madam Speaker, when you talk about future proofing, there is a conversation that we need to have in this House, and it has to be an honest conversation.

I encourage every Member in this House to look at an exercise that Bermuda did, I think back in 2013 or thereabouts. They set up something called the Spending and Government Efficiency Commission



(SAGE) and Madam Speaker, it looked at the different structures within the entire Bermuda economy. It was a very honest discussion they had amongst themselves, and in truth and in fact Madam Speaker, it did not paint a pretty picture; it is one report Madam Speaker, that I use as a basis from when I got elected in 2017, to look for those red flags that happened in Bermuda, to ensure that we don't repeat them here in Cayman.

Madam Speaker, when you look at long term sustainability, we have to brace ourselves for this fact. We have seen the United States— and Madam Speaker, I want to make this point: When you talk about countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, et cetera, these are countries that have the ability to turn on their printing presses and print money. They can just crank it up; once they got ink and that cotton paper that money can run. We do not have that luxury here in the Cayman Islands, Madam Speaker, and this is the reason why we have got to be prudent and we have got to be responsible.

Madam Speaker, we have seen the world take aim at the United States (US) for export inflation. As many people know, the US is the reserve currency for global trade around most of the world. About 60 per cent of countries around the world use the US Dollar as their reserve currency. Cayman is no different. Right before our very eyes, Madam Speaker, we are seeing the de-dollarisation of the US [dollar] as a reserve currency. This is not something that we can just push down the road. It is something that we need to be conscious of in the sense of what our currency is going to be like, and what the future is going to be like.

Equally, Madam Speaker, we have seen the US in a situation where they themselves have been battling trying to control inflation and they have been raising interest rates like crazy. Of course, because our dollar is pegged to the US and the majority of deposits in our banks are US dollars, banks here follow suit.

Here's the challenge, Madam Speaker. I want to say to Members and those in the public listening, I want you to look at a website called shadow stats. What that website does, Madam Speaker, is look at the government data and it keeps it steady because what has happened in the US is that you have gone out and you have seen where in some cases it would change the market basket of goods. Now they are even talking about super core inflation. They basically do certain things to manipulate the data that comes out.

When you look at shadow stats, something that jumped out to me was— I think 1980 was the last time the US had a massive amount of increase. I think interest rates went up to about 20 per cent. The problem then, Madam Speaker, is that even though the US interest rate went up to about 20 per cent back then, the total US government debt at the time, in 1980, was just under a trillion dollars. The problem we have today, is that you're talking about \$33 trillion worth of debt and if they drive those interest rates up too much, the federal

government itself may have its own challenges in terms of servicing their own debt.

By now we, and the world would have seen the constant battle in the United States Congress every year, in terms of raising the debt ceiling and the promises that have been made even for the last Speaker to get there, in terms of raising the debt ceiling, et cetera. Madam Speaker, this is a currency that our currency is pegged to, so we need to ensure we put the proper plans in place that, whichever way the world is going, at least we are future-proofing ourselves in that regard. Madam Speaker, these are things going on in the global economy that we cannot ignore.

Equally, Madam Speaker, the normal trend used to be, as soon as the US raised its interest rates, it normally used to result in lower oil prices. The world that we are living in today now, with OPEC and OPEC+ is that as the US raises interest rates, you see OPEC start cutting the supply, as a result keeping the price high. Madam Speaker, when you look at the challenges that even Saudi Arabia has, which is one of the largest members of the OPEC group, in terms of their own survival, they themselves have decided, *you know what, every man for himself and God for us all.*

Madam Speaker, the days of cheap oil are over and if there's any time that the Cayman Islands need to start looking at renewables and reducing dependence on fossil fuel it has to be now because this is not going to change anytime soon in the world; that's just the reality of it, you know what I mean. So when the budget comes out I would very much like to see more investments being made.

Right now, Madam Speaker, we spend over \$200 million a year which leaves this country just to pay for oil and oil-related products. If we can find a way to reduce our dependence and keep it to \$100 million, at least cut it in half, it would be more money going into our own local economy— and more importantly, more money being saved in our people's pockets. Those are the kinds of things that we want to see more of from that standpoint.

Madam Speaker, something that I want to touch on before I move off from the subject dealing with money, is the structure that we have in this country, in terms of how we structure mortgages, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, if people go to the Cayman Monetary Authority (CIMA) website, <https://www.cima.ky> and look at the statistics for the Class-A banking and convert it from US to CI, and the last information they had was up to June, last year. Just looking at the domestic, that is residential homes, et cetera, the total amount of deposits that we had, which we would say is local deposits, was equivalent to CI\$2.37 billion — I used the conversion rate of .84 that they had on the website; and the total amount of loans that we had was CI\$2.4 billion in terms of residential. Again, this does not include commercial or government loans, this is just personal residential loans. *\$2.4 billion.*

Now, Madam Speaker, I know some of those loans have a fixed rate because some banks out there have offered a fixed rate product for a maximum of five years. The challenge that we have Madam Speaker, and this is where the structure really has to change, and I am going to say why we do need a capital market in Cayman: To have that amount of loans, even if it is 70, 75 or 80 per cent, subject to interest rate movements—and we have seen the massive increases in a short period of time that has even led to bank foreclosures in the US itself.

It is something that is now unsustainable for an economy of this size to have \$2.4 billion have an increase of 4-5 per cent interest on it in less than a year is a challenge. That is just reality. Madam Speaker, we are in this position because we have what people refer to as a mismatch between assets and liabilities.

In short, Madam Speaker, banks will go out and lend you money for 25-30 years. There is no deposit for 25 or 30 years to match that loan, so in short Madam Speaker, the bank has in essence taken on something they refer to as liquidity risk. In other words, you have taken your liquid cash, and turn it into something illiquid, which is a mortgage, to lend to someone. Most of those are overnight deposits— maybe a one year deposit, maybe five years tops; but either way they are taking short term money and lending it out long term. That in itself creates a risk within itself.

In the United States, they don't have that problem, the reason being that most people can go and get a 15-year or 30-year fixed. I can use my cousin as reference, where she has her mortgage and despite all of these interest rates going up, her mortgage payment has not moved. Why? Because she locked in a 30-year mortgage at 3-point-whatever per cent so she is unaffected, whereas the new guys who are coming in who would want to buy a house or do something would be affected as part of the Federal Reserve System (FED)'s plan to "slow down inflation".

Madam Speaker, we need to sit down and we need to have that honest conversation, in terms of how long are we going to leave the Cayman Islands at risk, especially in the sense of mortgages and so forth that drive the local economy. It is something that we need to have an honest discussion on, and I hope that between now and the budget, the Government would start looking at ways in which they can start putting little things in place. People talking about even bringing back the pension money and so forth— I mean, there is some long-term money right there; again, you see what kind of financing that would be.

Madam Speaker, the long and short of it is that in the US, in most places, the mortgage market is backed by the Bond market. There are times we have seen interest rates in the US have gone up and mortgage rates have even gone down because the bond market behaved differently, but the point I want to make, Madam Speaker, the one takeaway, is that this is too much money to be subject to interest rate shocks.

We need longer term-financing so at least when a person gets a loan and they know the loan is fixed for 3, 4 per cent or whatever, it can be fixed like that for 15, 20, 30 years and that is where we need to start looking at having a capital market.

Madam Speaker, another issue that we need to speak about. When you look at the inflation rate, roughly 49 per cent of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is driven by housing and transportation— in essence, fuel. We need to look at how we can reduce our dependency on it. Mortgages alone, Madam Speaker, housing, is 35 per cent of GDP. So like I said, leaving that much subject to that kind of interest rate shocks, especially looking at the amount of loans that we have right now for where we are, is just something that we need to look at carefully.

The other issue that we need to look at also Madam Speaker, is food security. I know the Minister for Agriculture has been doing a hell of a job, in terms of trying to open up more markets in Central and South America to the Cayman Islands. Many people tell him it makes no sense that these ships pass Cayman going up to the US and then we go up there to buy from them, so it is something I know he is progressing well. I know there is something he is excited about, and even earlier today he gave me an update on some things that are being worked on. I think once the Government gives him the support, we should see some improvement; of course, it will also still depend on the local supermarkets being willing to buy produce from that source.

Again, Madam Speaker, between now and the budget and as we go through the throne speech, et cetera, this is the kind of future proofing that I believe we need to look at where Cayman is concerned in the sense of our own long term stability and viability. We are no longer the Islands that time forgot.

My mother during her lifetime— God bless her. I love her to death— would have seen the population of this country double when she was born probably three or four times during her lifetime. For me, I would say it probably could have doubled maybe two or three times before God probably calls me home. I say that to say, we need to be concerned with the level of population that we have and how we want growth. Which brings me, Madam Speaker, to the next point I want to touch on which is our dependency ratio.

Earlier on, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about Cayman's ageing population. The truth of the fact is Madam Speaker, if we look at Cayman dependency ratio right now and just for the listening public— in essence, it is the part of the working population that takes care of the non-working population. So normally, I think, we look at people less than 15, 16, and older than 65, and that is the working age population that we have.

As it stands right now, we would have a dependency ratio of around 32 per cent which would seem normal compared to other countries; however, Madam Speaker, if we were to take out the expatriate or non-Caymanian population from that number, we

would have a dependency ratio of more than 50 per cent, which would make us one of the highest in the world— or simply put, one of the worst in the world.

Now, based on the last census, we saw where the Cayman fertility rate has gone up to 2.1 per cent which shows that at least we have a growing population, but at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, it is still a transient society and we need to make sure that when you build a foundation for long-term Cayman, it is one that takes into consideration those future shocks because the truth of the fact is, Madam Speaker— and I won't pre-empt the Motion that I filed on health care— that it is something we need to have a real honest conversation about.

Madam Speaker, I am going to serve notice right now; it may not be the politically correct thing to do, but this is something that I expect to be at least started to be looked at by the time we get to the next budget and it has got to be the government's overall spending on health care.

Madam Speaker, again, going from memory, when we look even at the HSA's overall numbers we realise, that from a revenue standpoint the agency collected \$30 million of non-government revenue per year— \$30 million; but when we look at the administrative or non-medical expenses at the HSA, it was around \$60 million per year. In short, Madam Speaker, we are spending \$60 million in administrative costs to collect \$30 million non-government money per year. Over a 10 year period, that is \$300 million.

The reason I bring it up Madam Speaker is because, if you look at the government's forecast this year and the years beyond the output from non-government suppliers (this is the service that government buys from the statutory and government-owned companies), and the performance within SACGs needs to be looked at. I mean, look at the actual numbers. I compared the 2023 forecasts with the approved budget for this year, and even then we can see that civil service salaries, and supplies and consumables— the tools that they use to do their job— actually come in at less than budgeted, but the areas that keep going over are as a result of the famous NGS 55, which in itself is a problem, because the best healthcare plan you can have in this country is actually being indigent.

The problem, Madam Speaker, is that being indigent takes from people's dignity and we talk all the while about closing the dignity gap for our people, so this is another thing; and again, recognising the population that we have, and that we all have one body to live, we need to find ways to take care of it.

Madam Speaker, something that jumped out at me—and again, I am speaking from memory—is when I compared CIMA's 2020 annual report and CINICO's annual report for 2020. There were two things that jumped out at me: One was the total amount of domestic health insurance for that year was \$284 - \$286 million, of that amount, CINICO was responsible for \$102

million and the private sector was responsible for another \$184 million. CINICO at the time had 15,100 customers and the private sector of 50,000 people.

In short, Madam Speaker, CINICO spent \$102 million to insure 15,000 people, and the private sector collected \$184 million to cover roughly 50,000 people so it's either CINICO is paying too much, or the private sector is paying too little or somewhere in the middle.

The point I am making, Madam Speaker, is that we can't continue running a situation where we have privatised profits and socialised losses in this country, where the minute you retire from your job and you got to work from 16 to 65— 49 years of your life— and pay private sector health insurance, and the one time when you actually need health insurance in your golden years, you have to go to CINICO, which has a SCHICK plan that is basically inadequate for your needs at that point and what you find is that, in order for CINICO to remain regulatory compliant, they end up charging civil servants and civil service pensioners more.

In short, Madam Speaker, civil service and civil service pensioners are actually subsidising the retirees from the private sector, so when we look at government cost every year it keeps going up from that standpoint simply because we now have this imbalance; and what we have done, Madam Speaker, is that we have made it mandatory for people to have insurance, but we did not make it mandatory for them to sell it to people and that is where the disconnect comes in.

That's one of the reasons that we have pushed for the expansion of CINICO, for CINICO to go into other areas where it actually makes profit to kind of subsidise, or lessen, the burden on the healthcare side because the whole idea of insurance, Madam Speaker, is to spread risk. Again, these are structural changes that we need to make in order to really future-proof Cayman. It cannot be a situation where we continue business as usual. It does not work, and that is the reality.

Madam Speaker, I noticed that in the SPS the Government showed growth in GDP, tourism, and others, but there was a number that kind of threw me a bit off, namely the growth in unemployment which the last time we measured it was roughly 2.1 per cent. So I am trying to, again, figure out how— and I hope the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Economic Development can deal with this in their closing— it is that we have a growing economy, we have GDP growth, but you also have growth in unemployment. I am trying to figure out how because normally, a growing economy means that you're creating more jobs.

I just want to get a better explanation or understanding as to why we expect the unemployment rate to go up at this time. I mean, there could be a different reason for it, but I would like to get at least a response during closing up for it to make sense to me. I'm sure there is probably a legitimate reason for it, but on the surface of it... Again, we only got this information today, and it is a lot to digest. As such, we will probably end up having more questions than answers, so that's fine.

Madam Speaker, something else that we have to recognise—and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition touched on it—is the issue of under-employment. That has been one of the biggest issues and I do not need to go into that too deep, because I have a Motion coming up in terms of the Fair Employment Commission. Again, I can't take credit for it. It was brought by the previous Minister of Labour, the Honourable Member for Red Bay, Sir Alden [McLaughlin].

Madam Speaker, the reason we believe that such an initiative is necessary is that we need to have an honest conversation about what is going on within the Cayman private sector workplace.

Madam Speaker, we have heard countless criticism on the short-comings and the weaknesses of our education system and I can tell you that much of it is unfounded and unnecessary. People use that, or say something bad about our education system because in some cases they just want an excuse to not hire Caymanians.

Madam Speaker, the reason it has become an issue is— you say the Cayman education system is X— Okay, we hear you, but guess what, Madam Speaker? When our own Caymanian students come back from universities in North America and Europe, they still can't get a job. Is it a situation now that the education systems in North America and Europe are also inadequate, why many of our college students who come back cannot get these meaningful jobs?

You see, Madam Speaker, this is one of the reasons why we need to have this conversation, because we are a service-based economy. Our people depend on selling their services in order to feed their families and if we are denying them the ability to make a fair day's pay for a fair day's work based on their qualification, based on what they can do, then how are we helping our people?

Why is this important, Madam Speaker? The pension that we charge is a percentage of their productivity. If we allow a Caymanian to be underpaid 10, 15, 20, 30 years in the workplace, you know what it does to their pension when you have a contribution that is already inadequate? On top of that, Madam Speaker, we can see from the census that we also have a situation where there is a gap in terms of pay from a gender standpoint. We found, Madam Speaker, that women actually live longer than men; so if women are underpaid and living longer, you see where we are going, in terms of their longevity and their ability to retire?

We have just seen what happened in France, Madam Speaker, where the government was looking to move the retirement age and it was pandemonium over there. Again, Madam Speaker, these are conversations that, while uncomfortable, are conversations that we need to have. Simply put, Madam Speaker, the days of business as usual are over.

We need to have our own SAGE Commission. We need to have our own honest conversation. I can tell you that right now there are many young people

from Bermuda who refuse to go back to Bermuda. Instead, they have basically taken down a side of the Carolinas. At one time I heard that there were more young Bermudans in the Carolinas, than there are in Bermuda. Why? They say they are not going back home to all of that debt and all of the stuff that's waiting on them.

We need to sit down now. Migration is one of the things that we looked at in the census as to why people are leaving Cayman. How many young people do we have, who have basically sit back and their parents say to them *when you finish school don't come home?* You take one and one become two, two become four, and all of a sudden you are in the hundreds and the thousands. This is future productivity.

Bearing in mind, Madam Speaker, that we do not have a direct tax base. We have a system that I think works well, in terms of not taxing directly— I do not support direct taxation. At some point, Madam Speaker, if we don't lay the foundation from now, and the Member for West Bay West will soon tell you, that every time we have a finance problem and the UK government gets involved, the first thing out of their mouth is direct taxation. Let's have the conversation. It is something that we can't ignore.

When I see the ratios get as close to the wind as we are, 9.9 per cent as opposed to 10 per cent— if your revenues are off, you are over. Of course, assuming that you spend the same amount of money. You look at your cash days; again, one major disaster and you are over, assuming you don't cut something else. This is what the conversation needs to be: How do we sit down and put a structure in place, and it is not going to be overnight, Madam Speaker. It has got to be something gradual.

We all recognise, Madam Speaker that the minimum wage needs to go up and I said to the committee at the time, when we were spreading it, *“whatever the number you think it should be let it be. The government of the day can decide how it wants to implement it.”* If they say \$10, you don't move from \$6 to \$10 overnight. You can say, okay, every nine months we will add one dollar or \$1.50 or something, and you brace employers to take aim, to say, *“Well, we know this is coming”*; but either way, Madam Speaker, again, it is one of the things we need to have the honest, uncomfortable conversation about.

We have reached a point right now, Madam Speaker, where expenses in this country, based on this document, are going to pass \$1 billion in central government. In 2019, it was \$701 million. COVID stretched it to \$978 million and the goal is, Madam Speaker: We need to get expenses in this country below the \$900 million mark— and when you look at it, when you take out certain fixed costs, much of it is basically supporting our people. This is why we need to have the conversation with regards to healthcare, because NGS 55— every government knows it— is a problem, but just throwing money at it, throwing money at it, throwing

money at it, cannot be the situation. These are the conversations we need to have.

Now, Madam Speaker, I promised my wife I was gonna be nice—actually she asked me to be nice, and I have something nice to say about our former Governor, Mr. Roper, but you know what, Madam Speaker, I am going to [inaudible] him alone and I will tell you why. I sat down and I thought about it; I was actually going to read out the email exchange between him and me.

As I was pulling it up on the computer, I came across a story and you probably would have heard about this man in the Bible whose name was Jesus. One of his disciples came to him and brought a blind man and Jesus asked the man, how did he see people? He said, *I see them as trees*. Now, Jesus knew the man wasn't seeing right, so he took a little spittle, rubbed it in the man's eyes and asked him, *how do you see people now?* To which the man replied, *I see them as they are*.

Madam Speaker, I will leave this old Caribbean people saying: *See me and come live with me, is two different things*. And that is all I will say in that regard. I will say no more.

[Inaudible interjection]

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders:** Don't worry, I will just leave it at that.

Madam Speaker, honestly, I want to say this to everybody in this House and to the listening public: I wanted to pray for this Government. I wanted to pray that this Government does a very good job, because Madam Speaker the truth of the fact is we cannot afford for this Government or any government to fail. If this Government fails, the country fails. They are going to need help; there is no ifs, and, or buts about that. And I can't get up and have anything bad to say about the government, because I have worked very closely with many of the Members over there.

I can tell you that my good friend for West Bay North loves his kids, he loves the youth, and he is a fighter, Madam Speaker. I can say the same thing about my good friend for George Town Central, Kenneth. I love Kenneth to death. I probably spent much time down in the trenches with Kenneth and I said this on his platform the night when I introduced him.

I remember that February 28<sup>th</sup> article in the Cayman Compass that said over 10,600 work permit were deferred over the past ten months or something to that effect and let me tell you, Madam Speaker, I remember the pressures that were coming to bear from all around. I remember leaving the Caucus meeting that night, Madam Speaker, and I was so upset, I removed myself from the Caucus chat. I was that upset, and the two Members who really stood out to me that night, that I will never forget were the Member for West Bay North, my good friend Bernie Bush, and the Member for George Town Central- Kenneth Bryan.

Madam Speaker, when we look at a Caymanian unemployment rate of 2.1 per cent today, those things do not happen by accident because Madam Speaker, we took the approach—at least I would say I took the approach back then as the Minister of Labour—recognising that we had over 3000 Caymanians at the time on stipend, that if we pushed work permits through, and then the economy opened up and those jobs were occupied or taken, what work would our people have?

Many people were ticked off in the business community, et cetera. It was a problem. I remember a couple of business people coming to me and raising the issue and I was like, *"Guys, guys; hold up. I am the Minister of Labour, I work for the employees. There is a Minister of Commerce, you need to go talk to him. That is not my job. I am not doing that job, I worry about the employees."*

Madam Speaker, it turned out it was one of the best decisions that we actually made, despite the challenges and everything else because, had we not done that, we could not get up today and talk about having a 3.6 per cent Caymanian unemployment rate if we had given away their jobs during that time. The truth of the fact is, Madam Speaker, we saw it in the US and elsewhere, when the stipend was more than what minimum wage was, there was no incentive for anybody to go back, so as a result, that line had to be taken and I am forever in debt to Kenneth and Bernie for standing firm in that regard.

Madam Speaker, unemployment is an issue in this country. Many parents have mortgaged their homes, have taken out loans, to send their kids off to school, to come back to get a better job and the kids are not having that better job and Madam Speaker, we are running the risk of finding ourselves in a situation where the next generation will not do as well as their parents.

Madam Speaker, one of the things that made Cayman unique—and I am one of them who believe in Cayman's exceptionalism—is that our success was never about income inequality. It has always been about income mobility; the ability of our people to work hard, be committed, be dedicated and get their opportunity. Thus I have said over and over again, our goal is not to guarantee equal outcome, but rather to guarantee equal opportunity, and that is what has made Cayman different.

I look at my own family, Madam Speaker, God bless my grandmother when she arrived here in the 1940s and landed in Cayman Brac. She raised ten children and only one of them had an opportunity during his working time to go to university, and that was my uncle George McCarthy. While my mother and a couple of my aunts have gone back since, and have gotten their degree after they retired, during their working life, I can probably say only my Uncle George was really given that opportunity to see where education could have taken him after receiving a college education.

I look at my own cousins or my grandmother's grandchildren. Going from 1 of 10, I think we are probably close to 20 of her grandchildren who are college educated and I can safely say, by the time we look at our great grandchildren, about every one of them is going to be college educated. About 100 per cent of them are going to receive that education but the point I am making, Madam Speaker, to move from 10 per cent to 50 per cent to 100 per cent is what the Cayman story is. It is about income mobility, it is about giving people opportunities,

Madam Speaker, I have had a lot of time of late to reflect, and every March/April, thereabouts, I go through a period of deep reflection because back in 2006 in March/April thereabouts, I actually thought it would have been my last time on this earth. I remember clearly, Madam Speaker, getting up, going to work, and I woke up in George Town Hospital.

I was basically sent home— misdiagnosed but sent home—and the former Member for North Side, Mr. Ezzard Miller, came to visit me one Monday. I will never forget it. He came visit me at home, drove to Shawnette's workplace and said, "Shawnette, Chris needs to go Cleveland Clinic. Pack his bags." We flew out that same Monday evening. By Tuesday morning I was at Cleveland Clinic and they told me I couldn't see a doctor until Thursday.

