



2022-2023 Budget Policy Statement
By Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP
26th November 2021

The Cayman Islands Post Pandemic - Preparing our People for Sustainable Prosperity

Mister Speaker Good Morning,

It is an honour and a privilege to stand here today, addressing the members of Parliament and the country as we chart our recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, create opportunities for shared prosperity and prepare our people to avail themselves of those opportunities.

I would like to begin by expressing my sincerest appreciation to His Excellency, The Governor for the Throne Speech today, and his support of our new Government these past seven months. In addition to the Governor, I give a special thanks to the Deputy Governor and the entire Public Service for their service to our Islands. A heartfelt thank

you to each and every community across our three Islands. Thank you for your support and patience, especially these past few months as we prepared for the reopening of our border.

Preparing for the reopening of the border after nearly two years has consumed a fair amount of the Government's time and attention since