Madam Speaker, Ezzard being Ezzard, pulled out his phone right there in Cleveland Clinic and dialled 9-1-1; and they sent the ambulance from one side of the hospital to the next side of the hospital to come pick me up and Ezzard said, "*I bet you see a doctor today.*" By Thursday I had my first procedure and by Friday they said I had to have surgery, but Madam Speaker, during that period of time I made the mistake of Googling my sickness and looked at how high the mortality rate was.

I sat down and it took about two hours to dawn on me that I was actually going to die. And I said, *You know what, I am going to do my family a favour, I will just write my obituary for them and save them the trouble* because I did eight years of school in Kingston, which they would not have been able to relate to; I did four years of school in New York, which they would not have been able to relate to so that's 12 years of my life that nobody would have been able to tell a story about so I decided to write the obituary. Madam Speaker, it was when I reached to my relationship with my mother and my relationship with God, that my disposition started to change.

At that point I said, "*You know what, I am the only boy of Rose's five children. God ain't going to dis the Rose. You know, I goin' pull through*"; but at that point, Madam Speaker, when I was writing my obituary, I honestly did not like what I was writing about myself. At that time, I would have just considered myself a corporate animal, and I received an education that was paid for by the people of the Cayman Islands and truthfully, Madam Speaker, I realised then and there, that I

did not give back the Caymanian people their value, and that's what made me decide, coming out of that, to get a bit more involved in politics.

My good friend there, from West Bay West, at the time was always encouraging; West Bay North was always encouraging, and that's how I kind of really decided to go more. I mean, it is one thing writing speeches for Bernie and helping him go through different stuff, but I wasn't as committed as I should have been and that was when I decided I need to start doing more to give back.

Madam Speaker, despite the challenges we have in the Cayman Islands, this is still one of the best places to live and work on this planet. We are not going to get everything right. That's just life, but Madam Speaker, it does not take away from the fact that we still can do well here, given the right tools and what I would like to see, as we drill into the spending for the government, is how do we truly future-proof this country. How do we have that honest conversation?

It's one thing to put the money into education, but we also need to make sure we put the money to ensure our kids get the jobs for the education. The two have to go together, and Madam Speaker, whether you want to accept it or not, there are players in our market who do not want to give our people opportunities in this country and that is something that needs to be dealt with.

Sometimes, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, because we live in a small community, we are afraid to step on toes because these are people who we see and we pass. Madam Speaker, I will use one recent example that everyone already knows: looking at the former Governor, He is gone, come through like a whirlwind, do all of this stuff, press conference, everything; he is gone, but we are still here and the only people we can build this country on, are the people who are still going to be here.

About two months ago I had a conversation, a friend of mine was in town visiting and invited me over and I met their friends— nice professional group; and they sat down and they started complaining about, not being given an opportunity as much in Cayman to do this, to do that, and they have a lot more that they can contribute and we need to find ways of dealing with them more and they said to me, *Chris, what can we do to do more because we want this, we want that.* I said to them, *what I am about to say you may not like*— and I know what I am about to say, many people may not like, but Madam Speaker, if we start in this House trying to be politically correct and don't want the honest conversation with people, then there's a problem.

All of them there were professionals, they were educated by the government of their country, and I said to them, *you left the land of your birth to come here, and even though the land of your birth invested in you, you came here to make money. You really and truly expect us to say you wouldn't deal with the land of your birth, but you want to come here and help us?* I am not

that naïve. You need to do more, and show me by your deeds that you want to be a part of this community.

Madam Speaker, the secret of our success was never immigration. The secret of our success was integration. People coming here and being a part of the fabric of our community. Madam Speaker, there is nothing that brings people together more than food, music and culture and I am glad to see that there is an entire section there that deals with Caymanian culture and identity, but again, Madam Speaker, I will wait to see. They say the devil is in the details, the money that we are going to put together to bring our community together, to bring our people together, because we just can't expect that somebody is just going to come out of the plane and say, '*okay, I am in the Cayman Islands now, all of a sudden conch is going to do it for me or turtle is going to do for me.*'

It doesn't work like that, and you see, Madam Speaker, one of the advantages that I have now, having represented the people of Bodden Town West, I remember back in 2000 going door to door to many of those homes and speaking to many of those people. And in the mind set, Madam Speaker, not just Bodden Town West, but Bodden Town as a whole, the mind set was *if Cayman does not want me, I can go back home* because they still got their home wherever they were coming from, but they are still Caymanians in our eyes.

I go back 13 years later, I'll go back 17 years later. They have changed. Their viewpoint has changed. Why is that, Madam Speaker? They now have children. Their children know no other home but Cayman and all of us inside here who are parents will know, that when it comes to our children, when it comes to our family, it changes the landscape, it changes how we look at things and how we deal with things. And I can say to you right now, that we have many people in this country who are committed, who are here to make a difference and we also need to find a way in to integrate more of them within our community because many people out there, Madam Speaker, want to help.

There are some I will forever sit down and say are economic refugees, but there are some people who have genuinely come here and have made a difference. Not to just pick any one person, but the Chair of the Cayman Airways Board, Dr. John-Paul Clarke. He and I went to the same high school together in Kingston; he married a Caymanian, has two lovely kids. His wife is a genius, MIT graduate, he sits on a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) sub-committee. This man's résumé is just through the roof and Madam Speaker, I can say that I have called on him, and many others, to say *can you help so and so, or help with this or that* and they do it free of cost, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, we need to make sure that while it may be working to some extent, we need to put a little bit more emphasis, a little bit more effort behind that to create that one Cayman; because Madam Speaker, I can say to you right now that it is one thing

to get up and talk about having all of these different nationalities in Cayman, but until we set aside and deliberately go out to try to get everybody as one Cayman, we are going to have a problem and the Bible talks about a house being divided.

I say that because, Madam Speaker, we are already seeing that there are places Caymanians will go—I will say it to you now—in their own country, where they feel unwelcome. We start seeing the gated communities popping up. We start seeing where you can't go here, you can't go there and if you do go there, people look at you sideways like *what you are doing here?* Madam Speaker, that in itself is a recipe that if we don't address it, we don't tackle it, then it's going to be a problem.

Madam Speaker, I tease my own wife. July come will be 24 years married, although she'll probably say she married me at birth because I don't want to put her age out there... I always tease her that she has spent more of her life in Cayman, far more, than she did in the land of her birth and there was a time, Madam Speaker, that my own wife would say *okay, I'll trust Chris with this, Chris with that*, but now she's got three kids. I can tell you, if you think that nobody don't sit down and ask me more questions about Cayman politics and what is going on, and more in tune than anything else, check Shawnette.

Because again, now, she has three kids and she needs to make sure that there are jobs waiting for her three kids and everything else and jobs waiting for other kids coming back. Madam Speaker, again, we need to sit down and recognise that we have a country to build. We have been lucky, we have been blessed, but what we cannot afford to do is take it for granted, and Madam Speaker, when I go through and I look at the different initiatives in the SPS, I look at the specific outcomes and look at the number of projects.

Looking on page 13 at broad outcome number one— [Improve Quality of Life for Caymanians]. The number of projects add up to 64.

I look over at broad outcome number two— Enhance Competitiveness While Meeting International Standards. The number of projects add up to 32.

I look at broad outcome number three— Future Proof to Increase Resiliency. Those projects add up to 58, Madam Speaker.

I look at broad outcome number four— Modernise Government to Improve Public Sector Performance. The number of projects adds up to 47.

Then broad outcome number five— Protect and Promote Caymanian Culture, Heritage, and Identity, adds up to 18.

All of those projects added up, Madam Speaker, is 219 projects.

Madam Speaker, I said this to Sir Alden, and I am not afraid to say it publicly because I said it to him when I was part of the Government. I called him in December, I think it was, to wish him all the best, and I said to him, *as much as I hate to say it, but I have a*

*certain appreciation for you now that I never had before, and if I had known what I now know, I would never have given you so much trouble when I was in Opposition.*

[Laughter]

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders:** But then I also said to him, *but then again, you should have communicated better, too, that this was really what the landscape was like, and maybe I would have gone easier on you.*

[Inaudible interjection]

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders:** You don't worry about that. It worked, though,

The point I am making Madam Speaker, is that when we did the first SPS, many young people, we were eager, first time in Government and we listed a lot of stuff that we would have said that needed to be done.

Last night, as I was preparing for the SPS Madam Speaker, I went through the previous SPS that was presented to this honourable Parliament two years ago or thereabouts and I looked at all the stuff that was done and all the stuff that wasn't done, and I realised back then, knowing what I know now, it was overly ambitious. I can honestly say we were warned, and I look at these number of projects now, and seeing 219 projects I can honestly see this is overambitious but again, when you have 4514 people in central government at the end of February, maybe it is doable. I don't know.

Again, I will wait on the budget to get a more specific outlay of what these 219 projects are but one thing I want to say to my former colleagues is: be a little bit careful in terms of over committing, because this is now an election year SPS, and it's going to be an election year budget and come 2024, what you don't get done, the mantra is going *be, well, next year's election year so unnah outta luck* and once you have committed to it, then it creates fodder for you on the campaign trail.

I will say this, Madam Speaker, when you look at what we are supposed to do as a Government in terms of managing the economy, et cetera, it still goes back to the point that I made earlier: It takes cash to care.

Madam Speaker, going back to that honest, uncomfortable conversation that we need to have... If you understand, part of what has made Cayman unique, has been the fact that we were actually able to develop the right way organically, unlike many of our Caribbean neighbours, thus the reason I always used to correct people when they said *"well, we are doing this because our competitors are doing that."*

Madam Speaker, in this region, we have no competitors and I will explain why. The natural order, the natural development of any country primarily comes down to three things:

1. people come together as a community— it could be through religious purposes, geographic purposes, language, it could be many different things, but they come together as a community;
2. they start trading amongst themselves and in doing so, they create an economy; and
3. as the community grows and the economy grow, they create a political system.

The natural order is community, economy, political— we were able to develop like that.

Our Caribbean neighbours, most of them, Madam Speaker, did not have that luxury, the reason being they were exploited for economic purposes, so their economy came first; then they put in a political system to ensure that the needs of the economy were met, and the last thing that anyone cared about was a community of slaves. Thus, whether it be Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, the natural order for those countries was economy, political, community.

Now, we are seeing, Madam Speaker, in many countries around the world, where everyone is trying to get back to the community. I have said many times publicly that I love the fact that the Premier came up with his tagline *"Community creates Country"*, because it is exactly what it comes down to, but at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, saying it doesn't bring it into being. It still requires many different actions.

What I am saying is that when we talk about a time when Caymanians used to be together, it was when we are all struggling together, when we are all trying to make a better Cayman; but now I see many people started coming in and bringing their own, et cetera. That is part of the Caymanian magic, part of the Caymanian gift— any way you want to look at it— that made us unique, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that we need to go back or remain true to the foundation where our people must come first. Much has to be done at the community level.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you I am guilty of it sometimes. I have the second-largest constituency and I can barely keep up with WhatsApp messages. I can barely keep up with the phone calls, I can barely keep up with many things, and what has made politicking more challenging now is, you look at other countries— United States, other Caribbean countries—no one expects to see their MP; no one expects to see their Governor, their Congressman. They don't see them. Here, people expect you to show up for dinner. Sometimes people expect you to sit down and do not recognise that you have your family, you have many different things to balance.

We are trying our best to maintain a life and at the same time our country, it is not very easy, Madam Speaker and this is what I tell people. I try my best to use technology and I have been blessed that I have a very understanding community that understands that,



you know, *you may not get Chris, but I will call you back eventually, you know.*

Madam Speaker, I used to have people who would sit down and tell me, *well, when Jim Bodden was there I could always get him.* I would say, *actually no, darling; you had to call him either on his house phone or work phone and when he got home or he got to work, he got the message and called you back.*

Today, we have constituencies. My constituency alone, Madam Speaker, is larger than the entire Bodden Town at the time. Just one area of Bodden Town is larger than the whole Bodden Town at one point, you know. This is what it has come to. And I say to the public: *You have to find a way to engage your representative also.* My telephone number has remained the same, 345 926 2804. That 2804 comes from my son Brandon's 28<sup>th</sup> April birthday—by the way, his birthday is coming up so I need to go get him something. Thanks for me saying that.

The point I am making, Madam Speaker, is that our people need to reach out to their representative and tell us what's on your mind and equally, Madam Speaker, we also have to have that thick skin to be able to take the licks, and take their criticism, et cetera, because it is what we signed up for as public figures, you know.

Madam Speaker, as I said before, I genuinely wish the Government well and whatever it is that I can do to help, I will help, because at the end of the day, if they fail the entire country fails.

I want to close on one thing, Madam Speaker, and people may not want to say it but I am going to say it. To not say it, I wouldn't be true to myself: The biggest challenge facing this country and its future is bad mind. Madam Speaker, we have to learn to be happy for other people. We have to learn to help other people.

I remember a situation, where someone called me up and they had an event coming up on a Friday. They came on a Wednesday night and said, *Mr. Saunders, I have an event coming up and I haven't heard anything yet about my work permits and I have a place booked, I got tickets sold. If I don't get this, I am going to be salt—* in a nutshell. I remember the same Wednesday night I said, *send me a message; send me the date of birth, the usual stuff.* I forwarded it on and asked some people to look at it.

The next morning I reached out and asked, *you got a chance to look at this for me?* First response, Madam Speaker, I will never forget it: *Do you know how much money he makes from these events?* And I said, *what? How much money he makes from these events? He is Caymanian. He got business, he got trade and business licence. Why do you care how much money he makes from this event? He is Caymanian.* Madam Speaker, we sit down in this country and we mind people business too much.

Madam Speaker, we have reached a point right now, and we have seen it, where people in advanced countries around the world are getting elected

by sending out tweets; 160-character tweets, Madam Speaker. Do you honestly believe that you can sit—even the number of words in this document do not touch every single thing in this country, Madam Speaker—down and manage a country based on tweets? Do you think you can sit down and manage a country based on a one minute/two minutes video?

We can't do it, Madam Speaker, and I am going to say to the public: Demand more from your representatives, but also demand more from yourself because when people come to me and say, *the government needs to do this, the government needs to do that,* the first thing I said to them Madam Speaker is, this: well, you are the government, you the people, okay, so the people should do this so the question is why are you not doing it?

I say that because if we don't change the mindset in this country to being able to be happy for people and helpful to people, we are going to end up like that Italian immigrant when he found out the streets in America were not paved with gold, the streets in America were not paved at all, and the person expected to pave it was him.

Madam Speaker, our job is to create equal opportunities for our people, not equal outcome and too many people are messing other people and getting into people's businesses that they don't need to be getting into and until we fix that, Madam Speaker, this country will not realise its full potential. Madam Speaker, we are blessed and highly favoured and the only people who can destroy the Cayman Islands are the Caymanian people.

*[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders:** I wish everybody in this Parliament all the best. I genuinely do. There is a time to campaign, and there is a time to govern. The time to govern is now. Campaigning will come. Up-man-ship and one-man-ship and all that will come, but for right now our people are hurting. Inflation is killing our people, and we need to future-proof this country by starting to put things to help our people.

We can no longer sit down and depend on any external factors or anyone out of Cayman to help Cayman. You see it? The Governor with his praise, he gone. Where will the next saviour come from?

*[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders:** It is only going to be our people.

Madam Speaker, with that, I will end my contribution. I wish everyone in this House all the best and whatever I can do to help, I have an education that was paid for by the people of the Cayman Islands and anyone who wants the knowledge I would be more than happy to share it with them; but equally, Madam Speaker, this is still a House of politics. If anyone inside

here wants to play politics I can play it too, because if there's one thing I have in my hands, now it is time.

Madam Speaker, with that said, I have no ill will towards anyone. I want to thank my wife, that I did not have to resort to my Easter speech that I wrote— and I can tell you, that was fire and brimstone— and I thank my daughter and my two sons. I know Brandon is watching, he always watches, and I can tell you Madam Speaker, in this business more than anything, I am happy I have the support system that I have around me to keep me grounded. I am blessed for that.

This red tie was the last present my father gave me before he passed, and I don't want anyone to think it's because [*inaudible*] or even I get teased that I wear the right colours today, but Madam Speaker, I am the only person left or rather the next Saunders man to go. There were seven of us growing up, my daddy is gone, it is just me, and I told him when he was leaving, go sleep, I'll take care of his women, which are my four sisters and his wife and I have tried my best to do as much as I can. I have two sons left to carry on the Saunders name, and I am going to be defending that like crazy.

There is a building next door, Madam Speaker, that I will be spending some time in very soon because I will tell you right now, there is something I want to touch on but I will just leave it there because there are people who are paid to deal with that; but there are elements in this country that, if we don't deal with, will destroy it.

[*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Christopher S. Saunders:** And we are not going to stop, until we destroy this country from within. That is the only way we can do that, you understand me?

I want to thank everyone here because they have had influence on me one way or the other, and as I said publicly already, I told Sir Alden I watched him the most. I studied him. I can tell you he is a student of political science, he is a very good representative in terms of understanding parliamentary rules.

I understand he is saying he may not be running again, although I don't believe him. That's fine, but I want to publicly thank him. The reason I mention it, Madam Speaker, is because one of my first contributions when I first got into this House actually dealt with the Government's SPS at the time. We got a good political lesson that night from the then Premier, and it is a lesson I have never forgotten, so I want to thank him for that lesson because he gave me a wake-up call very quickly.

Madam Speaker, the reason I am saying this is that, when this Government was formed, regardless of how it was formed, the Member for Red Bay was one of the first to say to me, "*Chris, if you need advice on anything pick up the phone and call me, because I need for you guys to succeed*"— and that said something about him.

It is one thing for people to believe that we politicians argue, we war and we this and we that and whatever, but it is important that we recognise that regardless of our political differences, there is still respect inside here. Democracy itself after all, Madam Speaker, recognises that there will be divisions, disagreements, discord, dissent; but what it says is that we have debate, dialogue, discussion and we find consensus. Where our politics have gone sideways, is that we want consensus without the debate; we want consensus with a disagreement, and that is not the way to build any country.

I want to thank everyone. I wish them all the best. Good luck with putting your numbers together, but the fun will be coming because I'm open. When the budget comes, the numbers cannot be sailing this close to the wind— 90.1 days of cash days cannot work; 9.9 per cent debt service ratio cannot work. You are literally mortgaging the future of this country for one major project.

My friends, I will say this much: you worried about the dump, I am worried about people being able to afford or to even buy things to put in the dump, because right now, many people can't afford the very waste that you are going to have, because many people still can't afford to live here, whether you want to accept it or not. I know this is just the Government's outline, there is much more meat to be added to it, but I expect that at the end of the day it comes with a solid priority of what we can get done; 219 projects are not going to get done; I can tell anybody that.

Thank you all. I wish you good luck and all the best.

**The Speaker:** Members, we have now passed the hour of 6.15p.m. The meal that has been prepared for you is here, so I think it is a good time for us to take a suspension. We will resume at 7p.m.

**Proceedings suspended at 6.18p.m.**

**Proceedings resumed at 7.20 p.m.**

**The Speaker:** Please be seated. Proceedings are now resumed. We will continue with the debate on the Motion.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

[*Pause*] Does any other Member wish to speak?

[*Pause*]

The Honourable Member for Red Bay.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to make my contribution to the debate on the Strategic Policy Statement and the other statement in connection therewith made by the Honourable Premier earlier today.

I am somewhat surprised though, Madam Speaker, that thus far all we and the country have had

the benefit of are the very vague provisions in the Strategic Policy Statement itself, and the even vaguer representations made by the Honourable Premier in his debate on the Motion. They are in fact so vague, I can't even find them.

[Laughter]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Here there are.

Madam Speaker, I don't want anyone to think that I am making light of what I regard as fundamental failure on the part of the Members of the Government not getting up and speaking in some detail to the provisions in the Strategic Policy Statement. Maybe they are waiting until we have run out of Members on this side to speak, and then they get to say whatever they want to say without fear of contradiction by us, at least in these Chambers.

However, Madam Speaker, having spent 12 years on that side of the House, I have some idea what a Strategic Policy Statement is or indeed what it ought to be.

Madam Speaker, as I reflected on all of the—how shall I put it—marl road—and not Cayman Marl Road, the old one, the real one where people talk to each other—all the things that I and others have heard about the disagreements within the Government in connection with the preparation of this SPS, and so far the failure of any Minister to get up and say anything at all about it; I could only reflect on an old song which I played for the benefit of some of the younger members on the other side a little while ago—one of those Ernie Smith classics. Madam Speaker, I don't believe that you would grant me permission to play it, although that's what I would like to do.

[Inaudible interjections]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, can I move a motion that Standing Orders be suspended so I am able to play a song? No, Madam Speaker, seriously.

Madam Speaker, as I listened to the Premier, and as I reflected on the context in which all of this was prepared and indeed delivered; and as I still listen on this side of the House to the contention on the other side of the House about this SPS, I could only reflect on Ernie Smith's song which was written about the political situation in Jamaica back in the '70s. *As we fight one another for the power and the glory the country goes to waste... Right now our hands are tied, tied behind our backs while certain people if and buttin'... We have too far to go, not to really know just how we're getting there and if we getting anywhere... We can't build no dreams on a fuss and fight. I don't care who does it Jah say that not right.*

Madam Speaker, “are we building a nation or are we building a hut?”

Madam Speaker, I want to start my contribution by looking at the numbers. Madam Speaker, I say outright, I don't believe them. I have seen too many strategic policy statements and too many budgets for me to believe these numbers. Also, if I were to believe these numbers and the country was to believe these numbers to be real, we should all be extremely concerned about a government whose financial plans are leading the country off the edge of a precipice.

Why do I say that Madam Speaker? Shall I provide a little context? Madam Speaker, my first term on the government side, I was a younger representative. I was Minister of Education and a whole lot of other things; and I had no experience in government budgets except in my role as an Opposition Member. However, I, and the government of which I was a part had a grand vision for education in this country and the need to put in place proper school plants. Thus, we proposed not one, not two but four schools. We listened to a lot of expertise and advice and although no one, I don't think, could really have predicted the 2008 global recession, I learned enough about the outcome of all of that to cause me to be very, very cautious about accepting numbers that are given when the margin for error is virtually non-existent. All—as the Member for Bodden Town West and recently Minister of Finance in the PACT Government [has said]—it needs is the slightest shift in revenues for the Cayman Islands Government, for us to be in a major crisis.

Madam Speaker, let's follow this trend. These are the Government's figures — page 51 of the Strategic Policy Statement entitled, “Compliance with Principles of Responsible Financial Management”. I'll go through them all.

These are the principles for the benefit of those who don't know how government budgeting works. All government budgets and the SPS which precedes them require compliance with what are called the Principles of Responsible Financial Management as set out in the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision). Principle operating surplus should be positive. The forecasts for 2023-2026 are:

Forecast 2023	Forecast 2024	Forecast 2025	Forecast 2026
Surplus \$61.7 million	Surplus \$77.4 million	Surplus \$98.2 million	Surplus \$103.2 million

If you look at that alone and you say, *Wow! Government revenues are going to continue to grow and grow*, what is the basis for those projections in this current state of global uncertainty and turmoil in world markets? With another US presidential election looming, I wouldn't place a great deal of store in those numbers regarding surplus. Even if we say those are absolutely right, they have to be considered in the context of revenues that are more than \$1 billion dollars a year.

Therefore, the percentage or the margin between revenue and expenditure is still very small.

Net worth, not a great deal in here. For 2023 to 2026: \$2.1 billion, 2.1 billion, \$2.2 billion, and \$2.3 billion respectively. I'm not taking any issue with any of that.

Now, Madam Speaker, let us look at one of the real indicators that is the debt service ratio. **“Debt servicing costs for the year should be no more than 10 per cent of core Government revenue.”** Now, Madam Speaker, in 2023, I don't want to misquote, the debt service ratio if I remember is somewhere around 2.3 to 2.4. Mr. Leader, if you can track that for me while I continue with the rest of my debate. Thank you.

For 2023, the debt servicing ratio is projected to be 9.9 per cent—that's this year. The limit is 10 per cent. In 2024, 9.5 per cent; in 2025, 8.2 per cent in 2026, 9.9 per cent; pushing right up against the margin.

The one that scares me most is Net Debt. In the current financial year the net debt ratio is 2.8 per cent. That, Madam Speaker, is the ratio of the debt to government revenue; 2.8 per cent. Therefore, our debt is only 2.8 per cent of GDP. [In] the forecast for 2024 it rises sharply to 24.3 per cent; and then again in 2025 to 36.8 per cent; and then a quantum leap in 2026 to 70 per cent. If the Government isn't concerned about that, then it is no wonder that the Member for Bodden Town West quit the job as Minister of Finance and came over here, because at least he clearly understands what that is setting the stage for.

Let's look at the other important indicator of whether or not the proposed government budget—which is what the SPS is about—is realistic. That is the Cash Reserves. The Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) says that, cash reserves must be sufficient to run the Government for 90 days even if the government did not get another set of revenue during that period. For this year, its projected to be 172.7 days; next year 117.6 days; 2025, 101.0 days; and—this one is brilliant—2026, 90.1 days. How you got 0.1 of a day I was not quite sure in this context, but it is again right up against the margin and this is projected out three years.

The longer you project anything, the less accurate you can possibly be. This is scary stuff. This is scary stuff, not just scary to people like us who have been legislators for a while, but to the business community, to investors. The day Government cannot meet its obligations everything else gone. Confidence is the currency that the private sector and investors hold dearest.

Madam Speaker, I don't believe this for a moment. The only saving grace is, as the Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman said to me, is that based on the PACT Government's track record over the last two years, it is highly unlikely that they are going to spend anywhere near this money because they're not going to get the projects done. That may be

in the end, ironically, what saves this country from financial ruin. They are just not going to get the money spent.

I know, Madam Speaker, the Premier just glossed over it when he delivered his address. I know he's coming flying once we finish over here with a long speech about all the things he never talked about starting with ReGen; and he is going to say that all of this is because of ReGen. The one thing he did say when he was talking about ReGen that all of us on this side agree with is that this is a project which has been kicked down the road for a long time and that we are running out of time. He kicked it down the road for 18 months before he even looked at it himself. We started work on that project almost as soon as we took Office. He was a Minister in that government with me, as Premier then in 2013. It is a complex and difficult thing to deal with and none of us are saying otherwise, but we still don't know now what the cost of this project is going to be.

As the Leader of the Opposition said when he spoke, we only just received these documents this morning and I only had a chance to go through them cursorily. However, I see there is an indication here somewhere that the construction cost of the waste management facilities has been put at...

Madam Speaker, if I may with your permission on page 56 “Debt Management Strategy”. **“A robust debt management strategy is a key component of the Government's overall fiscal strategy to comply with the Principles of Responsible Financial Management as set out in the Public Management and Finance Act. The Government plans to introduce a Debt Sinking Fund in 2023. [Good plan. I really hope they go ahead with that.] The intent being to set aside a sum in a reserve each year to enable the Government to make a lump sum payment of \$75.0 million in 2026 towards the repayment of the construction costs of the proposed ReGen facility.**

**The Government expects to make principal repayments of approximately \$215.7 million—”**

*[Musical interruption]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** No, I don't need to be serenaded.

*[Laughter]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** “—over the SPS period. [That is between 2024—]”

*[Musical interruption]*

*[Laughter]*

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, you may need to the ban phones.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, that is between 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2026. By this point, “it is forecast that Core Government will have a debt balance of \$641.5 million, inclusive of the financing arrangement for the proposed Re-Gen facility. Current negotiations to date indicate \$330.0 million in construction costs for the proposed facility.”

Madam Speaker, we’ve got another number now. The former Minister of Finance said it was \$2 billion; I think the Premier said it was less than that, but I don’t know how much less. However, the construction costs here is indicated \$330 million, which is a big difference between that and the \$2 billion, I would say.

Madam Speaker, whatever the number is, the Government needs to make provisions and ought to have been making provisions for it since they took Office, because regardless of whether it is \$1 billion or \$2 billion, it’s going to have to be paid for over time.

Thus, if it were me, once we have that figure, this is the way we’d go about it; we know that we’ll have to find \$25-\$40 million every year for the ReGen project so we take that out. Now what is left in terms of fiscal space, is what we use to determine what we spend on the Government’s other priorities. You don’t do it in a way that runs you up to 70 per cent of GDP and virtually 10 per cent of your debt service ratio, which is the maximum.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Help me.

**An Hon. Member:** Government revenue not GDP.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Seventy per cent of government revenue, I stand corrected. Doesn’t change my hypothesis though.

Madam Speaker, this is not a viable Strategic Policy Statement and having been around long enough, I warrant that the budget is going to look significantly different from this when that comes in November.

Madam Speaker, whether you are in government, whether you work for a living, have a family, there are some basic principles of finance that are exactly the same. You can’t spend money and still have it and if you spend more than you can afford, you’re *gonna* get in trouble; simple. Every little man, woman out there doing their little thing, understands that but it doesn’t seem the Government does.

The former Minister of Finance, the Member for Bodden Town West said, advanced countries can print the currency, print more. We can’t do that, we absolutely can’t do that.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned just now priorities. Believe you me, I was once a greenhorn, a legislator, a representative, and you want to do everything you can for your people, and you want people to notice what you’re doing because if they think you’re not doing anything it’s unlikely they’ll vote for you again. I understand all [of] that but the difference with the current Administration from any that I have been around is this, it seems that—this is just my opinion, my impression—every single Minister believes that his or her projects, policies are the most important and nobody wants to give ground.

Thus far the Government has spent virtually everything they have earned plus US\$403 million of loans, which is the contingent loan facility we had put in place in the event that the Cayman economy went south as a result of COVID-19. *That’s in this too you know.* When they’re talking about surpluses and all of that, US\$403 million is borrowed money. One thing I know about borrowing is you got to pay it back. By the time they pay that back, me, the Member from West Bay West, all these white haired people up here, we going all be gone and our grandchildren will be paying it.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** You must plan to live to be 130 then.

Madam Speaker, the Government needs to go back after this is over and sit down and have a hard look at what truly are the country’s priorities. I learned my lesson, believe you me in that 2005-2009 administration when the global economy went south. That, Madam Speaker, will always be the worst time of my life. The Member for West Bay West beat me nearly to death with it for about eight years. Now, I hear him crying for a school in West Bay; I was trying to build one down there too. The foundation is still there, he can build his new one on it.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** It never got that far?

**An Hon. Member:** No.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** The *[inaudible]* boards were there though.

*[Laughter]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** I am going to support him in his initiative for another school in West Bay; we needed it 15 years ago. We needed it then, we need it now but you can’t have everything. That means there has to be a trade-off for this so you get that. I think perhaps it is that this group of young Ministers think this might be the only shot they have and if they don’t get it

this time around, they're going be battling in the political wilderness with Arden [McLean] and Ezzard [Miller] and the rest of them for the next term.

[Laughter]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Anyhow, Madam Speaker, I say those things because a little lightness I've learned is a good thing; and none of us vex with anybody and none of us hate anybody so they can go away with that. However, we disagree fundamentally with this kind of approach—

[Inaudible interjection]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** That's between the two of you.

However, we disagree fundamentally with what we see as grave financial mismanagement or a plan to do so which is going to result in disaster for the country.

Madam Speaker, try as I might, I read it through two or three times, I don't see anything in here to help the little people as they are calling them. I keep looking for these dwarfs who are running about when they talked about the little people. Where is there any help, hope or optimism offered to the ordinary people of these three Islands? We heard what the inflation rate was—10 point how much Mr. Leader—9.2. That means on average everything that you buy in Cayman, you're now paying almost 10 per cent more for it than you were paying last year.

What happened to any provisions for the recipients of NAU [Needs Assessment Unit] ex-gratia payments for the seamen, the veterans? What happened to civil servant salaries? [You] think civil servants aren't paying 10 per cent more for everything that they go to buy? No provisions in here for that. However, they are spending \$1 billion—that's US\$1.2 billion you know, for people who don't know—\$1 billion and you can't allocate \$100 more for the people who are most vulnerable, most needy in the country.

**An Hon. Member:** It's in there.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** It's in there?

**An Hon. Member:** Yeah.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, I hope the Member for West Bay West, he said he is not a Member of the PACT Government so I don't know how he knows there's going to be more in there.

[Laughter]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** He seems to know more than I. I read it three times, I don't see anything here in either document.

[Inaudible interjection]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Oh, you going to put it in; good.

Madam Speaker, I have listened to all the arguments on the various news networks CNN, Fox News, Bloomberg, even Al Jazeera.

**An Hon. Member:** Cayman Marl Road.

[Laughter]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** The argument against raising salaries in the advanced countries is that you won't ever be able to control inflation if you keep giving people more money so they can buy more; you won't reduce demand. However, Madam Speaker, I've been around long enough to know that principle does not apply in the Cayman Islands. Here is why, because most of our inflation is imported. We pay the inflated prices for whatever it is that is produced overseas and we have to purchase it here. It's not our demand here that is driving inflation. Therefore, the only thing we can do to help our people is to put more money in their pockets so they can pay the extra 10 per cent. I don't see any provisions here for that. We are not supposed to anticipate motions but I see one motion coming with something about that but not from the Government side.

Madam Speaker, this lip service to being people-driven... it's not people-driven, it's driving people into the ground. Got the words the wrong way around. Transparent? This is so "transparent" I can't even see anything about it in here.

[Laughter]

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, there is something else that the Premier said which he is absolutely right about. This is the thing, Madam Speaker, this is the thing; there's no reasonable group of people who could disagree with what are the specific outcomes or even the broad outcomes that the Government claims it aspires to in this document. All good things; building a modern infrastructure, creating and encouraging further diversity in the Cayman Islands economy, on and on. We don't disagree with any of this.

However, as the Member from Bodden Town West said, *you need cash to care*. Without the income, without the revenue, Government can't address any of those; and without a ruthless approach to what ought to be the priorities of the Government, they are going to achieve little or nothing in terms of improving the lives of the people who live here.

We don't need—how many projects he said?

**Mr. Christopher Saunders:** Two hundred and nineteen.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Two hundred and nineteen projects; we need a few that really matter to people. Give people the ability to get a piece of land, waive the Stamp Duty; the House has resolved that already, where is it?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, increase the incomes of the most vulnerable and of civil servants who slogged day-in, day-out all through COVID, all of those things to get *cussed* every single day on Cayman MarlRoad and on Cayman News Service. I said, *no man, no man*. Even a stopped clock is right twice a day, they can't be wrong all the time. Give them a break.

Madam Speaker, the other thing that gives me great concern is—and they started this from the time they went into office—we can't have this anti-development, anti-immigrant stance.

**An Hon. Member:** What you say? Say it again.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Anti-development and anti-immigrant stance, and still expect to derive the revenues that both of those categories provide. We can't have it both ways.

Madam Speaker, without the income you can't do all the things you want to do for your people. That is so simple to me.

Madam Speaker, the Minister for Tourism announced some time ago now, what we had been saying for four years, that if you don't build a cruise port, the big ships are *gonna* pass us by and therefore the number of cruise visitors is going to fall off significantly. A lot of people applauded that in the environmental lobby. Fine, but how are you going to plug those revenue gaps? What are you going to do with the Caymanians who own tour buses and taxis when they don't have those people to take around and the ones who do the marine tours.

I see in the Strategic Policy Statement, a reference to improvements to ports of entry. What does that mean? I am hoping that the Minister of Tourism at some point will tell us what that means.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** The reference, Mr. Minister, in the Strategic Policy Statement and in the Premier's speech as well, improvements to ports of entry to enhance the visitor experience. What does that mean?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Yes, I hope you do. You can also tell us what you're going to do about cargo which is a crisis. Not going to be a crisis but is a crisis.

Madam Speaker, then there is this little matter you don't really hear many people mention it but it's about traffic congestion. I noticed how the Premier in his speech glossed over that. Are we going to get the East-West Arterial or is it going to take another government to do it? Because one—

**An Hon. Member:** *It goin' happen.*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, I think the Minister for Tourism would like to say something.

*[Pause]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Can you repeat that, sir?

**An Hon. Member:** By the hook or by the crook.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** No, we don't want to do it by crook; we want to do it the right way. It is inconceivable that a new roadway is not built extending from at least North Side road all the way into Town. Anyone who believes that Cayman can continue to develop the way that we have, without an alternative route from the Eastern Districts into Town, is dreaming in colour.

*[Desk thumping]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** I don't know how many of them were around in 2004 when hurricane Ivan struck this place, but Bodden Town was impassable in places; East End, you couldn't get to East End. It doesn't take much. All we need is a major accident on Shamrock Road—they call it, not Bodden Town Road—and traffic is backed up for miles upon miles, upon miles. I don't see any reference to that in here. Has the Government agreed to leave this out?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** The East-West Arterial.

**An Hon. Member:** It's referred to. It's in the SPS.

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** It's in the SPS? Okay.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, the whole issue of Cayman's continued development and the consequential growth in population—principally as a result of immigration—is something that we all have to grapple with. I hate to use this because everybody uses it but it never happens; we truly need a national conversation about this and we are never going to get consensus but if we sit around and wait on consensus we're going to have gridlock from East End to West Bay.

*[Desk thumping]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, I have said this many times. I firmly believe that the day we stop growing is the day we start dying as a country. Everybody may not share that view but that's my view.

This I know after almost 22 years in politics, you ask the average Caymanian and they are going to say, *no man, we got too many people here, too many work permits*, but you know what, if he or she owns a business or has children and needs a domestic helper, you tell him or her that they can't get their permit, then you will understand why we are in the dilemma that we're in. Everybody wants the rules to apply to everybody else but not to them. They want their permits, they want their car, but they don't want other people to have it. Those are the ones who shouldn't have it. That's why you hear these categories of, *this one shouldn't have a car and this one should have a car*.

People are people and as long as we don't have a reliable public transport system that every 15 minutes you know if you go there some vehicle is going to pick you up and take you where you want, we can't tell people they can't have cars.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, this is the dilemma that we have. They said we should reduce the importation of cars. How is that going to help? I know they have driverless cars now but I don't see any in Cayman; every car I see going down the road has somebody in it. Cars in Cayman don't drive themselves, it's people who are driving the cars; so it's a growth in population that is driving the increase in cars on the road. We have to grapple with all of these things and doing the East-West Arterial and fixing the other things are not going to sort the problem out; and even if it did, it would be temporary because the population is going to continue to grow and more cars are going to keep coming. All the reports that we've had tell us that there is no single fix to this issue.

However, so far Madam Speaker, the Government has done *diddly-squat* about any of this and we are at halftime. They've even changed Ministers with respect to public transport. These are big issues that require a great deal of thought, work, planning and design. I'm afraid, Madam Speaker, to tell my good friend the Minister for Transport and roads, et cetera that he has to get elected another time if he *go in*' see the East-West Arterial built because it won't be on this current watch.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** No, even if it were approved tomorrow, you couldn't build it in the time we have left.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Just ask yourself how long Linford Pierson [Highway] has taken; believe you me, I know.

Madam Speaker, where is this woke Administration that is called PACT? In fact, I think we need to change their name now based on what we've been hearing since we came here today. I think we should call it PACT United because everybody is together.

Madam Speaker, where is the development plan? I think that the Premier said it wouldn't happen this term. Madam Speaker, unless we get these fundamentals right, all of these other issues which are consequential are never going to be resolved.

Madam Speaker, seriously, the Members of the Government have got to start working together. They have got to understand the importance of compromise if you're going to get anything done. Based on what I have been told, they cannot even agree on where they should get lunch from, let alone anything else, because this one want curry goat and that one want Thai Orchid, that's how it goes.

*[Laughter]*

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Seriously, Madam Speaker, we can't lose two years. It's two years of everybody's lives and the problems we have will just continue to compound if nothing is done to address them. You know, for those who would want to go back into Office they may be rubbing their hands and saying, *oh well, we'd just sweep them out next election because they wouldn't have done anything*, but the country would have lost four years. At my age, I never thought this would happen, but two years seems a long time. I don't want to lose two years.

Madam Speaker, two other related matters which I don't see any reference to which I believe ought to be high on the list of priorities—one was mentioned, maybe both of them by the Member for Bodden Town West—the issue of health insurance.

We were happy when we heard certain utterances from the Member for Bodden Town West when he was Minister of Finance that he had taken on board our sort of premise that in order to make CINICO feasible, we needed to extend its scope and range of products which it offered. The Member for Bodden Town West's analysis is absolutely right. Civil servants are paying for former private sector employees to get the benefit of CINICO because once they reach retirement age, they get kicked out of the group policy that they were part of at their workplace. Then they're now 60, 65 or they have some pre-existing condition which, if they don't turn you down point blank, they make the premiums so high you can't afford to pay it. That absolutely has to be addressed. I raised it when I was Premier. We had these things unactioned; COVID stole a lot



of time that we would otherwise have had to advance many of these policies we're talking about.

The issue of pensions. People pay—in the private sector—pensions for their entire working life and the best they can get out of it is \$12,000 a year. Seriously? It's not viable. If those people can't survive, Government is going to have to pick up the tab; that's what we've done in Cayman ever since, and I hope whoever is in government, that we never lose that sense of compassion for people. However, those things are going to take m-o-n-e-y and they need to be prioritised. These are social issues. These are the things that people need more than they need a park.

No, I am not going to criticise anybody for buying land. We bought a lot of land and I am happy to see the Government doing the same thing because in 10 years there's not going to be anywhere for our people to go. I am not against that but I am saying, in terms of priorities, if people can't pay these basic things and pay for the things that they need to live, they're not going to be able to enjoy any beach or any park.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** You need hearing aids.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Of course, I support it.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** I introduced you to Scranton Park, I don't know who you talking to.

*[Laughter]*

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin:** Madam Speaker, from my perspective, the Government has a lot more work to do to get the budget which is to come, to a point where it even begins to address some of the critical issues in this country.

I hope having had the benefit of such debate as we have been able to provide in the limited time that we have seen this document, the Government will take on board our concerns and have another look at what can be done to tweak these figures. Because when you have \$3 billion to spend, you should be able to give a little assistance to the most vulnerable and hardworking in our community, that is, the NAU recipients, the seamen, the veterans, the pensioners and civil servants.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak?  
*[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak?  
*[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak?  
*[Pause]*

The Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman.

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I rise to make a short contribution on Government Motion No. 4 2022-2023: The Strategic Policy Statement for the 2024-2026 Financial Years.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak about two things specifically that are near and dear and extremely important to all of us. I would like to start, Madam Speaker, by reading from the Strategic Policy Statement page 27, under Ministry of District Administration and Lands. It says, with your permission—

**An Hon. Member:** Which page is it you said?

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Page 27, it says, “**Continue to support and improve the business of government in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, ensuring the timely and efficient implementation of government policies; enhance services to Cayman Islands citizens and companies in the areas of land registration, surveying, geographic data, valuation, and the management of government facilities.**”

Well done, Minister, well done. The summation there of what is included in the Strategic Policy Statement, I believe will give everybody comfort—the outline of it and to start off with continue. As we all know on both sides of this House, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman—Cayman Brac more so—depend on government and government jobs and government help to create a sustainable quality of life.

We are extremely proud of what has been previously done there. I think we have moved to a sustainable feeling and I believe as I say, *well done Minister*, this statement alone gives our people, our population, the comfort to know that it will continue in the way that it has, and the improvements will continue to move forward in the Strategic Policy Statement of how it was delivered.

Madam Speaker, I want to take the time to just look through Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. What Government touches under this heading when you think of district administration and public works *that* encompasses the daily life of everyone who is on those two Islands. That basically means that, that is the support system of what happens as two small Islands move forward on a daily basis.

The hospital is separate from this line item part of the budget but is certainly an important part of what has to be funded and what has been identified.

We will also hear about schools separately but again, doesn't fall under this but falls under another line item of how the Strategic Policy Statement has been delivered.

Madam Speaker, as we look and think about the two Islands and the daily life that government supports and continues to move in a sustainable way, we look at the services that are available, planning. I mentioned that last week the Minister responsible for Planning was on the Brac, [we] met and talked about some planning improvements. I thank him for that; we appreciate that. The [Department of] Lands has its own office there, we looked at some of the staffing needs but they're certainly being talked about.

Madam Speaker, Environmental Health, Department of Environment, these are all services that are there and available; and I say that we know the daily life of each person there is touched and affected and made better by what the government services offer and how they are supported.

Madam Speaker, the capital projects will be broken down I am sure in the budget, and we can all listen and drill down on how they will move forward. However, that is another part [where] we identify recurrent spending in this conversation.

I see my good friend, the Minister of Tourism waiting to have some input or to hear about the issues from his Ministry on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman and it's a very important part of his Ministry. We have the Airport Authority which I want to say has 10 new jobs coming up on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, *hats off*. We also have CAL [Cayman Airways Limited] which I will address later. The Department of Tourism has its own office there; does the inspections regulates and gives the comfort of knowing that it's monitored and regulated.

I want to bring in Cayman Airways now because as we listened and understood of the importance of the services, absolutely nothing can happen without Cayman Airways in Cayman, Brac and Little Cayman.

I mentioned his support and his push to get the third twin otter for Little Cayman. I know that they have reached out, thank you; and I know you're involved with it so, again, *hats off* to you.

It is also needed that we look at what we are doing with the Saabs and the schedule in the Cayman Brac. If we don't have that service, the quality of life that we in government services are providing ends; from sports [teams] not being able to get to Grand Cayman for events, to health services not being able to move back and forth, and the list would go on.

I know this is a cost and I have heard the speakers who came before me break the budget apart, break the Strategic Statement apart and talk about, *we need to be very aware that we have to look at what the important spends are and what are not important and how we budget ourselves*. However, I want to use this presentation to show that we have to have expense on one side that's going to drive revenue on the other side. When I move from this, I will move to a revenue stream called Tourism, which is a real opportunity for the Government and some of the things that the Minister has shared.

There is a part in the Premier's statement which identified, improving physical infrastructure development, upgraded business regulatory framework to make it easier for local companies to do business and to prosper. Part of this revamp will be to modernise the Liquor Licensing Act to align other commerce-related legislation.

Madam Speaker, I would ask the Premier that when he is looking at these headings and when he's looking into his closing, that he would move to request that when the reviews are being made to meet that specific outcome, "**building a modern infrastructure to ensure successful future for our Islands**", we encourage the Government to include in those plans, a reduction in fees for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman trade and business licences.

I'll purely give you an example. There has been major representation from the Islands but the example is this: you have a 50 per cent reduction now in those costs and you buy the licence. Let's say you pay \$1000 for it in Cayman Brac, the population between the two Islands is approximately 2000. Thus you pay \$1000 for a population of 2000 that you have an opportunity to do business with. That licence will cost you \$2000 in Grand Cayman but you have 78,000 people. From the cost of doing business in the two Islands, we ask that they look and regularise [it] and don't put the businesses at a disadvantage because of that costing.

I want to also mention—and this fits right into the Tourism wheelhouse Madam Speaker—the Little Cayman World Heritage site that is going to be recommended by the Foreign Commonwealth Office. Along with that, is to now move for solar on Little Cayman and Cayman Brac which I believe puts us into a whole new growth opportunity. In the statement, there's also a move from tourism to those eco-tourism aspects. I think we're ahead of the curve with that and very happy about looking at that.

I also want to mention the Fire Service that also has jobs coming up on the Brac, and obviously the plane can't land without the Fire Service and we depend on them every day.

The last one that I will mention is the Police and I make an appeal that something is done to strengthen the Police [presence] on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. I can tell you that there were people arrested yesterday. There have been four different burglaries in the last two weeks and I say good things because the two individuals were picked up in a short period of time but that doesn't mean that that is the deterrent and the safety that we need there now. Therefore, I leave that with the Premier.

Madam Speaker, I want to now move to the tourism part of the Strategic Policy Statement. As the previous speakers have said, we didn't have a look at this Policy Statement until today; fair enough. However, I want to share my thoughts that we had previous to the statement itself. Then at the end, I will go through what

has been delivered today and I think it will be pretty interesting the common thought and the common thread of how we move tourism forward.

Madam Speaker, three years ago, we locked down these Islands from the outside world. We did it to protect the lives of the people from the virus COVID. Closing our borders to save lives, we shut down the most successful six continuous years of tourism growth in the history of these Islands. Over those six years, we pulled ourselves out of the slump of a global recession, a recession that really took a toll on our economy. However, as the [then] Minister responsible for Tourism and Transport *and* District Administration, supported by my Progressives-led Government colleagues—most of them are here on both sides tonight—I understand where we were coming from and where we needed to go.

We knew that we had to build the future of our country so we had to look closely at our tourism infrastructure and human capital. We knew that we had to get our messaging right and get the word out that we were in business in a serious way. That's why I mentioned earlier that I wanted to talk about tourism as being a revenue stream for the country.

Madam Speaker, we knew getting where we needed to be was a marathon, not a sprint. Thus, we worked with an excellent team of civil servants and private sector partners who mapped out the vision and worked to help drive forward programmes to return growth and jobs across all three Islands. I would say that, we are fortunate that these people are still in place today and are extremely bright in doing their job with the civil service Department of Tourism and of course, the private sector partners.

Madam Speaker, those jobs included work for Caymanian entrepreneurs who rely on tourism to feed their families and provide a roof over their heads. Many of those families are from West Bay, Madam Speaker, and you have seen that things were better in 2019 than they were in 2013. Life was better from West Bay to George Town through to the Eastern Districts and across the water to Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

We all understand, Madam Speaker that the benefits of the tourism dollar flow through many facets of our economy and benefit many people directly and indirectly. We understand that tourism is an integral, indeed vital part of our economy and must be nurtured.

Over the years, Madam Speaker, I have often referred to the benefits of making it easy for people to get to all three of our Islands. Get your marketing offer right, and every visitor who comes here will return with their family and friends. Cruise visitors come off the ship and are intrigued. Many return as stay-overs with friends and family. It's still true; get our tourism offer and messaging right, make it easy for people to get here and give them reasons to return with family and friends. Remember 46-48 per cent of stay over visitors are repeat visitors.

Madam Speaker, in no small part because of that simple formula, that is how we have grown tourism for these Cayman Islands.

I just take the time to give you a thought process of delivering on making it easy for the Cayman Islands. When you look at attracting tourists individually to the Cayman Islands, the first thing you have to think of is, we are a high cost destination and how do we attract that block of high net worth individuals. To get the information to them, you can look at their zip code and its categorised by income and you can make sure that electronically you get information to them that they understand there is an opportunity to vacation in the Cayman Islands. You under promise and over deliver, that's what gives you your repeat guests.

Madam Speaker, again, the high or medium net worth individuals are the ones who can really enjoy the vacation time here, and the multigenerational.

The second part of making it easy is that now that you've identified, you want to take a bullseye on the gateway cities because as it is difficult to get from East End to George Town, you don't want to advertise to somebody who can't get here in an easy way.

Therefore, your gateway city is your opportunity to market and bring people here again in a comfortable, easy way. That starts putting us into the situation of the strategic value of Cayman Airways and the other partners that bring our guests.

As they arrive, the pleasant airport experience they find when they arrive in the Cayman Islands and say is above what they would expect coming to the region; and as they come in and are taken through Border Control, it's a good, easy experience to the carousel. Then the ambassadors kick in when they come outside and they get in a taxi or a tour bus and they start talking and listening and hearing about Cayman, and it gives them great comfort because it's safe and it's easy. Then, as they go to their hotel, condo, Airbnb, vacation rental by owner, friends, family, whatever it is, they have the opportunity to look and feel safe.

However, part of the infrastructure that takes place as we continue to make it easy, is if they're driving up Esterly Tibbetts [Highway] and they have to see the median that's overgrown in the middle, that's not Cayman.

*[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** I mentioned that because it's all of us. It is each one of the cogs that we have to keep in place and work to make sure we share that experience with people who arrive.

The next part of it is, Esterly Tibbetts Highway is fairly smooth but there are transportation problems. That transfer of wealth, the transfer opportunity to the Eastern Districts does not happen until we straighten that problem out, bringing 25 per cent of your economy in for opportunity.

Working on good roads is important. I won't be in the room when you're prioritising what your cuts are going to be but that's where we are.

Then we have hotels that are second to none. They offer value for money and they put the guests into the next phase which is the tours and the opportunity to have an activity here in Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Further, I would say at the end of the day, based on such a high [number of] repeat guests, we deliver value for money but we can't take it for granted. We have to continue and improve the experience.

Madam Speaker, between 2015 and 2019, the tourism sector grew an average of almost 10 per cent each year, often outpacing regional competitors. This is a good time to remind the House that the countries in the region are our friends, Madam Speaker, but they are also our competitors. I give you the example of a shopping mall that you go to as a destination, but each store is a competitor of the other one. That's the region.

I always remembered my first and only obligation as Tourism Minister was the people of these Islands and I never forgot that my role as Minister was to facilitate a vision and a positive result. To do that, I had to respect and rely on the people and businesses with real stake invested in our tourism. Thus, the Government and our private sector partners work together to grow the demand of our Caymanian tourism product. The result of that hard work was not only record tourism numbers but the great demand for our tourism product meant that the average daily hotel rate was one of the highest in the region.

At this point, Madam Speaker, the tourism industry contributed over 25 per cent of the country's GDP. It provided an opportunity for thousands of Caymanians to make a good living and in financial terms, the country received hundreds of millions of dollars in tourism spend, around \$850 million.

However, tourism is not just an economic pillar to our economy, it is a strategic economic driver for the Government. That's why I say it's a revenue stream when you're looking at what to cut. A strong tourism product and market along with a stable government helps instil confidence in investors and underpin hundreds of millions of dollars in investment which drives construction, retail, imports and other ancillary services.

Our economy, Madam Speaker, is like a web of many interconnecting parts. Break too many strands and our economic web will collapse.

*[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Tourism and development are vital strands in that web.

Reflecting again, Madam Speaker, on how far we came in six years as a country. We were averaging over 3.5 per cent growth per annum, had cut Caymanian unemployment from 10.5 per cent in 2012 to 5

per cent before the pandemic; in 2019, the Cayman Islands recorded the highest tourism arrivals in history crossing the 500,000 mark in stay-over visitor arrivals. Stayover tourism numbers grew by over 45 per cent those six years.

Madam Speaker that was no accident. We worked hard, we focused on what was best for Caymanian families and businesses, and was focused on what was best for our Islands, whether it was at home or travelling overseas, it was what was best for the Cayman Islands.

I'd never forget we were having a strategic meeting and Parliamentary Councillor for Tourism [Mr. Joseph] Hew was there and we were looking at where we thought we could drive arrivals in the next two years and we had come to around 450,000, and Mr. Hew stood up and he said, *500,000 or nothing*. Thank you, Mr. Hew, now Deputy Leader of the Opposition for the push.

We listened to our tourism partners whether large hotel properties or small to medium-sized businesses. We worked along with the team in tourism to develop a marketing approach that was the envy of the region.

Madam Speaker, this is available on statistics at the Cayman Islands Tourism website. It's 2019 that's on there now and that is very interesting. It has a big flyer which says, "Record Stayover Arrivals 502,739." Cruise was down to 1.8 million and the spend was around \$840 million [sic] [\$924.2 million] for that year. They also have, Madam Speaker, on that site, arrivals by the month for a 10 year period and I just brought that up because you can see the growth, and the growth indicates that the strategy and the plan were working and there's no reason why the strategy or the plan will not work again. If anybody, wants to look at that, that's where it is available.

Madam Speaker, as we entered 2020 tourism was booming. Tourism workers were earning a good steady income and tourism growth was forecast at five per cent for the year. We all expected 2020 would be yet another record year but as we all know, the onset of COVID changed the story. Travel, tourism and hospitality industries were among the first economic casualties. Tourism sector-reliant businesses were hit hard; thousands of workers were unemployed overnight but as a government, we cared for our tourism workers and businesses because it was the right thing to do. We provided stipends to tourism workers and helped businesses survive as best we could through policy and plans. It was the right thing to do.

However, we also understood that dawn follows the night and that we had a resilient tourism product. We had to ensure that tourism workers and businesses had the ability to remain resilient so when tourists started to return, we had the people and businesses to cater to them. [Thus], Caymanians and others could return to work in the tourism industry.

We knew that we had a resilient product Madam Speaker, not only because of the natural beauty that we have, our diverse tri-island experience, our remarkable beaches, warm weather, wonderful attractions, excellent accommodations and restaurants, but our most welcoming people are the key.

Also, offerings were improved as we built out our infrastructure to accommodate tourism growth. I'll hit on a couple of the cross Ministry examples of how everybody worked together and the need [to do so]. The most tangible expression of our Progressive-led government for the tourism industry was the modernisation and enlargement of our airport.

For years, the old airport had been creaking at the seams despite years of government after government saying we had to get something done. The Progressive-led government finally delivered the modernisation. My colleagues and I understood the needs, and we worked together to stage the rebuild so that it was only affordable over time. It was accomplished from cash and not by adding any debt. We encouraged and worked with investors to build new room stock so over 1,000 rooms were built between 2016 and 2019; and room stock grew to around 7,000 rooms by the end of 2019. Also, I might mention that, that's about where it is now, back to the 7,000 plus.

We put our Hotel Tourism School [UCCI School of Hospitality Studies] into action. Madam Speaker, the Progressive group doesn't take credit with the push to start the Hotel Tourism School that was done by the Member for West Bay West. However, we take credit for actioning the Hotel Tourism School and having students arrive for the first class. We included tourism training and education in our budget as we understood that it was necessary to lay the foundation for our future so young Caymanians would be encouraged to get into tourism.

Madam Speaker, our support for Cayman Airways never wavered and we upgraded the fleet to the Boeing Max-8 to also help build for the future. The Max-8s provided more capacity but importantly allowed us to enter strategic routes that were not easily feasible and our older aircraft could not make the distance. Denver is one such route that has proven to be successful and we continue to use CAL for the strategic purposes of growing tourism. We also [spent] \$20 plus million dollars in wages for CAL employees, a Caymanian workforce and gives opportunity for them to share in that industry and we encourage Government to continue to look at opportunities for the employees at CAL.

Madam Speaker, we are in a rebuilding mode. I certainly understand the Minister speaking enthusiastically about his efforts to grow tourism, but he needs to fully understand the challenges and tell us how he plans to mitigate those challenges with some of the issues of prioritising what our next steps are. The Minister's challenges, Madam Speaker, are not his alone, they amount to challenges that will impact thousands of Caymanians. The Minister has already told us that

cruise tourism will not return to the 2019 numbers he hoped for. He expects by the end of next year, the best that we will get is about 40 per cent of the 2019 numbers.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister for Tourism.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order for the Member to show where that was said because it's not factual and he's been giving some great information so I think maybe he misunderstood what was said, but at no time did I say that would only make up to 40 per cent of the 2019 numbers. Now, if he wants me to provide that information for him, I would be happy to but that is not correct.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Madam Speaker, if the Minister would like to give me the information I am happy to say it. How would you like to leave it?

**The Speaker:** The Honourable Minister of Tourism.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the Honourable Member is giving way just for clarity. I think the 40 per cent which he's speaking of is not 40 per cent of the number of persons coming but the amount of revenue we projected for 2022; and for to 2023 we projected revenues of 70 per cent of arrivals. As we all know in this Parliament, cruise tourism was not in place until March of last year and the whole country wasn't fully reopened from a COVID perspective until August of last year. Therefore, that 40 per cent in numbers was related to the pre-COVID times. The projections moving forward are not to that amount.

Now, I did say that the cruise tourism projections for '23, '24 and '25 are within the range of 25 per cent drop of the overall 2019 high numbers. That was as a result of the country's decision collectively not to move forward with the pier, which we have accepted as an Administration with respect to the people.

Hopefully that gives some clarity to the Member. I know he didn't mean it in any negative way but just clarifying the information.

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister for that. My information came from the CaymanCompass it says, "**Ministry of Tourism, based on information received from cruise lines, projects that just 746,000 [cruise] passengers will arrive on island in 2024—a drop of nearly half compared to 1.4 million expected... by the end of this year and a 60 per cent reduction on 2019 figures...**" So we're just splitting hairs.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, if the Member would give one more give way. I accept that misprint by the local news company and I had to reach out

to them to say that they have misprinted the information. That was on the basis that the projections were not fully completed for ports. Also, as the former Minister may know, how the cruise industry works is they upload their ports of call throughout the year. Those projections were as we were presenting to the CITA organisation and about what the projections were. That year which they reported on was not completed and we had to ask them to correct it. I am not sure why it is still up, but I am happy to ask the local Cayman Compass to please correct that because now it has caused a problem in Parliament with respect to false information. At no point have we had an indication that it would only be 40 per cent of the cruise tourism numbers.

**The Speaker:** Please proceed.

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister again for that. Let me end the story by asking him, what strategies are in place or plans being considered to ensure that tour operators and other small Caymanian entrepreneurs can survive in those years. What alternatives? In fairness, I believe you already identified that on your list and like I said, I just got this when it was presented today. We'll wait to hear from the Minister, I am sure you will update us all.

Stayover tourism is also trying to recover but here the news is better. We had 248,000 stayover visitors in 2022, Madam Speaker, 56 per cent of the 2019 number. Just about where we were in 2010. Yes, we exceeded what the Ministry aimed for, Madam Speaker, but that's not hard if you choose to have a low number that you're aiming for—raise your number—we should be more ambitious than that.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Madam Speaker, we should aim high and do whatever is necessary to achieve our ambitions. We need a “Cayman Islands only” marketing focus and do what we did before; work with tourism partners to actively grow demand. Unless we forget Madam Speaker, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman have unique offerings that must be accommodated in our marketing plans; and the support of the new planes Dash or ATRs for that daily schedule will be supported with the marketing plan.

Please don't speak as if the work with Cayman's tourism recovery is a done deal. There is much work to be done. Focus on working with our local private partner partners and our talented marketing staff to drive demand for Cayman's tourism.

Looking at other challenges Madam Speaker, the airport infrastructure will need further improvements to better accommodate commercial and private [aircraft]. Also, don't forget about general aviation; what

are the Minister's plans for that? How will the improvements be paid for?

The Minister has acknowledged that the cargo port needs to be enlarged and enhanced, but he also hinted that cruise tourism needs a solution. Thus, the Minister recognises the challenges but does not put forward viable solutions. Again, there is the issue of how government plans to pay for it.

Madam Speaker, I would say that after listening to the previous speakers, the synergy between what everybody is looking at and saying, prioritise the most important, again, I go back to the prioritisation of tourism as a revenue stream.

I mentioned Cayman Airways earlier Madam Speaker. CAL and the employees who work there are national treasures. It is an essential asset that we cannot take undue risks with. Therefore, I say again, we must be strategic in how we put that valuable asset to use and ensure that every route we fly makes sense for us and CAL. Our load factors must be carefully watched on any flight we support and be mindful that if another airline is not flying directly to Cayman from a particular city, there may be a reason why. Airlines generally fill a void where they see a demand.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Madam Speaker, I am trying to—

At this point in time it's prudent to have a Cayman centric focus and not a regional one. Tourism is starting up, Madam Speaker, our regional competitors are working hard to capture as much of the existing market share as there is, including many of the same people and their friends and family who helped us get to the 500,000 stayover passengers back in 2019.

We do not know what the next year will bring, Madam Speaker, but if the US economy goes into recession, that will impact tourism. This is no time to believe we are well on the way, we are just getting out of the starting blocks and there is much work to be done to make the lives of our people better. Madam Speaker, there is no room for going wrong with 25 per cent of our economy.

I was going to close there, Madam Speaker, but when I got the written copy, I think it is important for us to look at, *that's where we were, that was the success we had, that's what we did that drove through 2019.*

“**Promote and grow sports and event tourism**”; these are the new initiatives that are coming out. CARIFTA we've done, it's fantastic. It drove the highest numbers we have ever had for that month. The event tourism, weddings, sports—weddings are in the shoulder seasons; very successful. We've done it; *hats off.*

“**Expand into emerging and secondary tourism markets**”; we didn't do that to a great extent. The reason we didn't do it is because there are 350 million people in North America and it was easier to fill our rooms and get the price that was being charged at a

percentage. I am sure the Minister has a plan of what percentages he's going to pull out of this but I would encourage him to make it easy for them to get here, and market to high net worth individuals. I think we're leading the area in that with all the private [flights] we see.

This is very important, "**Promote Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.**" I think we hit on that with the need for CAL. I see the Deputy Premiere sitting right next to you; total support from both of us. I look forward to having a chat more about that.

The opportunities for expansion of Cayman routes; there are opportunities to grow revenue, to bring tourists. We must just make sure they are right routes. Diversify our tourism product to eco-tourism focus; strong. Reimagine cruise tourism; again, identified why it needs to be done. Increased safety regulatory oversight—I'm assuming that's Little Cayman—

**An Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Okay, good.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me the time this evening. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Before I ask if any other Members wish to speak on the Motion, I would like to remind Members of the Rules of Debate, particularly Standing Order 34 as it relates to standing on a Point of Order or to elucidate. I ask that you wait until I acknowledge you and then you can express if it's a point of order or elucidation. Also, I would like to remind Members, that while someone is on the Floor speaking, that you maintain your silence while they're speaking. If you have an issue on a Point of Order or Elucidation then you rise and I will acknowledge you. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak?  
[Pause] Does any other Member wish to speak?  
[Pause]

The Member for George Town West.

**Mr. David C. Wight, Elected Member for George Town West:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Anything formed or put together through envy and jealousy will always fail.

Madam Speaker, I rise to make a very brief contribution on Government Motion No. 4 of 2022-2023: The Strategic Policy Statement. As everybody on this side have said before, we just received the SPS today, but everybody on this side who has spoken has gone into it and dissected it as much as they could. Therefore, there is nothing that I would want to go over and it doesn't make sense repeating what has been said.

Before I start, Madam Speaker, I would just like to say, I congratulate and I am very proud of the performances over the last year of our sporting teams and

sporting individuals. We all know the golf that has been taking place with Aaron Jarvis representing Cayman at the Masters. We've had the rugby ladies and men doing well; in fact, the ladies recently went on a tour. The men's cricket [team] went to Argentina and performed very well, qualifying for the next round which still gives them a hope of qualifying for the Cricket World Cup. We've had our cycling team especially Nathaniel Forbes going away and performing well. However, our CARIFTA teams, the swimming, and the track and field with Jordan Crooks as usual continuing his great performances, and Davonte Howell being the first Caymanian to win the 100 metres at the track and field CARIFTA games. We are all proud; I am and Cayman is very proud of all the performances.

Madam Speaker, as a Member of the Government between 2017 and 2021, I saw the process of the government preparing two SPSs to present to Parliament so I have some insight into what it takes with each Minister spending long hours and late nights with their Ministry teams working on the budget proposals.

I will steal a quote from the Leader of the Opposition's contribution today where he says, "**The Strategic Policy Statement should represent the collective view of the elected government as to its future direction. It has become the norm for the Premier to present the plans and policies on behalf of the Government, after which the Finance Minister delivers the financial plans that underpin the policies in the SPS, to assure the House that the country's finances can meet the government's planned agenda.**"

Madam Speaker, the SPS gives the Government an opportunity to present their objectives and policies to establish the upcoming budget allocations. This process involves leadership, trust, teamwork and respect because it is here where cuts will be made where necessary to each Ministry's proposals.

Madam Speaker, it's very important that I repeat that again, leadership, trust, teamwork and respect are very much needed because as in most cases, the captain has the final say in making the right decision, and in this case for Cayman and the Cayman people for the following two years.

Madam Speaker, sports has been my life. As far back as I can remember, I have been involved in sports and very often I make comparisons of life experiences with sports. I'm going to talk a little bit about the history—sport in general but I'll stick more to cricket because that's where my love is and make comparisons with that.

I have been involved and played many sports, but my greatest love has been cricket and I will use the history of Cayman cricket to make comparisons to what I will talk about today.

Madam Speaker, I have memories as a five or six year old playing cricket with my father and brothers in our backyard—at that time, it was only two brothers, Brian and Christopher. I also clearly remember as a

nine year old in 1968 going to the West Bay Primary School to watch the Melbourne Cricket Team from Jamaica, which included a young 14 year old named Michael Holding, who would go on to become one of the greatest fast bowlers in cricket history. He played against the Cayman Select Team which included my brother Brian who was only 12 at the time. I say this just to emphasise how long I have been involved in cricket in Cayman and my memories of the history and the ups and downs of cricket in Cayman.

In those days that I just referred to, cricket was mainly played by those who loved cricket and often played for fun and enjoyment. It was decided that the way forward was to form an association and elect a president and form a league with teams to compete against each other. Cricket was on the rise. Madam Speaker, cricket continued to grow and the level improved with the league and competition, and in 1996 a technical director was hired by the Cayman Government which brought more success as Cayman was accepted by the ICC [International Cricket Council] which is the world governing cricket body at the affiliate level, which allowed Cayman cricket to receive some financial help from ICC and gave us the opportunity to travel overseas and play against other countries in ICC America's League.

A few years later, we were accepted at the associate level which increased our financial help and the benefit of travelling to tournaments of higher level. Madam Speaker, why I am referring to this, is because with success came envy and jealousy, as is usually the case with most things that are successful. Cayman's cricket success encouraged someone to seek election for the position of president of the CICA with exaggerated promises and financial incentives to teams. Once this person was elected as president, promises were forgotten and Cayman cricket suffered and the success of Cayman cricket declined so much so that countries that we were beating previously were now beating Cayman.

Madam Speaker, last year Cayman cricket received a visit from ICC's Development Officer to review the state of cricket in Cayman and offer some tips. The day before she was leaving, the Development Officer visited Christopher and me, and she stated how happy she was with the future of cricket in Cayman and the open-arms reception she received from the present CICA [Cayman Islands Cricket Association], but she went on to say something very shocking to us. She told us that the previous president and administration had no interest in accepting advice of suggestions from her and even when offered some financial help said—and this will sound very familiar—*it is okay, but we got this*. She had some commitments the next day before catching a flight but Chris and I arranged with a local reporter to meet her at her hotel to do an interview to reveal this so Cayman cricket will know what was going on. The

reporter waited but she could not make it, but has promised to be back and do an interview. That reporter was Seaford Russell just to let you know.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned before, for success it takes leadership, trust, teamwork and respect but with the former president, all this was missing and there was no unity and Cayman cricket suffered.

Madam Speaker, my experience of the life of cricket in Cayman through the years compares very similarly to what has happened to politics in Cayman. This is where I will mention my statement I mentioned at the beginning, *anything formed or put together through envy and jealousy will always fail*.

Madam Speaker, this in my opinion is how this Government was put together. I don't know if I should say this so I'll just move on.

[Laughter]

**Mr. David C. Wight:** I might as well say it though.

[Laughter]

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Madam Speaker—and this is my opinion. I don't know why Brian didn't take this out—this in my opinion on how this Government was put together. We had someone who was very envious and jealous of the former Premier and in my opinion, there was no limit.

[Inaudible interjection]

**Mr. David C. Wight:** *Say what?* I am talking about the former Premier, Sir Alden McLaughlin.

**The Speaker:** I didn't say anything, I didn't turn the mic on either.

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Okay, okay, so I can continue.

[Laughter]

**Mr. David C. Wight:** They were envious and jealous of our Premier and in my opinion, there was no limit to how far he would go to form the government and become Premier; and there is no limit—my opinion again—to how far he will go to keep this Government together and remain as Premier.

Madam Speaker, the effects of this has been a lack of trust in leadership, lack of teamwork amongst his Government Members, and a lack of respect from his Government Members. Therefore, Madam Speaker, how can I have any trust in this Government and the SPS that is being presented here today?

I will go further, Madam Speaker, and say that I lack trust in five of the eight Ministers; that's over half of the Ministers who are supposed to be part of the Government presenting the SPS for the greater good of the Cayman Islands.



Madam Speaker, I will not dwell too much on this subject as I have spoken on it previously, but it needs to be repeated. I cannot trust someone who resigns from the Progressives and tears down the Progressives banner off the office because of a certain issue but just a couple of months later, he ignores that same issue so as to become Premier. How can I trust someone who one night pounds their chest and proclaims, *you have my word*; not once but three times, only to have that word meaning zero just a few hours later. How can I trust someone who one night promises his campaign committee—and you're making me nervous with your finger so close to that—

**The Speaker:** Well, since you said that I will just ask you to stick with the scope of the Motion.

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Madam Speaker, my contribution to the SPS is saying why I cannot trust that the Government will deliver on their promises. That's what I am touching on. All of the Members on this side have gone into the SPS as much as they could even though they only received it this morning. So my contribution, I am just explaining why I am having and will have difficulty in trusting that the Government will deliver on their promises.

**The Speaker:** Please proceed.

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Thank you.

How can I trust someone who one night promises his campaign committee and some of his financial supporters that in the morning, he was coming to the Progressives to form the Government but just hours later in the morning, something made him break that promise? How can I trust someone who leaves the government to join the Opposition saying that he cannot sit with the government that has—and I cannot say these two descriptions—as a Speaker, but only a few months later accepts that same person that he called some names, back in the same position as Speaker so as to become Minister in a government. I wonder how now it is okay but [was] so terrible a few months earlier.

Madam Speaker, my final little piece on the five Ministers. My eyes don't lie; I might be shocked at things I see but my eyes do not lie. As a very proud Member of the Youth Parliament Committee for four years, there was one experience that deeply upset and concerned me. I won't go too much into detail and it may not have been a criminal act, but it was an incident of cheating done by an MP who was also a Member of the Youth Parliament Committee and is now a Minister. After continuously denying it, when I confronted the person saying that my eyes don't lie, and I know what I saw, he tried to make excuses for what took place. That proved to me that my eyes weren't lying. If cheating will go on in small things how can I trust that this won't happen in bigger decisions? How can I trust that this Government which has five Ministers that I have lost trust

in? How can I trust that they will deliver on their promises in the SPS?

Madam Speaker, I just put forward reasons why I will have a very difficult time in trusting that these five Ministers will put forward a budget that will benefit and be in the best interest of Cayman and the Cayman people. Doubts have been planted in my head by their own actions.

Madam Speaker—you might be happy to hear this—in closing, we had the arrival of our new Governor, Her Excellency Mrs. Jane Owens on Friday gone; and after the reception at the airport, we had her swearing-in ceremony here in Parliament in the afternoon. The Premier delivered his welcoming speech—

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, just one minute, please. There's a Member standing. Just take a seat for a moment, please.

Honourable Minister for Tourism and Ports are you rising on a point of order?

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Correct, Madam Speaker.

I am just trying to find the relevant Standing Orders. Though I may not have been in my seat, I was listening to the Member and his contributions in the Committee Room as I was preparing my notes. If you give me way to find the relevant Standing Orders—because I believe the recent statements by the Member have cast some aspersions on the Members of this House Madam Speaker, which is clearly against the Standing Orders.

Therefore, I ask him to retract everything that he has said. Not only has he not called any Member by name but he's also allowed these allegations that he has said to be any single Member of this House including you, Madam Speaker, and I think it's highly inappropriate for him to do such thing.

Madam Speaker, if you give me just 30 seconds to find the relevant Standing Orders, I will provide that information for the House.

[Pause]

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Thank you Madam Speaker for the leeway.

In the Standing Orders on page 25, Content of Speeches, Standing Order 35(4) says, “**No Members shall impute improper motives to another Member.**” Madam Speaker, the Member went as far as to say it was close to being criminal.

Madam Speaker, I have never in my six years being a Member of Parliament, as green as I was, I would never go that far. Thus, I ask you as the Chief of this House Madam Speaker, to ask the Member to retract his statements because he's made assertions on everybody including his own Members on the opposite side to [have] potentially been doing something as close as criminal in this Parliament.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, I'd like to ask you to retract your statement where you are imputing.

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Madam Speaker, what I could do... the incidences where I mentioned five Ministers and he is saying it could be referring to anybody I will just name who I am referring to then.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**The Speaker:** I would caution you.

**Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell:** Madam Speaker, could we have a couple of minutes break, please?

**The Speaker:** Thank you. Honourable Member just have a seat.

I actually need to stretch my legs so we will take this opportunity to take a 10 minute recess.

**Proceedings suspended at 9.31p.m.**

**Proceedings resumed at 10.03p.m.**

**The Speaker:** You may be seated. Proceedings are now resumed.

Honourable Member for George Town West.

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I just want to clarify something in what I had said previously. I didn't, and I am sorry if anybody misunderstood what I said, but I did not say that any criminal act was committed. I didn't say that, and if somebody misunderstood what I said, I apologise for that.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, honourable Member. Please proceed with your debate.

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Madam Speaker, as I said, in closing, we had the arrival of our new Governor, Her Excellency Mrs. Jane Owens and after the reception at the airport, we had a swearing-in ceremony here in Parliament in the afternoon. The Premier delivered his welcoming speech...hmm.

**An Hon. Member:** *Don't say it. I don't want no trouble tonight.*

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Okay. The Premier delivered his welcoming speech and what stuck out large to me was his feelings towards certain Members of his Government. Madam Speaker, there was a time he was mentioning a Parliamentary Secretary and he was excited, proud and enthusiastic but a few times when he had to mentioned a couple Ministers, it sounded to me like he was in some serious pain—

*[Laughter]*

**Mr. David C. Wight:** And it was hurting him to say what he had to say about those Ministers. Madam Speaker, I will finish by saying I used to like the old Wayne but I very much dislike the new Wayne. I believe that the envy and jealousy that made you hell-bent on forming this Government and trying to keep this Government together, where you are totally disrespected by some of your Government Members, has made the new Wayne.

I am asking you for the sake of Cayman and for the sake of yourself, Premier, go back to the old Wayne—

**An Hon. Member:** *No sah!*

**Mr. David C. Wight:** Because it is destroying you and destroying Cayman.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak?  
The Honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise to give a short contribution to the Government SPS. Madam Speaker, I know the hour is late so I will do my best to be short in my speech.

Madam Speaker, the last two years and where we are today got me to thinking, and one of the things I thought about was, you know, we all watched a lot of fairy tales as we grew up and it came to my attention that usually in a fairy tale there are people who are lost in the forest or a desert or in water. Then they find each other and then they lived happily ever after.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, I noticed that it's very rare—and I couldn't think of one—where there is a sequel to the fairy tale. You know why, Madam Speaker? It really didn't end that they lived happily ever after together.

Madam Speaker, all fairy tales end with them living happily ever after together, and this Strategic Policy Statement by the PACT Government I think, is the first sequel that I have seen to a fairy tale.

Madam Speaker, as I said, I had a wonderfully written speech here—truth be told the font was way too small even with my glasses on—but I just want to hit on a couple of points that I think were important to highlight, that I felt should have played a greater role in the presentation of the SPS; or perhaps I missed it, and perhaps we will hear more details later on.

Madam Speaker, not in any particular order but one of the items that I am concerned about when we

talk about building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands, is that of the modern subsea cable. I know that there were funds approved some \$15 million in the 2022 budget—I think it was. I just wonder Madam Speaker—we do have a Parliamentary Question and maybe we'll get the answer tomorrow—whether or not because that had started under the last SPS, under the last budget, whether that was omitted from this SPS or perhaps it was just part and parcel of a greater presentation.

It would be interesting to find out, Madam Speaker, because I do believe and I think that it was a priority of our government and certainly of this Government when they first took Office; so it would be interesting to know where we are with that modern subsea cable to provide faster, more affordable, more reliable internet for the people of our country.

Madam Speaker, roads. The East West Arterial, we had a lot of discussion about that today and there are Motions coming up, et cetera, but, Madam Speaker, we all know that it has to happen. I also understand and I fully appreciate that at a minimum, the hydrological study has to be done. I am not so sure Madam Speaker, about a full EIA [Environmental Impact Assessment] because if the EIA comes back and says that you can't build it there, Madam Speaker, what are you going to do? Unless there's somewhere hidden in this SPS that we are going to do an underground subway or above ground electric cable tram or something, we can't move it; we can't move it, Madam Speaker.

**An Hon. Member:** We build a bridge.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, I won't say any more about that. It has become a matter of contention and a lot of discussion will be perhaps tomorrow if the Member for West Bay West gets his way with his Motion.

Madam Speaker, the Airport Connector Road, this was scheduled for completion when we were in Office for the third quarter of 2021. Then we heard there was a delay in the culverts. I think if they were coming on a slow boat from China and took a wrong direction—which if you leave from China, you get here eventually either way you go—they would have been here by now.

Madam Speaker, the Minister for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman spoke about the median and tourists travelling to and from the Seven Mile Beach area along Esterly Tibbetts Highway. The median is one thing, and maybe we should let it grow up because at least when they're heading north towards West Bay Road on the left hand side and they can't see the land-fill—because I know they *gonna* be stuck in traffic—

*[Laughter]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, I don't care what day of the week it is. In fact, Madam Speaker, Saturdays are worse than Monday through Friday when you try to negotiate that Butterfield roundabout, the Esterly Tibbetts Highway, Eastern Avenue, Godfrey Nixon Way; it is bumper to bumper.

We have always insisted and we have always strived towards getting our tourists on Island, getting them on the beach, spending money as quickly as possible, and allowing them to sit on the beach, spending money as long as they possibly can before getting them to the airport, but that is not the case right now, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it's a stressful journey, that if you are lucky you don't get in a car accident, you might get on West Bay Road in an hour or two. We need that Airport Connector Road, we need it as a matter of urgency, Madam Speaker. I have no idea where the money went.

Madam Speaker, tied into that is the Godfrey Nixon Extension and the other roads that were planned for connectivity in and around George Town. This was key to the George Town revitalisation but also key to relieving the stress on that key roundabout.

Madam Speaker, as I said, East West Arterial is needed. I congratulate the Minister on continuing—and perhaps even improving, I have no idea—some of the works that we started. I saw a press release recently about the King's Connector and a few other little roads that will make a huge difference for those travelling from the eastern districts but it certainly will not make the type of difference that our people are looking for. The good news is though, Madam Speaker, while the people in North Side sitting in traffic, they can fill their coffee to the rim because the roads up there nice; they're nice, nice. You can fill that to the very rim and sip that all morning, Madam Speaker.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, the third item that I wanted to speak on and I know that the Honourable Leader touched on it and also the Member for Red Bay, and that is PlanCayman or the review of the National Development Plan.

Madam Speaker, I have talked about this a million times and the thing that stuck out most for me tonight and looking at this billion dollar budget, Madam Speaker, is that the issues we are facing, the sustainability issues that we're facing, whether it be traffic, beach erosion or housing; the foundation of all of those issues is the lack of the review of this National Development Plan. Not just by this Government, Madam Speaker, yes for 25 years—1997 the year my eldest son was born 25 years—we have not reviewed that plan.

Madam Speaker, I will say today and I know that Members on the other side know this, that the framework that was developed under the PlanCayman banner is a good framework. Nothing is perfect but it is a good start especially, Madam Speaker, for the development along the West Bay Road or what everybody terms as the *out of control, unreined*, all sorts of fancy names, for development along the West Bay Road.

Also, as I warned the last time, Madam Speaker, the buildings on the West Bay Road are getting older and older. They are failing inspections to keep up with the modern planning codes and Madam Speaker, if we don't do something now, those buildings are going to get knocked down and built right back in the same spots, on the same beach; and the older ones, Madam Speaker, with an even shorter setback because when they were built, the setback was based on the vegetation line. It's now based on the high water mark. Everybody knows that the surveyors wait until the tides are at their lowest. If they have to wait eight months, they'll wait eight months on it because, Madam Speaker, those few inches, those couple of feet on the West Bay Road are millions of dollars and the sale price of those properties depend on that.

Madam Speaker, again, it is the foundation of the majority of the things that we are talking about and trying to achieve or trying to rectify in this billion dollar budget. However, that one should be at the forefront; that should be of most urgency right along with the landfill.

Madam Speaker that is the beginning, middle and the end. We can talk about giving people access to affordable land but if we don't zone that area properly, what's the purpose? Where do we go after that? How many people will you give land to, every Caymanian? How many houses can you build? Minister, you love to build, you can build, but you're not going to build enough houses for the people who need houses. Zoning is key.

If you do not believe that Airbnb and Vrbo do not play a part in our housing crisis, then ask the question, how do we increase stay-over tourism year after year, bar the pandemic, without new hotel rooms? They aren't sleeping on the beach, it's our own people sleeping on the beach, Madam Speaker, not the tourists. Our Caymanian people [are] sleeping on the beach.

Zoning, Madam Speaker, simple things. The foundation of our issues is that National Development Plan and we play politics with it. We played politics with it during the election and we played politics with it after the Government was formed. I don't care what they call it, Madam Speaker, they can call it the fairy-tale plan; I don't care. We need to move forward with it or something comparable.

Madam Speaker, the next issue I wanted to touch on—and this is a good leeway into it—was housing. As I said, the Minister is ambitious in his plans to build houses. However, Government cannot build them all, Madam Speaker; and not everybody wants to live

in the type of houses government is building. If we didn't learn a lesson from our schools when we talked about social integration, we better learn it on housing and learn it quickly. I repeat that, if we did not learn our lesson about social integration when it came to our schools, we better learn it about housing and we better learn it quick.

Madam Speaker, we have to think outside of the box, not just we *gonna* give some people opportunity to land, then you can hear well they better be from East End if it's East End; or for West Bay, it better be from West Bay and everybody *gonna* be laying down in front of the bulldozers and all kinds of things.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, there are many, many other options out there, shared ownerships. The National Housing Development Trust needs to expand its gamut to include rentals, shared ownership and other programmes.

Madam Speaker, the Minister, I know his heart is in the right place and I know he met with a brilliant young lady—half Cayman Bracker. Madam Speaker, that young lady is passionate about housing, she has wonderful ideas; she has created a social media site and she shares her ideas on there. They don't even need to meet with her, they could go on and read the ideas. She has done her research, she has explained her plight, her struggles, also, her husband and her kids' [struggle] to try and find a home.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** I know you have appointed her to the board but she should have been on the committee that you said you were forming to look at housing from a holistic perspective.

**An Hon. Member:** She wasn't from North Side, you see.

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, you have a brilliant young man in the Governor's Office by the name of Matthew Hylton who has all of this information. We put together a cross ministerial committee and we did a tremendous amount of work prior to COVID. Unfortunately, because of Matthew's skill set, he had to be pulled away and went into Travel Cayman to assist with the COVID regulations.

Madam Speaker, he has the information. We met with private sector, utility companies, and construction companies. We spoke to Minister Ebanks' Ministry, I think Minister Ebanks may have been involved in the early parts of that— at NAU, yes. My co-chair of that committee was the Minister from Bodden Town East. There were great proposals in there. We talked about

empowering Caymanian landowners, Madam Speaker—

**Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour:** Good stuff.

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Empowering Caymanian landowners and everybody always talks about—most who don't understand why you have to sometimes and I believe this Government can figure it out and realise they *gonna* have to do it in a year or two too—why you have to give concessions to spur development. Then everybody rightfully says, how come only the big developers get it? That's because they can come in and say, *here's your ROI (return on investment) Government; I am going to spend \$25 million or \$250 million and you can get back \$100 million or \$400 million; that's easy.*

Here is an opportunity to say to Caymanians, I'm going to give you concessions; we can actually walk you through planning. NAU needs—at that time, it was some 70 something units made up between multifamily and single. They also needed assisted living for elderly and semi-assisted living for young people who turned the age of 18 coming out of the children and family services care. Not quite ready to go into the world yet, they just needed some semi-assisted living; somebody checks in on them in the morning, checks in on them in the evening. We had all the numbers; they are still there, they could be refreshed immediately.

Then we wanted to go out to all landowners across Cayman and say to them, what property do you have? What land do you have that you can develop? How can we help you develop this? Okay, you have the land but you don't have the cash. We are going to give you concessions; we are going to provide you with long-term leases that you can take to the bank as collateral. We don't want all of your units. If you can build 10, we want to put four in the NHDT. If you can build three, we want to give one to NAU; you can rent out the other two. We can give you a 10 year lease on one.

That way we achieve two things, primarily three things rather:

- we assist with the housing crisis;
- we provide opportunity for our Caymanians to develop their properties if they so wish and enter into the lucrative real estate market; and
- we fill the needs of NAU for the next 10 years, maybe beyond.

That's the kind of thinking we have to talk about when we talk about housing.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** I said 10 year leases, absolutely.

That's the kind of thinking, social diversification, affordable housing, and partnerships with the government; and most importantly, Madam Speaker, in

some of these programmes I speak about like shared ownership, et cetera, the property has to stay within the affordable housing regime pool.

Most of the ones we have now, after a certain period of time are being sold and are no longer considered affordable housing. Just a simple example is a shared ownership with the government where a Caymanian [who] qualified buys in at 30 per cent, each year they buy more, and they get to 50 per cent. There is an agreement that a percentage value of the current market price, you will get that return on investment for your percentage. Then that Caymanian can sell that 50 per cent to another qualified Caymanian homeowner purchaser or sell it back to the government for it to continue in the programme. That is the kind of stuff I wanted to read in the SPS. Those are the kind of solutions I want to hear about.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Yeah, they'll even build them in West Bay too.

Madam Speaker, small businesses. Out of 230 line items, plans, whatever they are, I saw one for small businesses. Everybody knows that that is a passion of mine. I hope—and I know that the Minister is an eloquent speaker—I look forward to when budget time comes because I want to hear the wonderful plans he has for the Centre for Business Development. I want to hear how he is going to realise the dreams of those entrepreneurs at the Centre for Business Development to finally get to that point to be able to access funding from the Commercial Banks or the CIDB [Cayman Islands Development Bank] or the Agricultural Development Bank, whoever it is; to take their businesses not only to the next level locally but internationally. [I'm] looking forward to hearing that, I didn't read it in here. I didn't see the emphasis on small business. Yes, Financial Services is important, yes, Tourism is important but let me tell you something, that small and medium-sized businesses in this country are the crux that are holding those two industries up. That is the industry that is circulating money in our local economy.

Madam Speaker, small businesses and medium-sized businesses in the Cayman Islands, those older Caymanian people down at the Cayman Business Development Centre, our Caymanians, that is where their dreams are answered. Not everybody is dreaming to be a senior partner or an equity partner; not everybody is dreaming to be chief medical officer, or to own a restaurant or hotel. The dreams of our people are in small and medium-sized businesses, Madam Speaker. Do not let that Centre for Business Development go to waste.

Again, we talk about looking for things in this SPS that matters to our people; the people who it needs to matter to. The people who it will most affect, the people who are crying, crying at our offices, crying for our

help. That is where we want to see things in this SPS. My goodness it's so small I couldn't find it.

Madam Speaker, I will close by saying that, like the Member for Bodden Town West and like I have said before in this House, I have businesses; I don't hide that, I'm an ambitious person. My family has businesses; we've invested hard in this country. We have given back a lot to this country. I have children. I want to see the country do well and if the country is going to do well, it means that the Government has to do well.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** MacDonald's stopped serving at 10 o'clock.

Madam Speaker, I will close with a poem by William Stanley Braithwaite, *It's a Long Way*.

**"It's a long way the sea-winds blow  
Over the sea-plains blue, —  
But longer far has my heart to go  
Before its dreams come true.  
It's work we must, and love we must,  
And do the best we may,  
And take the hope of dreams in trust  
To keep us day by day.  
It's a long way the sea-winds blow—  
But somewhere lies a shore—  
Thus down the tide of Time shall flow  
My dreams forevermore."**

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak?  
The Honourable Member for West Bay North.

**Hon. Bernie A. Bush, Minister of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage, Elected Member for West Bay North:** Madam Speaker, I at the beginning had no intention of standing, but to see that the Leader of the Opposition had a special mention of myself only having a retreat and something else ...

Madam Speaker, tomorrow morning, I'll be making a statement but it doesn't surprise me coming from that side of the House that they have no idea what is going on. That's part of the course.

They stand there and they say things and we have to say, *oh it's in the SPS*; and they talk about how we didn't do anything in two years. The Member for Bodden Town West can probably give the figures—you know he is good with it—how many motions that we passed in here that the government agreed on and not one of them was ever actioned.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Bernie A. Bush:** The government. He brought the motions, they all voted, 'yes', but they never passed. Ask him.

Madam Speaker, he also mentioned something about the [Ministry of] Home Affairs and myself. I am still proud that I exposed the double standards that's there for Caymanians and people who come from overseas. I will ever be proud of that. Some people have to go down and stand for something.

Madam Speaker, the SPS like every other SPS is not perfect. Do we all agree? Does everybody feel that they are getting what they want for their Ministry? I don't think so. Everybody wants more. However, these people seem to forget that the first 14-16 months we were under COVID.

Madam Speaker, that government had eight years to solve all these problems that they are talking about. I even heard them bring up the \$6 minimum wage. That was their baby and they said that they would explore it the next year forming a committee. We are still looking for that committee. [They] kicked the bucket down the road just like the albatross around our neck now is that dump, because it's been kicked down from the time we had the debacle, not in my backyard.

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** True. The best plan.

**Hon. Bernie A. Bush:** It seems as if everybody is expecting this Government to solve all the problems that they couldn't solve.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Bernie A. Bush:** Madam Speaker, [if] it's one thing about this Government, we know and have an idea what's happening.

I remember the former Minister of Sports standing over there and saying, *I have been reliably informed*, and I learnt my lesson. What I did, I didn't want to bring it on the air, and off the air I went and told the Minister. They said the oldest cricket pitch in Grand Cayman—the same pitch that the Honourable Member for George Town West mentioned that he went to as an eight or nine year old. My father was the umpire in that match by the way—and the oldest cricket pitch in this country was torn up to be replaced and when I asked the Member about it, they didn't know.

The story they gave the Minister to answer was that, they would go through the back gate and go over to the Jimmy Powell Oval and use their practice nets for cricket for West Bay. I told the Minister afterward, when you go through the back gate which is padlocked, there was about 50 ft. of log-wood prickles, but forget that, Madam Speaker, because that could be chopped out and moved. There's no practice pitch at the Jimmy Powell Oval.

Madam Speaker, at least I know what's happening. At least I'm involved around with the sports and tomorrow morning, I will give the Leader of the Opposition in a statement. He will know what I have been doing.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak?  
[Pause]

The Honourable Member for West Bay West.

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Madam Speaker, I don't think I've ever said this much in this House. I don't know if I ever said it but I didn't intend to speak. However, there are a few areas that I want to draw some attention to.

Madam Speaker, [there're] no two ways about this country still having good opportunity to do great things and that we have come a long way. You can say, and perhaps others will say, *well, you had 40 years in here and so it takes things time to happen*. However, Madam Speaker, it is true. We need to be grateful. That's not to say that there are not areas that we have to do something about but for those of us in my age group that remember where we came from we can say, **"we've come a long way, baby."**

When I came here the budget might have been that thick—I'm not saying that we need all the paper that we've got now because I don't believe we do—but we certainly have grown in terms of the things that the Government is doing—

[Inaudible interjection]

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** We certainly have improved in many, many instances over the years. To think that we have our budgeting for over \$1 billion in revenue and still we know that's not filling all the wants and needs.

Madam Speaker, I asked what the budgeting is all about, what people want. The question we must ask ourselves, are we willing to allow the country to grow to the extent that we can fill the revenue with those needs.

Madam Speaker, much talk is about traffic. I know that my district has been experiencing good growth in homes and apartments particularly. We had a respite for a time but now we are experiencing traffic; traffic is coming back again. There is still loads of development happening and while we want it, it is going to have an impact. Some say we can't tell people that they can't have a vehicle but I know some hard decisions have to be made, Madam Speaker. Perhaps that's what we're going to have to do. We cannot continue to build out and build out because if we continue building roads *we won't have no land to build a house*.

Madam Speaker, what we can't do is to tell Caymanians they can't build and invest in apartments because that's basically where many Caymanians can invest. We can't be telling Caymanians that.

I just take West Bay I don't know if West Bay would be best. We have two sets of apartments that are coming up—I think it's about 100 apartments each—and another one on the North West Point Road, Turtle Farm Road that is just completing and others that are more tourist oriented but nevertheless, that's going to cause traffic; that's going to cause vehicles. Therefore,

I am hoping and praying that the Government will find some meaningful solutions to alleviating that situation.

There are some things, Madam Speaker, and I don't think that I need to go into it because the fact is this is not the budget. I know what people say about debating this but it's not the budget. It's the budget we're supposed to be pulling apart and looking at every vote. That's where we are supposed to be, not this SPS. I am sorry for those people who think that this is the one to do it on, but it is not.

I just sat here all day and I listened and I thought, well, we would have the Premier give his statement because a statement is supposed to come with it and you know, the Leader of the Opposition says nothing at times but that he would get up and make some points and you expect that. However, I certainly didn't expect us to be going to 11 o'clock at night. I don't really think that's what SPS is all about. *It is not*. It is where we examine the budget, the figures and what the plans mean to those figures. Yeah, there's been talk, talk and talk around and you don't have the figures.

[Inaudible interjection]

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** No, that's not right. That is not right.

Madam Speaker, yes, I want to see some things done and I am exiting politics, Madam Speaker, I have just about two years to go if they don't kill me. I am 68 years old.

**Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour:** *You must take your Bayer aspirin.*

[Laughter]

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Five grandchildren, Madam Speaker, which I have to be concerned about. My eldest is graduating next week Saturday. My God, where has the time gone?

I want to see our country put right and we can do it. This House will fail if we don't take some hard decisions. I know there is always an Opposition that wants to gain the power and there is a government that wants to stay in power. I've been here for 10 terms, I know that and I watched it about three or four terms before that—at least two terms.

Thus, I recognise that's what it's all about but we have to be careful too where we're headed, what we want to do and the things we pile up and say that we want, because we can want and want but the realities are, where are we going to get the funds?

Therefore, we have to be realistic in our own mind; and that's why in moving my motions, I am going to be talking about the things that I think we can do. Yes, it will cost some money, some will cost money and others will not.

If he work with whatever private sector—and I know that our colleague, the Minister of Social Development is trying that as well as the Minister of Housing, and I believe from what I heard that the Ministry of Education had some programmes that work with the private sector. That is all good.

Now we can't just buy everything that they want to do because that will not work. We know the private sector works different from government, but there are things that we can do with them that will make things easier for government but we have to be willing to do that, Madam Speaker. Those things might not require so much money but will require policy decisions.

Madam Speaker, I know that the Caucus—and I don't meet with the Caucus—but I know that they have long meetings. They need to be a little bit more productive, cut the meeting short and take the hard decision because that's what you *gotta* do. You've got to worry about being elected if you want to be re-elected because I have been through all of that too but if you stay all night, you'll not be good the next morning; might not even be good when you get home.

Madam Speaker, what I am trying to say is some of the things don't require big expenditures but require hard policy decisions. That is what I think the Government is facing.

Don't worry about the Opposition; you have the Members to vote. Never mind them saying that *unna* pulling me over when you need me. I hear my good friend for George Town West talking that too but he forgot that they did the same thing. For me, I am here to work and I told them that when I was running and I was running by myself virtually. If I get elected whomever I can work with, I will work for the betterment of the country.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** I am always very animated, that's why they say I touch people.

*[Laughter]*

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** I am very animated when I talk.

Madam Speaker, one of the areas that I know that requires a policy decision is pension—that is public pension, not the public service pension I am talking about.

Madam Speaker, I think what people are getting from the private sector pension schemes are only something like \$1000 and that is simply not good enough today. When we pushed for pensions, and I brought a pension law in [but it] didn't get put in place right away. However, when they did get it, we were looking at it and we thought, *boy, that's \$1000 for people who are not going to get anything anyway, they will be able to manage*. However, look at the changes in the world that have come about. Look at the costs that

have come about because of the pandemic—the one we just faced and perhaps still going through. Thus, \$1000 is simply not for today's economy, and the Government has to sit down with pension holders and *let them stop wasting money and losing money* because that is what is happening. You know how many millions of dollars are lost? Do we hear anything about it? I hear about it, I hear the complaints. They are losing a lot of money, I guess from where they are investing.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Madam Speaker, we can't just sit down and say everything is hunky-dory. We have to make some changes to that situation. We cannot just allow it to continue year after year and we do not do anything because we are scared of what this one and the next one will say. I know how that is.

You know what I went through to get pensions, to get labour laws in this country and to get benefits for the working man? Then you have some people writing on social media—they just come here, they just jacked up here—they don't know what people went through to get things for this country. They don't know; they don't know the fights, the threats, they don't know the nights that I put my children on the mattress and put it on the floor because I was threatened to be shot because I was trying to bring in pensions and labour laws, and I was a socialist and a communist. No, they don't know *none* of that. They bring up all kind of *fool fool* things. Talking about me being charged. I will tell them who should be charged.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Madam Speaker, labour is a serious situation and the Minister who has it now has his hands full. He has two big Ministries only two words Health and Labour [sic] [Border Control & Labour].

One year, I told the Governor don't even darken my office to talk about me taking back Health; I don't want it.

*[Laughter]*

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** The cleaner thinks that he is the nurse; the nurse thinks that he is the doctor; the doctor thinks he's the hospital administrator. That's a hard Ministry to deal with.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** I'll add another one. Some of them think they are politicians.

*[Laughter]*



**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** No, Madam Speaker, some of these things are not money, it's political will and policy decision. If we don't leave *frien' frien'* alone, we get nothing done.

Some of the people who opposed me in my terms when I was fighting for those things are some of my best friends today because the truth is, I told them I can go out and do everything and travel to every country and try to bring in revenue but the day that the poor people in this country can't live here, they will come and take it from you. Most of them have learnt that and some of them appreciate the efforts that I have made in those directions.

Madam Speaker, this will cost money, I don't know how much, but I was hoping that the seamen, the veterans and the elderly were going to get an increase; and I hope that that is still possible by the time they get to the budget. I don't know but I would hope so because Madam Speaker, the truth is, we know what today's economy is, and \$950—you can say what you like, go and check it; even though the Government takes off some off the light bill it is still high. People can manage better? Maybe some of our elderly citizens don't quite get that; but I don't think that \$950 is cutting it for them. When I say elderly I mean our seamen, veterans and otherwise. Therefore, I am hoping, Madam Speaker that something can be done about that.

Madam Speaker, people are hurting and there are those who cannot help themselves in the cost of living. Electricity is high, groceries are high, more added on our loans and insurance. *Aha!* That's where we need to put our foot down.

Madam Speaker, I know how much is added on and I read Bermuda told them, no. I read in the media they said they don't have to pay that kind of increase; Miami is not paying it, they are not paying it. Insurance companies here are making us pay it and it's going up on the interests. I don't know why the cost is so much there but I don't know. I say that in all sincerity; I don't know what gives rise to some of these things that are happening and the additions on our loans.

Well, Madam Speaker, when we have a small population, those who don't want us two grow they certainly don't understand the economies of scale. Now I say that widely because I have to read about it and learn from people but we recognise that more people will cost more, because of more schools, more this, more that but yet the purchasing power is better [which] means more money is circulating and Government getting more revenue. On the one hand you try to do something and it hurts to the other side, and that's what happens a lot in Government.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, don't fool ourselves; people are in dire straits out there. We know how many people come to us, we know that. I know some Members here are like myself, maybe all of us, giving and giving and giving and when you can't give, they accuse you. You better keep your wife in the room with you. *They gonna accuse yuh.*

I don't know how people in the media tell them, *no, no, no he making thousands of dollars from Government.* Can you believe that? Those smart people we have out there, they tell them that; that the MPs making all kind of money, he can give it to you. It doesn't work like that, Madam Speaker. We give, I know Members who give the church, the school, and give individuals who come, give families and maintain families.

Madam Speaker, I have never said this publicly. In my time, I paid off three mortgages; 15 years I was paying that for three families for their house. I don't get out there and broadcast to the whole world that I am giving this and that to this individual. I'd broadly speak as I am doing now. That's not what it's all about, but I can tell you that we better understand that no matter how good our budget and our figures are, people are hurting.

I am not going to get into the crime factor that they say some of it is because of—because people are hurting and people [are in] need. I'm finding too, Madam Speaker, that some people have been more frugal. There are people who are out there trying to help themselves. They got a little job and they come and three of them get together—I can speak of one situation—they make sandwiches, corned beef and tuna fish. It doesn't cost them much but they're selling 100-200 a day at \$2; selling them every day. You figure that those people are trying to help themselves and they are doing well. I know!

Madam Speaker, we can't just say that all our people aren't trying to help themselves. There are people who are trying, doing their best to manage, to cut back on things for their children. I know, I see it. Some of them have to come to us quietly and ask, can you help us this month? Cayman Islands have a good future but there are many things that need to be done. They are not going to get done in two years either, that's another thing. Can't get all the things we want done in two years.

That is why, Madam Speaker, we have to ask the question—I will end there—with all the needs that exist where are the funds to come from to pay for those needs? Not so much wants, the needs.

Madam Speaker, we as legislators and Members on this side of the House, even if those out there think differently, we have to say, let us be reasonable. Where is the Government going to get the money?

Madam Speaker, when they were building the big fat post offices, \$1 million back then. I said, *no, I am not going to do that in West Bay.* I saw this thing called internet came in and could be used more and more. I said, *the present post office in West Bay is an old heritage building, I'm not allowing Public Woks to come down there and knock that down to build something else.* I'd want Public Works to come in and expand on it and keep that building. That building is still there in use today. We spent, I don't think it was \$350,000, to expand it and we have all the facility that we need.

Madam Speaker, that's one of the reasons why in asking for a high school for the district, I have worded my Motion that it's clear—and I don't want to speak about it before I even get it moved—but that's why I am saying we have to plan it then we can start to get the money hopefully, next budget.

We've got to be careful on this side what we are saying because we can *cuss* the Premier all we want, I believe that he can go home, *cock up* his legs and laugh at us when he wants.

[Laughter]

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Let's not believe that we can just throw licks and blame and that's all *gonna*—I can blame him for some, oh yeah, he knows that. However, Madam Speaker, we have to be careful in what we want and what the country can actually deliver in cost and in timing. All the things that we want to do won't take loads of money, it takes the political will though, and it takes the policy decisions.

On that high school—and I will say this much—I will ask for a lot because there is a lot which needs to be done for the future generation. We do have to put up the best buildings, [in] the best way, and [use] the best mechanisms and that costs money; I know that. I'll say no more at this point in time but I give notice.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I am not happy with that Order Paper that I see. I am not happy with it because while the Business Committee of this country can move around things, there is a situation. It's not Opposition Day that's not what our Standing Orders say. Our Standing Orders say it's Private Members' business and the truth is, the Government shouldn't even be bringing all those statements that they can take more than half a day to read. Then by the time they get to us it's this time of night too so bear that in mind, Madam Speaker, because you do have some bearing on it as well. Look at the Standing Orders and the precedents.

I say let us give the Government the support that they need; let us work with them. That is the reason why I am over here. I'm not moving, [I] see nothing to move for right now.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible interjection]

**Hon. W. McKeeva Bush:** Also, let us understand that the SPS is a budget plan, not the budget. It's what they believe can be had and done and paid for, and hopefully the Government is right. Not always, many Governments have budgeted and won't meet the budget, that's when you go into a deficit.

Let's not talk about you're disappointed. You're disappointed because you're not in Government and if you were in Government you'll probably be doing the same thing.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak?  
[Pause] Does any other Member wish to speak?  
[Pause]

The Honourable Minister for Tourism and Ports.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, I do want to address some things that have been said here tonight in response to what our Government—

Excuse me, Madam Speaker.

[Pause]

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, I want to make a contribution but I am not sure whether it's your will, considering the hour of night, 11.00 p.m., because as per the Standing Orders allowance of two hours, I can't say that I am not going to take all of it.

[Inaudible interjections]

[Laughter]

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** I just want to give that notice before I get started.

**The Speaker:** I should have known that when I saw you rise that we'd be here until tomorrow morning. That being said, I think this is probably a good time for us to take—

[Laughter]

[Pause]

**The Speaker:** Oh, okay. That's fine with me. I just need a cup of coffee.

I'll ask the Member to continue with his debate.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I must say that I am going to try my endeavour best not to be to—no I'm going to be as long as I need to be. I'm going to try my best not to be argumentative in any particular way because I don't think that the Opposition, besides a few points here and there, went too hard. They tried to do a little bit of their politics which is expected.

Starting with the former leader, the Member for Red Bay, which is his common practice with the doom and gloom story. It's a strategy that he is well known for, Madam Speaker. You put fear in the hearts of the people and then after you put the fear, chaos comes along, and you follow it up by saying you need to do some more things that's causing the chaos in the first place, and let the need and want to cause the chaos to develop.

What I mean by that, Madam Speaker, is the former leader spoke about how tight the projections of the SPS have been presented and the figures as per our legal obligations over the next three years. Yes, Madam Speaker, it is very close to our legal obligations of reasonable and responsible financial management but it has met the mark.

The reason why it's close, Madam Speaker, because like every single other country in the world, they have had to deal with the most difficult economic crisis that we have ever seen so it's expected to be close. We're not taxing the people, we are trying to get the revenues back to where they were while the global economy levels back out to some normalcy. What he then does after that, Madam Speaker, is he says, you need to increase more spending on this and on that, to add to what he has presented to be the problem in the first place.

I just say that, not to get into any argument because I'm growing up you know, I stand to learn not to fight so much and let the words speak for themselves. I just want the listening audience, Madam Speaker, the people who we represent, to be mindful of that game. Because if you are going to say that the Government of the day is presenting a financial crisis projection, why would you then say right afterwards, increase the spending some more. What political games are you playing with the minds of the people?

Madam Speaker, I am not surprised by that, but I must say that there are a couple of things that I agree with them on. We have outlined a large number of things that we intend to address. We will closely assess the financial realities as we get closer to the budget and decide by way of priority, after much discussions with the people who we represent, including those on the opposite side because this Government represents every single person in this country. We'll go through what we have outlined as to the feedback we have gotten from the people to say these are the areas that we heard from you that we think are focus points.

When the budget and its actuals start to present themselves and we are more certain of those numbers, we will start to list from the top of that list straight down to the bottom and put them in priority. If the projected finances of this country are off by a large margin we will make adjustments. That's what responsible governments do.

Again, you have heard the definition of the SPS is a ballpark suggestion of what we are planning to do by way of our focus points, our interests, our capital projects, et cetera. Madam Speaker, by all means, there is no absolute concrete suggestion that these exact things have to be done or these exact figures would be as they are.

Madam Speaker, I am so grateful to the last contributor to this debate, the Honourable Member for West Bay West and his discussion that, as we outline the SPS and say the things that were going to try to do to resolve the issues for the country, we highlighted the

fact that there are a lot of things that we can do without spending one single dollar.

Thus, with the presentation of 200 *and odd* things that need to be done—yes, we have highlighted by each one of us giving our contribution as to the things we heard from you the people, that we want to resolve—not every one of them has a price tag, Madam Speaker. It's not going to cost us any money in the budget to increase the minimum wage. It is not going to cost us any money in the budget to reform the immigration policy and the point system to give back some more protections to Caymanians. There is not going to be any costing in having negotiations to reconsider some of the treaties that we're obligated to, which costs us money, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I say that to temper the expectations or the light upon which those opposite me are trying to present, that with the number of things that we are trying to do, that every single one of them is going to cost \$5 million because that's not the case.

Madam Speaker, I heard them say that is too much and I think most of them said that they agree with all of the things. Well, none of them would dare say which one they want to cut because they know they all need to be done.

Now, is there something wrong with us aspiring to want to solve all of these issues? Nobody is going to dispute that. It just shows how many things were left behind for us to fix. It also shows that—and we must accept—Madam Speaker, we had to spend a lot of our reserves to get through the hard times. That's why the reserves for the 90 days is so tight because a lot of the money that we had saved and that includes from the hard work that the Members on the opposite side and some Members of this side did in the past administration and the administration before that.

It also contributes to when the Honourable Member for West Bay West created the infrastructure and the systems of financial services and so forth that we are in this situation that we could afford to make sure that every civil servant had a salary throughout the pandemic. When other countries were letting go and firing people, we were able—along with them in the first half—to spend, I think it was \$7 million per month. That money came from somewhere when we had no revenue coming in. Therefore, it is understandable, Madam Speaker, that our piggy bank would be depleted.

Now, unless we are supposed to say, *oh we're not going to do anything at all* and we're just going to start saving, saving, saving; if that's what they would have done, unfortunately, this Administration does not agree with that. Yes, we will pay very close attention to our spending habits over the next two years while at the same time pushing very hard to strengthen our economy and increase our revenues even more than we have already done in the last two years. However, we cannot say that we are not going to try to do these things.

Madam Speaker, one of the areas I know the people want us to focus on, and it definitely trickles back to all of the problems that we are having today, is immigration.

Madam Speaker, in our fifth Broad Outcome it talks about protecting and promoting Caymanian culture... and identity. That's it. Thank you Premier.

Madam Speaker, if there is anything that is the top of the list for the people of this country today is the feeling that they will be obsolete in a couple of years, if not decades from now.

Madam Speaker, as much as the other four are very important, as the representative of George Town Central and the greater Cayman Islands, I will be pushing very hard with my colleagues that we hammer down heavy on this area of Broad Outcome 5 that says, "**Protect and Promote Caymanian Culture, Heritage and Identity.**" Madam Speaker, how do we do that?

Madam Speaker, we talked about immigration and the thing that we have already started the ball rolling with—at least I have, and I think my colleagues support this approach even though we haven't made a full specific policy on it yet—is discussions with our new Governor. I am happy to say I've had some very positive conversations so far whereby I've even asked for the discussion of opening the door on reform of our obligations as an Overseas Territory to some of these treaties and international obligations that have gotten us in some of the messes that we're in.

Madam Speaker, I am going to give you two examples this evening. We are currently spending—let me just double check the figures—the cost to Government of \$1300 per person for the Cuban nationals who came here and applied for asylum, which equates to a total of \$11,000 per person for the time that they have been here; a year. That is excluding the cost of travel both between here and Cayman Brac, all the paperwork associated with it, repatriation to Cuba; and we had to do a Supplementary for just for a part of last year. [It's] \$2.9 million per year. Now, why do we have to do that? Because we are obligated under Law because of our British Overseas Territory relationship—one that we all appreciate very much Madam Speaker—but there are obligations that we have to adhere to which comes with costs which the taxpayers have to pay for.

Madam Speaker, the Governor of the Cayman Islands, Her Excellency, is the person who will be responsible for discussions with the Secretary of State about what our obligations are. By no means am I saying that it is an easy task to get out of those obligations. No, but it's difficult, Madam Speaker, to sit here today bearing the cost of these obligations when I see our mother country making legislative changes in their own Parliament. That's an example of some of the things that we need to change.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, we have been talking about the reform of our immigration system to protect Caymanians because I think we all will agree

that the rate of us approving Caymanians is just going way too fast. With that rate and the number of persons being granted status to become Caymanian, so does the cost of taking care of the services needed for them. Once you become a Caymanian, your children get to go to school; when you retire if you don't have enough money in your pension you can go to NAU; God forbid you lose your job, you can go to NAU—[do] you know how much money we spend on NAU per year? It's only increasing. Grassroots Caymanians are not making enough babies to justify the growth rate so you know it's not your indigenous Caymanians.

We are talking about things in the SPS like a new school. I don't know if we are in the process of doing an analysis, but I am definitely going to ask our Government to do an analysis because at this rate, five years from now we're going to have to build four schools, and I didn't say primary schools either. If the cost of the last one is any example—was that one hundred and some million dollars for the last one—talking about money problems...

**An Hon. Member:** \$83 million.

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** \$83 million.

We are going to have some serious expenses coming up because the Constitution also obligates us to educate every Caymanian child. One that we are happy to do, Madam Speaker, don't get me wrong. I think every Member of this Parliament is happy to educate our children. That's something that gets us up in the morning; it's to know that we are in a financial position that we can afford the children of this country a free education, a free opportunity to have a good mind to survive in this world today. However, it comes at a cost.

Madam Speaker, some of the other costs that come along with the immigration system that we have is the battle that we keep on adding to the competition of business.

Madam Speaker, there is a reason why the Law says that you have to have a Caymanian partner to do business. The reason it's there is to protect Caymanians in the economy that belongs to them.

Madam Speaker, if 10 people and I are competing in a business area and five years from now there are 50 people that means my competition has increased by 400 per cent. Those types of things are how immigration is causing problems for our people because they are having more and more competition every year because we're so free with this policy of residency and practically the runaway to status.

Madam Speaker, you may ask why I am bringing this up. I think in the scope of the debate this committee [sic] [House] understands them tying immigration to the things that affect the country and the policies that we need to fix that don't cost money that can have a positive effect on the people who we represent.

Now, getting back to immigration, Madam Speaker.

[Pause]

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Honourable Premier, this honourable House awards me two hours sir, and I am going to use as much as I need to represent the people of this country.

Madam Speaker, I was talking about immigration and the negative effects that it has on our people—I lost my train of thought because a colleague of mine was given me an indication.

Immigration, the reason why I am bringing it up is because I recently learned that the decision [in] 2009 when we reformed the roll-over policy to allow persons after living in the Cayman Islands for seven years to be able to apply for permanent residency, within that system, once you get permanent residency, there's practically nothing that really ever stops you from getting status.

Madam Speaker, the basis—and I think the Cayman listening public would remember this, those who are focused on immigration—of that argument was on advice that was given to the committee that created the policy, that persons coming to the Cayman Islands could be seen to have the right based on international obligations if they were in the Cayman Islands for at least 10 years.

Madam Speaker, to my surprise, I found out today that, that legal advice did not come from the entity responsible for advising the elected arm which is the Attorney General's Office. [I've] come to find out that, that advice came from the private sector. *Oh, I wish I knew that from a long time ago*, because if the Attorney General who is the legal advisor, not only to the Government but also to the Governor of the country, is in disagreement of the principal reason why we created a policy that has effectively increased our population tenfold and causing us the problems that we have today by way of demand for housing, by way of competition for people who are in business, I would have fought that fight a long time ago.

Madam Speaker, if there is a potential chance that we can change our immigration system whereby people can be awarded the opportunity to live in this country and work and contribute, don't get me wrong Madam Speaker, we want people to come and partake in our economy but not at the expense of you taking what is rightfully Caymanian's; and I haven't gotten to the political side of that yet but I will shortly.

Madam Speaker, I am hoping that we can review the legal obligations and change the points system altogether whereby persons can come here and after a period of time, show their commitment to be here, then we can say, okay, after seven years we'll give you a long-term residency with no obligations to status at all, just a commitment that you can be here. If the reason for our international obligations—I go back to again—does not award you that right, and that legal advice was not supported by the entity which legally

advises us, then the foundation of our immigration system is flawed altogether; and it's the one thing that most Caymanians talk about today.

In the interim, Madam Speaker, while we talk about that, this Government is committed to the reform through the Ministry of Border Control and Labour that has the worst effect on Caymanians at this particular point outside of granting of status itself, which is the points for buying property and buying houses.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to take this honourable House and the listening audience back to the 2017 election when I said publicly, with the stroke of one pen and one signature the Government before that caused hundreds of Caymanians to be foreclosed on. It was the main basis of my campaign because when Caymanians were coming out of a recession in 2019, the then Progressive Government changed the policy to allow the roll-over and the point system upon which—in that points system—the biggest thing you can get by way of points is buying property and land. We were just coming out of a recession when most Caymanians weren't back to work fully and if they were back to work, they were so backed up in mortgages, they were just trying to pay them off. The banks did not have enough demand on the houses to come and foreclose because if there is nobody to buy the house, they're not going to foreclose on you, Madam Speaker. [Then] one stroke of [a pen and] that immigration policy caused so many Caymanians to lose their homes. Madam Speaker, let this be a warning today because I believe that same thing is around the corner and we as a government better be mindful of it.

Madam Speaker, remember now we have a population of 72,000 and I think only 50 per cent of that is Caymanians. Potentially half of those [people] are currently looking or could potentially say, I want a home so I can get the points so I can stay here forever. We all know, Madam Speaker, many people who come here don't ever want to leave and I don't blame them. Cayman is the best place in the world.

However, Madam Speaker, that demand on housing is what has increased the cost of housing; not only the cost of the materials in the global economy but supply and demand are imperative to any cost. If you have 10 houses and only five buyers, those 10 people are going to compete against each other to try to get their places sold and are going to compete the prices down. If you have 10 houses with 20 buyers, the buyers are going to negotiate more money on each house and the house price is going to go up. That's the significance of our immigration policy and what's causing Caymanians today not to be able to afford a home.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, when you hear the Honourable Minister [with responsibility] for roads talk about the importance of roads, it's because we can deal with that supply and demand equation.

Madam Speaker, I know that the discussion about the East-West Arterial is a very sensitive one for many but it's quite simple for me because whatever it

takes to allow Caymanians to have a roof over their heads is the number one priority; everything else is secondary. If human life isn't more important than everything else, then I don't know why I'm in this job.

Madam Speaker, that road is essential to the equation of supply and demand. There is only so much land that is available with access to a road. With this road we will open up the avenue of thousands of acres which will flood the market with more land available for Caymanians to buy. If you flood the market, the price value goes down and Caymanians can then be within reach of being able to afford a piece of property.

Now, Madam Speaker, I just talked about the sensitivities of this road because of the environment and the ecosystem upon which it is designed and planned.

Madam Speaker, the world is advanced enough today that we can find an equal balance that the road can go through and that we can still protect our environment. Like the Member suggested earlier that I said and the former Deputy Premier said, that we're going through the wetlands, we never said such a thing but I know politics will be played. Even if the road had to go through an area that was sensitive, there are examples across the world where you can go through sensitive areas and have it built in a way that it does not negatively affect or at least minimally affects those areas. I am certain, Madam Speaker that the Minister is conscious because of the type of Government he is a part of, that we will get this road done in a sustainable way; however, the road has to be built.

How can we address the traffic issues of this country? How can we diversify the issues and jobs in this country if we don't have another location to take them to? We are constantly approving major building structures on the west side of the country and then we wonder why we have traffic. No major business or development is going to happen in the eastern districts when you have basically a side road that leads up to the eastern side of the Island.

The East-West Arterial is essential to home ownership, essential to the diversification of the economy and diversification of tourism, and just common sense from a safety perspective as we see one accident on the road and you can't move; one hurricane and you can't get to somebody who may be dying on the other side because the road is blocked off.

Thus, Madam Speaker, when we talk about priorities, it will be a serious discussion with this Administration as to where the East-West Arterial lands on that priority lists.

Madam Speaker, I went from immigration to housing to roads but they are all connected. Madam Speaker, my point is that there are plenty of things that we can do without spending one penny, that the people are asking us to deal with right now and that we are going to do, that deals with policy even if we had no money, no money at all. We could come to this Parlia-

ment and change legislation, we can change the regulations. Now, sometimes we have to wait on the proper reports and I know some people are not happy to hear about reports but we have to make sure that when we make the decision we understand the data and the effects of it afterwards.

For example, Madam Speaker, the minimum wage. I am exhausted with the number of calls and queries; *Minister, what happenin' with the minimum wage.* As you can remember, Madam Speaker, my good colleague the Member for Bodden Town West was in charge of Labour and you can ask him how annoying I was about it. However, we are waiting on the Minimum Wage Committee to come up with an answer as to what is a good figure because we can't just pluck it out the air. However, we have to move a little faster, otherwise the Opposition will be right. We need to start approving things that more directly affect the average Caymanian.

I believe, Madam Speaker, any legislation that gives more protections for Caymanians, the public will appreciate it because our economy is strong, Caymanians can find work. Now, there is a small percentage who sometimes you question whether they really want work or not, but if they wanted they can find it and we will fight for them because the business community knows that this Administration doesn't play when it comes to our people. If you put the fight in and you show that you want it, we will be there for you and get it.

However, what the people want more than building structures or dumps or roads, is the protection of their identity and we can do it by way of immigration; we can do it by way of protecting our environment. Why is it that every time I go to the beach I see somebody who I know doesn't even have residency fishing in my waters where I can't take my daughter Renee or Sienna to even catch a grunt because they fish out our waters but we are being told that we can't stop others from fishing.

That's what the people want to hear from us. They want to hear about protections for them because if we don't protect them now we're going to lose it. I am going to tell you how we are going to lose it.

Madam Speaker, there are some things that have happened in this country in the last two decades that I know that our forefathers, if they were able to know what was going on, they would turn around in their graves because it's not a part of who we are as a people. However, the abundance of that inside influence on our society has changed our identity, our culture and even the way we think.

We're already challenged dealing with entertainment and technology; and influences through television and music every day on our children. You know when it's going to hurt the most? When we realise that we are not making enough indigenous Caymanians and that we're giving away so many work permits that the people who get elected in this Parliament will be of a totally different mind-set from the people who were

born [here] and built this society. That's when they'll have the stroke of the pen, and that's when they'll come in and say, *I don't mind a transgender person teaching education to our kids*. That's what's going to happen. Madam Speaker, that's why the immigration policy and the protection of our people is paramount to building any building, and it doesn't cost us one cent. The people want to be protected.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to start wrapping up by highlighting something. We are a government that focuses heavily on sustainability. Unfortunately, I believe there is a misunderstanding as to what sustainability means because I think that we have to add to the definition of sustainability, *moving forward*. I'll tell you why, Madam Speaker, and I take full responsibility for not catching it before.

Sustainability, Madam Speaker, doesn't only talk about the environment, the definition of sustainability is **“the ability to maintain or support a process over time.”** It doesn't say the environmental process. I want to take it one step further. In 1987 the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as, **“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”**

Sustainability is often broken down into three core concepts and the three pillars are environmental—and I am sure we have that covered because we have the most environmentally protective Premier this country has ever seen. Thus, I can promise those who are worried about that, you have a fighter, you have a champion in this Government and he's at the head. I am not worried about that.

The other two areas of sustainability are economic and social. I think the Honourable Member for West Bay West covered the economic and even some of the Members of the Opposition highlighted the importance of the economic sustainability and ability to provide for our country.

However, I want to get into the social [aspect] because social is the part that I think we have failed to identify, that the people are calling for us to focus on, it's their identity; and we have committed to that in this document. Therefore, the issues and the policies that we are going to have to deliver over the next two years need to focus on this area.

Let me read Madam Speaker. **“Social sustainability is about making sure that communities and societies can thrive and continue to exist...”** Today, if you ask our Caymanians that you and I know who voted for us, they believe that they will not be in existence in the near future because of our immigration policies, and they deserve to be protected.

I am going to tell you this, Madam Speaker, I am an independent Member of the PACT Administration. If we are not committed to this area, *Houston, we have a problem*. I will add no more to that.

**“It focuses on improving people's quality of life, fostering strong relationships, and ensuring**

**that everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential.”** Now, how can a Caymanian fulfil their potential to buy a home when there's constantly someone who is trying to get into Cayman, putting pressure on the real estate market to bring the prices out of their reach? How can they reach their full potential when the banks are not giving them the loans that they need?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, no matter what money you put in this SPS, if you don't protect the Caymanians, from being Caymanian to ownership of this ship that we are staring; *dog eat our supper*. No, forget that. The dog is not going to eat our supper because we're going to be well gone. It's our grandchildren who will be in a world that they don't even know or maybe in a world they know because they won't even know what Caymanian is. The Cayman of today or of yesterday won't be the same Cayman of tomorrow. The same cultural things that we did...

I'm going to tell you one little thing that came in and this one is going to be controversial; I promise you. When the [foreign] numbers get so big that they tell you, you can't eat turtle meat anymore—because that's coming. Many people who are Caymanian today go, *oh my God, I can't believe you eat turtle that beautiful little green finned animal; my God*.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Let me tell you something Madam Speaker, as funny as it may be it's a reality, it's coming. You know how I know? I am the Minister for Turtle Farm. I am now the one who gets the emails and the comments about, *oh my God, your nationality eats turtles?* You know that in some countries they protect cows, they worship them; but we eat cows too. When our forefathers were being eaten by mosquitoes, sunburnt to the crisp, trying to get turtle meat to build what we are in here today, they don't know that story.

Madam Speaker, if we do not protect our Caymanian identity, no matter how many buildings you build, no matter how many dumps you fix, no matter how many roads you construct, it is not going to be relevant because it is not going to be Cayman. It's going to be something else but it's not going to Cayman.

I will be honest with you, Madam Speaker, if we did nothing else in the rest of this Administration, [we should] reform our immigration system to protect our people from extinction.

Madam Speaker, I want to just finish off by addressing some of the comments [mentioned earlier]. I'm glad to see that the Progressives will be supporting the Central Scranton Park, as per their representative from Red Bay.

This concept of nothing for the small man in our SPS, I think it's an unfair statement and time will show our commitment. I am glad that some discussions

about pension has come up as well because Madam Speaker, I do believe that we need to take a proper look at our pension structure particularly in these times of [high] interest rates. I am happy that my colleagues will be in support of increasing the withdrawal of our private pensions to pay off mortgages from the current amount of \$35,000 to \$50,000, which means a married couple can withdraw up to \$100,000 to pay off a mortgage of their family dwelling home. That means a lot.

I want to say, thank you so much to the former Minister of Tourism. He practically gave me full praise for the hard work I've been doing over the last two years and what this Government has been doing for tourism, and I appreciate that.

Madam Speaker, it shows that there can be maturity in politics because the honourable Member never gets the politics in the way. I think he was a little bit off by the whole 56 per cent not recognising that was for 2020 when we were still locked down but I think it was an honest mistake based on data that was given to him. However, everything else he talked about, he supported.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to close on something that saddens me. It saddens me but I am not going to make a big deal out of it. I was going to but I chose not to. It has to do with the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, I sat and listened to the Leader of Opposition talk about the ReGen project; and the information I knew, I said to myself imagine that, not following the Standing Orders at all.

Madam Speaker, let me turn your attention to page 47 of the Standing Orders, section 83, it says, **“A Member shall not move any motion or amendment relating to a matter in which that Member has a direct pecuniary interest or speak on any such matter, whether in the House or in any committee, without disclosing the nature of that interest, and shall in no circumstances vote on any such matter.”**

*[Pause]*

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** We're going to get to it.

Madam Speaker, I recall—and this part made me cry, it really hurt me. When I got into politics, I gave my commitment to the people of this country and I had to reshuffle my life so I could balance the commitment to the people at the same time as the commitment to my children.

Madam Speaker, my wife decided to change her career, a very good one in financial services and [it] paid good money. She actually used to work with the Honourable Premier. Because of my commitment to the people in my limited time, my wife decided she'll change careers into something that gives more flexibility. Thus, my wife decided to go into real estate.

Madam Speaker, you will recall that the Honourable Leader of Opposition, when my wife started off in real estate—when I was covering all the bills for almost a year—going out to just get her name out there to say, consider me. I was out doing what a husband should be doing, being there for the one that he is in partnership with. Then he makes politics get the best of him, [saying] how disappointed he was.

Let me read some of the comments: **“egregious conduct”** by the Member. **“He further said that Bryan, ‘a Member of Parliament and the Cabinet has sworn an oath to serve the people of the Cayman Islands and put the country’s interest before his own.’”** [He] talked about our Code of Conduct and the mere principle of it even being perceived as influence.

Now forgive me for being naive and young and *green* to [not] think that helping my wife give out flyers was so terrible, and that the whole world would think that I'm interfering. Telling people that helping my wife with flyers is influencing the society.

Okay, no problem if it is perceived that way. My Leader and I sat down and said, in the role that you play now, perception matters. Just the mere perception, not the reality. I had to apologise to the world as if to say that I felt bad for helping my wife give out flyers to feed my children, Madam Speaker.

Yet still this Member can sit here and talk for 20 minutes about the ReGen project and why this Government needs to do it but he won't declare his interests. I support the Standing Orders, Madam Speaker.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, I am not going to go any further. I'll allow him to tell the country his interests because I am not going to be petty. It disappoints me.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member for George Town North.

**Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, on a Point of Order. The Member took a line that he says that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition had a pecuniary interest in the ISWMS [Integrated Solid Waste Management System] Project. I think he needs to say what that is, Madam Speaker. He can't just leave an open ended accusation.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** Madam Speaker, it is my understanding that the Leader of Opposition's wife works for the company which has been awarded the contract for the ReGen project. Very similar circumstances, don't you think? Not saying that he can't talk about it



because he has an obligation as the Leader of Opposition to represent the country but the Standing Orders were quite clear. Just declare it so that people understand and they can draw their own conclusions.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan:** I never hid that was my wife when I was giving out flyers for her but [in this case] nobody knows and the Standing Orders obligate him to do that.

Madam Speaker, it's not like I want anything to be done. I am just saying, how far can we take politics to be so silly, to the point where you see a husband trying to provide for his family that you are going to be taking up politics to go that silly?

Madam Speaker, we have to put our priorities right, because you never know when it can come back and bite you.

Madam Speaker, that's my contribution.

**The Speaker:** Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Before we continue with the debate, I will take a five minute suspension.

**Proceedings suspended at 12a.m.**

**Proceedings resumed at 12.10a.m.**

**The Speaker:** You may be seated. Proceedings are now resumed.

I call on the Honourable Premier to exercise his right of reply.

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, I thought in the early part of the debate, after the Leader of the Opposition spoke, that he laboured so much in trying to find a way to address the SPS issues that there would be no real debate on the SPS from that side, except perhaps from the Member for Bodden Town West who actually did get into the SPS details.

Madam Speaker, firstly, there was the comment made in relation to Tabling the SPS on the same day in which it's debated and voted on. The implication was that there was some unfairness with this and something unreasonable about it, which prevented the Opposition from the opportunity to review it properly and do their job.

Madam Speaker, I just want to note for the record that the SPS that was tabled for 2017 was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 2017. That would have been the first SPS for the administration following the election in 2017, which would have been the Opposition Members, primarily. Madam Speaker, that SPS was debated and voted on, on the same day, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 2017, and it was Tabled on the same day without

the then Opposition having the opportunity to review it in any detail.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, the following SPS that was done on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, was Tabled, debated, and voted on, that day. Madam Speaker, the same thing, of course, happened with this Government's Tabling of our first SPS on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 2021. I just wanted to address the question and the implication that there was something unfair or unreasonable in relation to Tabling this SPS.

Madam Speaker, we went to great efforts with this particular SPS to take the approach of actually following what is contemplated in the Public Management and Finance Act, which is that you put the policy statements upfront— that's why they call it the Strategic Policy Statement, Madam Speaker— so the policy should be set out in detail upfront and then the financing as well as the macroeconomic environment and the local economic environment, which are relevant, and then the financing details will follow.

This, Madam Speaker, is a document that has been done in a different way, in a different style, and one which we feel provides the opportunity for the public to follow it much more clearly and understand exactly what is happening with this SPS and the rationale for it, which is that it is a policy tool to help to manage the strategic development of the eventual budget for the next period. So Madam Speaker to complain that they haven't had it long enough...

There were also references on several occasions that the— how many pages it is? 91-page document was so small, they couldn't find it. I'm sure it compared favourably, if not better, with other SPSs, so the attempts to suggest that this particular SPS was somehow deficient, is really laughable.

Madam Speaker, I want to say that in terms of the comments from the Member for Bodden Town West, his concerns around the revenue projections and costs, I have no quibble with that. Those are legitimate concerns to express but, of course, Madam Speaker, without having had the benefit of sitting around the table, working with the team and understanding where the projections come from in particular.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Right.

Just noting, Madam Speaker, that the 2017 SPS that I referred to earlier as being Tabled on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August and debated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August was only 57 pages, whereas this one is 91.

Madam Speaker, all the same, this one makes a much better read, easier to follow and that is the whole point of it, despite the fact that it has a few more, maybe more than a few more pages; but Madam Speaker, the point I am making regarding the question around the projections: it is difficult to follow and under-

stand without being around the table and understanding how we arrived at the projections for revenue and the projected expenditures.

Madam Speaker, a great deal of effort was put into assessing and analysing what the revenue numbers should be, and I just want to go into quite a bit of detail on this because it is fair to raise the question around the revenue numbers and projections for expenses, but other Members on the other side went further proclaiming, Madam Speaker, that they didn't believe the numbers and that there was something really wrong. Madam Speaker, as I was saying, much effort was put into coming up with the forecast for the revenue numbers.

Madam Speaker, at this point we are past the quarter way mark for the year. I won't give you specifics, but I will say government's revenue numbers are actually ahead of last year's revenue numbers which were already at \$1.02 billion so there is certainly, to this point, a clear rationale for thinking that the revenue numbers as forecast could be reasonably reliable.

Madam Speaker, we all know and we all understand that anything can happen— a storm, another invasion of another country; God forbid, another pandemic type of situation. Anything can happen. Madam Speaker, any geopolitical tensions, any market failures, many things can happen which impact the outcome. We all understand that, and nobody expects us to have a crystal ball, but these are reasonable projections, Madam Speaker, and on the expenditure side, they reflect an attempt to keep our expenditure under control. We are not spending initially beyond what we spent last year. That is the baseline for this year. It does increase slightly for '24, and then '25 and '26. In 2026 it goes up to just over a billion dollars in expenditure.

Madam Speaker, as I have outlined, these are reasonable forecasts subject to all the usual qualifications on the revenue side and the expenditure side and we have demonstrated compliance with the principles of responsible financial management, compliance with the Framework for Fiscal Responsibility.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Red Bay spent quite a bit of time talking about the issue of compliance with the required ratios and numbers. Madam Speaker, what I wasn't quite sure about was, the Leader of the Opposition was saying that we absolutely must do the ReGen project and I have indicated my views on that. I think that it is something that we have to move forward with, but Madam Speaker the Member for Red Bay then followed up suggesting that the impacts of a project like that, along with all the other expenditures that we are proposing to try to help people in a modest way, in a reasonable way, somehow threw this SPS's accuracy into doubt, suggesting that he didn't believe the numbers and this was a problem.

Madam Speaker, I just want to touch on a couple of the points that he focused on. One was the debt servicing ratio. He did correctly note that for the years starting in this year '23, going to '24, '25, '26 the debt

service ratio percentage is just under the 10 per cent limit; so for 2023 it is 9.9 per cent, 2024 is 9.5 per cent, 2025 is 8.2 per cent, and 2026 is 9.9 per cent. So why is that happening, Madam Speaker?

Well, Madam Speaker, that is happening because the Government chose to employ a mechanism to allow the investment in 2026 of \$75 million to pay-back or pre-pay some of the debt under this project to save the country money over the 25-year life of the project, Madam Speaker. There is an internal rate of return against which interest is paid on the construction cost, so if we pre-pay it, we are saving ourselves money in the long run. Madam Speaker, if we were to simply make a \$75 million payment in 2026, which is when it is expected to be done, we would not be in compliance with the debt servicing ratio. It would be in excess of 15 per cent then.

It wouldn't be the first time that the government would have temporarily breached the debt service ratio; it happened as a matter of course, in 2019 under the previous administration, when they paid off half of the then outstanding bullet bond of \$319 million, I think it was, and refinanced the balance. That triggered a significant jump in the debt servicing ratio— something close to 80 per cent I think it was; but Madam Speaker, we did not want to reflect a breach of the debt servicing ratio, so the way we address this is by putting aside \$20 million I think it is, in 2023, and then \$15 million and \$20 million and \$25 million I think it is. I don't remember exactly what the numbers are, but that is what allowed us to remain below the 10 per cent so we did not breach the debt servicing ratio and that's a projection, Madam Speaker.

Here is the reality, Madam Speaker, if we were down the road and we felt that we were having a budget issue, we have the ability to not inject the total amount. The original proposal was to inject \$20 million. That is what was originally contemplated. This proposal that we have is to inject \$75 million in order to save the country money, but if we need those funds for some reason, I am sure that we could not inject that or utilise the funds that we are withholding over these years, so there is not a significant risk in following this kind of methodology to ensure that for the debt servicing ratio we are okay. And you know, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition himself actually said that he was happy to see that we were taking that approach because he was going to suggest to us that that is the approach that should be taken; so if he is suggesting that is the approach we should be taking, it's really interesting that the Member for Red Bay is having a fit over the fact that it's just below the 10 per cent but not in breach of it. That is what his leader, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, says he would have suggested to us to do, so Madam Speaker.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** De facto, is that what you are saying?

Madam Speaker, the other element in particular that the Member for Red Bay was casting significant doubt on and expressing concern about, was the net debt ratio where he noted that it would go up to 70 per cent in 2026.

Madam Speaker, I think during his contribution, he was mistakenly considering that it was a percentage of debt to GDP which, if that was the case, I don't think this would be reflected in this SPS at all. Madam Speaker, it is a percentage of revenue. Debt as a percentage of revenue. Now, what's really important is: When you see 70 per cent for 2026, the first question you should ask is, *but what happens thereafter?*

What happens, because the payment is being made in 2026, what would happen based on the forecast the following year? The answer to that, Madam Speaker, is that the following year the net debt percentage goes down to 52 per cent and the year after that, unless there was some sort of borrowing, the following year after that, it would go down again. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I do not accept the view that what we have reflected here, in this SPS, with these projected levels of revenue and expenditure and projected surpluses over that period of time is anything that anybody should express concern about; anybody should cast doubt upon; anybody should ridicule or suggest it just can't be right.

He can say he don't believe the numbers, but the numbers are not unreasonable. His own leader has said that kind of mechanism, to get that sort of result with the pre-payment of the debt for the ReGen Project, is exactly what he would suggest so this compliance schedule, showing the Government's Strategic Policy Statement numbers, which starts off with '23 but the forecast for the SPS is 2024, 2025 and 2026. There is no reason to suggest that it's inaccurate or cast doubt upon it, Madam Speaker. As I said, obviously, it has to be qualified by all the usual qualifications whenever you are dealing with some of these types of scenarios.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Red Bay also noted—and I may be right in thinking that the Member for Bodden Town West noted it as well—the cash reserves number reflected in days based on the amount of days of reserves that are projected to be available at that time. Yes, Madam Speaker, for 2026 the cash days are down to 90.1 days. Madam Speaker, clearly that is in compliance but, is it something to be concerned about? Is it something to watch? Is it something to dismiss this for? No. Is it something to keep an eye on? Absolutely. Absolutely, Madam Speaker, but Madam Speaker, I want to give you an example. The 2021 SPS that we did, which was our first SPS, projected the 2024 cash days as 94 days, just a little bit over 94 days. Madam Speaker, as you can see, the forecast for 2024 in this SPS is 117.6 days.

Madam Speaker, I make that point to say that because 2026 is now reflecting 90.1, it doesn't mean

that it is going to get worse. It very likely will get better, particularly based on the level of revenue that the government has received so far this year, which is ahead, which is reflecting a positive variance to last year's revenue numbers. Of course, we know there is no guarantee, Madam Speaker, but by the time we get to dealing with the actual budget for 2024 and 2025, we will have a much better idea of how the revenue numbers are trending and we can factor that in Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I say that just to outline that this “doom and gloom”, as my colleague the Member for George Town Central referred to in his contribution, that was emanating from certain quarters on the Opposition bench, is not reflected in this document. This document fully complies, and it is reasonable for us as a country, as a government, to rely on these numbers in order to plan the implementation of our budget for '24 and '25.

Madam Speaker, I did find it interesting though, that immediately after trying to cast doubt on the revenue numbers, trying to cast doubt on the expenditure numbers, trying to cast doubt on the ratios, trying to cast doubt on the anticipated required surpluses for the forecast period of '24, '25 and '26, the Member turned right around and started talking about all the things that we should be spending money on— all the additional things that we should be spending on, to help people.

Madam Speaker, you cannot have your cake and eat it too. You can't say that this shouldn't be relied on and then turn around and say, *never mind what I just said, you should be spending all these other money on the basis that it takes cash to care.*

Yes, we all know that Madam Speaker, we all understand that. Every government has the struggle trying to work out how the best employ the limited resources that it has at the time, and it's reasonably anticipated to be able to spend over the forecast period coming to best impact the lives of our people; to help them, to make their quality of life better, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, you can't be talking out of both sides of your mouth at the same time.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** That is not a credible approach to governance, it's not a credible approach to constructively reviewing and lending your voice to discussions on what you see in front of you in this SPS document.

Madam Speaker, I just want to make one additional point at this stage which is that the surpluses which are indicated, they do appear to be significant amounts of money, Madam Speaker for the '23 year, the '24 year and '25 and '26— \$61.7 million for '23, \$77.4 for '24, \$98.2 for '25 and \$103.2 for '26. It sounds like a lot of money, Madam Speaker. Last year, we also had \$47 million in surplus against a projected amount of \$19 million.

Madam Speaker, the point I want to make for the benefit of everyone, is that even with those levels of surplus on the basis of these revenue numbers, which we say are a reasonable projection on the basis of the expenditure that we say is reasonable for us, at '26 we are still just making compliance with the required equivalent of 90 days' executive expenditure at that time.

I say that to say, Madam Speaker that firstly, the Public Management and Finance Act requires us in terms of the FFR principles that are built in there, it requires us to have a surplus; but secondly, to say, when you see government reported surpluses like these, and you see that we are controlling our expenditure and controlling and limiting the amount of capital that we are employing over that same period and yet we are still just barely complying, people need to understand that it means a \$98 million surplus or a \$103 million surplus is not a guarantee that the government can just give money away.

I have heard that, you know, even coming from the Opposition, who would never have said it when they were in government. You have to be careful, you have to manage your resources appropriately Madam Speaker, and what I want to do is to send a very clear message, because I think certain Members of the Opposition tried to do the opposite. They tried to send a message to the people of this country, and to the business community in this country, that they should not have any confidence in this Government and in this SPS!

Madam Speaker, that is an injustice to all the hardworking civil servants; to the people who work in the Economics and Statistics Office, who have helped to put this together; to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, who have helped to put this together; to everybody else in government, including in my office, who have been through this and have looked at this in detail and who understand what the implications are for all of the various required principles and ratios that have to be met. So Madam Speaker, I do not accept for one second that comments made from the other side should be viewed by anybody else in the country as being fair or accurate at all. Not at all, Madam Speaker.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, I think I made that point very clearly. Maybe I should say it again, Madam Speaker: This country, our people and the business community have every reason to have the usual confidence in this SPS, Madam Speaker.

This Strategic Policy Statement which has been specifically prepared in a different way and, actually, more closely reflects what is contemplated under the Public Management and Finance Act as a part of

the initial policy strategy stage of the budget development. This they can read, this they can follow far better than many others that have been done in the past, Madam Speaker.

It has graphics, it is quite clear in pointing out in detail the compliance ratios, how it needs the ratios, how it is in compliance, and then all of the other typical details that help them to understand what the broad outcomes are, and what the specific outcomes are, and which Ministries, Madam Speaker, have input into each of these broad outcomes and the specific outcomes and under each of them Madam Speaker, it says responsible entities and it lists the different Ministries that have input, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, what was the phrase the Member for Red Bay used?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** PACT United? Was that it?

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** PACT United. Madam Speaker, I think I like that.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** I think I like that.

Madam Speaker, I like PACT United much more than—

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, I like it more than what I would regard as progressive hypocrisy because the approach of getting up claiming you have not had a chance to read this, claiming it is so small that you couldn't find it and then basically saying it's rubbish, you should pay attention to it and this is a dangerous approach and this is a dangerous government. That is what has been said from day one. We are two years in.

We have performed Madam Speaker. They seem to have forgotten where we came from, what we had to do, in terms of reopening the economy, reopening the country, re-establishing business activities, getting the tourism industry going again; ending up with nearly \$100 million swing in both '21 and '22 on financial results, Madam Speaker; having the lowest recorded Caymanian unemployment numbers so far as far as I can tell, Madam Speaker; having a surplus, and complying with the law.

I just explained, Madam Speaker, that while the surplus is good, it gives us additional cash because we have used reserves in the past during the COVID environment where revenue was down significantly.

What we need to do now is continue to build reserves going forward, but as can be seen even in this document it is going to be a challenge and, hopefully, when we get to '25 we look at '26, we will see that the cash reserve position at that point is much better. Otherwise, we may have to take some action Madam Speaker but, as I said, there is every reason to believe that the expenditure numbers can be maintained and the revenue numbers are accurate.

Madam Speaker, on the revenue, I will just note that one of the Auditor General's criticisms on government's financial projections has been that the revenue projections always end up being too conservative— that government typically collects much more revenue than it initially projects it will. Now, Madam Speaker, we know past performance and all that stuff, none of that is any guarantee. We also know that anything can happen; as I said, we don't have a crystal ball. Great effort was put into this, Madam Speaker, and now it is a high level indication, a guiding set of principles and numbers which will help us develop the '24-'25 budget.

Madam Speaker, a whole lot of talking. People made laps around George Town, and all over the country, discussing this SPS seemingly as if it was a budget but Madam Speaker, it is not a budget. We are very clear on what it is. We are very clear on that, Madam Speaker. There will be time to discuss the budget and get into much detail. This might be just the introduction of the budget, you know. Those documents are going to stack up to here, Madam Speaker, so the country has every reason to be confident in what we are doing.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for his demonstration of endurance in being here.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** It is much appreciated, Madam Speaker, and since he is here, I want to talk a little bit about the issue of PlanCayman and the development plan review that he was quite exercised about.

Madam Speaker, firstly, there were statements made by the Leader of the Opposition and I'm not going to say it came from, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, but at least one other Member suggested that I had indicated that this Government would not get the development plan review done in this term. Madam Speaker, that is categorically inaccurate.

I said, Madam Speaker, that the team had indicated to me that we would probably get half of it done and, doing it in stages, probably get half of it done, but it would not be complete for all of the country, Madam Speaker. That is what was said, not that it would not get done at all— and Madam Speaker, I agree with the Deputy leader of Opposition. It is important.

It is important, but I will say, Madam Speaker, that the advice that I have seen in relation to PlanCayman as was left by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who was the former Minister, that in itself, Madam Speaker, if it was adopted by Cabinet tomorrow, would not do anything in terms of the development plan review. At most, it could be regarded as a sort of baseline guiding policy for a development plan review in stages.

Madam Speaker, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition rightly noted that we've had this issue going on for 25 years now, in terms of the development plan review— that is required by law to be done every five years— not being carried out.

Madam Speaker, there was an article back in 2015, I think it was. I have it here somewhere, I have to get the date of it; not 2015, but there was an article in the Cayman Compass, I think it was, criticising the then administration led by the Member for Red Bay now, Sir Alden. I think it was probably 2017 or thereabouts, that what was being contemplated was not a development plan review, but was a plan for a plan and it still hasn't been done, Madam Speaker. It hadn't been done when they demitted office and we have been working to try to move this forward. We all understand; the Deputy Leader of the Opposition understands the challenges with it, but we will be moving it forward, Madam Speaker. There's no question in my mind that we will be moving it forward.

Madam Speaker, the discussion around the ReGen Project by the Leader of the Opposition, as well as the Member for Red Bay, was also an issue that I was quite concerned with the manner in which it was being addressed, Madam Speaker, so I want to get it straight. The comments were that I wasn't paying attention to it; that I wasn't focused on it; that it is an example of slowness of the government and lack of correct priorities.

Madam Speaker, this project was bid in 2016; 2016, Madam Speaker, and all this time... It wasn't until we got to March... and I know it's complex and it's difficult. I am just talking about the comments that emanated. To suggest that somehow, we were supposed to be able to take a project which required another 30 documents to be negotiated, finalised, ready for signature between March and October, when it took 1.5 previous PPM administrations to get it to that point is not logical, it is not reasonable. It's bordering on hypocrisy to suggest that somehow that reflects some kind of failure.

Madam Speaker, one of the favourite expressions was— and there was some finger wagging going on about it as well— that as Premier, I was "dithering". Madam Speaker, the dithering I heard has come from that side. It is this same, constant, rhetoric that somehow this government isn't getting anything done, when we are.

Madam Speaker, I and the Members on the other side know it, but for the benefit of the public I need to explain, that even though I am the Minister with responsibility for it, I can't get involved and go and sit

around the table and negotiate these projects and these terms, Madam Speaker.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** I cannot do that. The team from the civil service has the responsibility to conduct those negotiations on behalf of the government; and Madam Speaker, I also want to point out, that the same private sector team that was advising the previous government on this project, both in the UK and in Cayman, is the same one that this Government is taking advice from in order to get this done.

Hence, I don't really believe that they are going to suggest that the good civil servants that are working hard on trying to get this done are the ones that are dithering; the ones that can't make a decision; the ones that can't pay attention or be focused on it; and the private sector members/advisors in the UK and Cayman equally. Are they suggesting that they are not doing their job? They are not earning the fees they are being paid? Madam Speaker, that is for somebody else. It does not reflect reality.

Madam Speaker, I know that the hour is late. It's now 1 a.m.

Madam Speaker, I think I have made the points that have been necessary in relation to this SPS. It reflects good things for this Government to be delivering for the people of this country. This view that we haven't been performing and therefore the people of this country can't expect that we should be performing in relation to this? Nonsense, Madam Speaker.

I referred to the fact that we have had these significant improvements in our financial position. I referred to the fact that 14,500 new jobs were created, which no doubt has also led to this significant reduction in Caymanian unemployment, Madam Speaker. Our people and the business community out there have every reason to have confidence in this Government, Madam Speaker. We have facilitated their ability to operate within the private sector economy which drives so much here, which we have acknowledged, and it has resulted in good financial performance by the government, by the country and good unemployment numbers, good economic growth numbers— I believe the economic growth was 4 per cent in 2021 and 3.7 per cent in 2022.

Madam Speaker, as I said, anything can happen— hurricane, some sort of similar global financial crisis as happened in 2008, 2009— we just don't know, but outside of those things, Madam Speaker, the country has every reason to have confidence in this Government. Whether you want to call it the PACT Unity, or whether you want to call it Action PACT—

*[Laughter]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** We are going to deliver, Madam Speaker.

We are going to ensure that we continue to take a conservative approach. Make sure we guard the financial position of this country and ensure that we deliver for the people of this country on our promises that are reflected in this, Madam Speaker, plus many other things.

There were comments around education. Madam Speaker, we are putting 14 math specialists across the spectrum in our primary schools. That will help, Madam Speaker. It will help develop and improve math in those schools. Once math levels are improved at the primary level, it will translate into better performance at the high school levels and thereafter, Madam Speaker.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** We are also going to have 80 assistant teachers; I think 40 in January and 40 the following August, Madam Speaker, so education is getting much attention to ensure that we address issues in the right way, based on the analysis that is being done, as to what is needed to end up with our children being better educated and better prepared to pursue further academic training; better qualified to go into the job market or undertake Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) training, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I don't know...

There is always this focus on myself, and the suggestion that the Government is coming apart every minute. It's been two years now, Madam Speaker. It hasn't happened. Is it easy? No, it's never easy, Madam Speaker. I was a part of the Progressives. Were there arguments in the Progressives? Yes, there were. Were there disagreements? Yes, they were. Were there threats at different points about people walking away? Yes. These types of things happen, Madam Speaker. It is part for the course.

Madam Speaker, I will tell you something: I like the Leader of the Opposition but I don't like his odds if he were sitting in this chair because I don't think that he has the kind of personality that would be able to handle this job. I am not trying to offend him, but he spends all day long dishing out insults to me, so I think that is a fair comment for him.

Madam Speaker, the Sister Islands are getting attention as well.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** There was a discussion with the former Minister for Tourism and there is clarity around that.

Madam Speaker, I visited the Faith hospital in Cayman Brac fairly recently. Much work is going on there and more work is planned to put in a new emergency room service, Madam Speaker, so that the people of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman have access to

better services there which will hopefully lead to saving lives or certainly, making people a lot healthier Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it is late and I'm going to close on just one thing. I like the way the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is trying to claim sustainability or climate change credentials now, when I am not going to say him, Madam Speaker, but the former Premier at the time led an effort to completely undermine the National Conservation Act. Led an effort, Madam Speaker, to completely undermine the National Conservation Act on the basis of advice from one of the biggest developers in this country.

Madam Speaker, this was being done at the time when the good gentleman Member for George Town North, who is still here with us, which we appreciate very much, was standing over here on the front bench holding up the number of planning applications that had been approved and saying how much development was going on in the country and how many new planning applications had been approved. You can't say that the National Conservation Act was holding up development, if on the other hand you are standing over here saying, *look at all the development going on*. Madam Speaker that is one of the issues people in this country express today— we need sustainable development, responsible development.

The claim made by the Leader of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, was specifically in relation to the suggestion that the previous administration had organised the funding of the climate change risk assessment that was carried out by this Administration. Madam Speaker, we signed the agreement in 2021 dealing with the climate change risk assessment. It was funded through the Governor's Office, Madam Speaker, and we ended up with a climate change risk assessment which listed 50 risks this country is confronting.

Eighteen of those risks, Madam Speaker, are rated as severe risk. Half of the eighteen relate to the economy and society so, direct quality of life impacts. The other half relate to impact on the natural environment, degradation of habitat, et cetera, so the suggestion that somehow this was all arranged by them is inaccurate and where we are at now, Madam Speaker, is that we are about to issue the draft national climate change policy for the country for public consultation.

Madam Speaker, we are taking many steps to do things properly in this country, which benefit our people. That includes doing the EIA for the East-West Arterial to ensure that when we build it, it is built properly, without any problems that we are going to have to come back and fix later on, at a much higher cost, Madam Speaker. Also, what you don't want to find out once it is built, is that it starts causing flooding in many areas that didn't flood before.

These types of things are about planning; about making sure that we do what is right, what is required, in order to get the right result for our people, so

that we can contribute to the road network to help manage some of the traffic problems that we have. It is not going to fix the traffic problems, Madam Speaker— it is not going to fix it; but it will contribute as a part of the solution. Part of the solution is also going to be making sure that we implement a proper public transport in this country.

Madam Speaker, this Government acts with a social conscience; we tackle tough issues, we make tough decisions, even if they are personally difficult. We cannot fix in two years what is reflected by the last several administrations kicking the can down the road and not dealing with those problems. We cannot fix it in two years, Madam Speaker. At the end of it, come and complain and tell me that we have not done it. You won't. I don't think you are going to have much to say then; but that's when you come and complain, not when you have spent 12 out of the last 18 years in Office as the governing administration and you still haven't fixed a majority of the problems that you expect us to fix in the first two years that we are in Office. Yes, we are working on them. Yes, we will get them done. Yes, we have many challenges, but this Government has performed, Madam Speaker.

The first SPS was done, accepted. I indicated what some of the numbers were in relation to it compared to this one. This one, Madam Speaker, I probably have even more confidence in, perhaps because I was more specifically involved in it, but the people of this country, Madam Speaker, can have confidence in it as well. Madam Speaker, we are going to get this done, we are going to get a new budget in place by the end of this year. We are going to be delivering today, tomorrow, and for the next two years for the people of this country.

Madam Speaker, it is going to be done through the policies and the guiding numbers that we have set out here. I am not saying the budget is going to reflect exactly what this has, but the point of it is to act as a guiding policy document so that when we get the budget done, it has a degree of fiscal integrity around it and maintains the country in compliance with the FFR provision to be able to deliver for our people. It will be a people-centred budget, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the hour is late. I thank you very much, and I thank all Members of this honourable House. Again, I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for being here at this hour, and I commend the Motion and this 2024 to 2026 Strategic Policy Statement to this honourable House and to this country, Madam Speaker for our people.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The Speaker:** The question is, **BE IT NOW THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Parliament approves the policy priorities, aggregate financial targets and financial allocations set out in the 2024 to 2026 Strategic Policy Statement as the indicative parameters**

**on which the 2024 and 2025 budgets will be formulated.**

All those in favour please say Aye. Those against, no.

**AYES.**

**The Speaker:** The Ayes have it.

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, can we have a division?

**Division No. 8-2022/23**

**AYES: 11**

Hon. G. Wayne Panton  
 Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly  
 Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan  
 Hon. Sabrina T. Turner  
 Hon. Johany S. Ebanks  
 Hon. André M. Ebanks  
 Hon. Bernie A. Bush  
 Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour  
 Ms. Heather D. Bodden  
 Hon. Isaac D. Rankine  
 Hon. W. McKeeva Bush

**NOES: 0**

**Abstain**

Mr. Joseph X. Hew

**Absent**

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart  
 Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell  
 Ms. Barbara E. Connolly  
 Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin  
 Mr. David C. Wight  
 Mr. Christopher S. Saunders

**The Speaker:** The results is 11 Ayes and 1 Abstention. The Ayes have it.

**Agreed: Government Motion No. 4 of 2020-2023 passed.**

**The Speaker:** I now call on the Honourable Premier to move the adjournment.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Madam Speaker, I thank all Members present for their work today, and for being here at this late hour/early in the morning. It is much appreciated, Madam Speaker.

I think all Members' contributions have been appreciated and valued, Madam Speaker, therefore I

move for the adjournment of this honourable House until 10a.m. tomorrow morning.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton:** Sorry; 10a.m. later today, to be specific.

**The Speaker:** The question is that this House do now adjourn until 10a.m. later today.

All those in favour please say Aye. Those against, no.

**AYES.**

**The Speaker:** The Ayes have it.

**At 1.26a.m., the House stood adjourned until 10a.m., Thursday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023.**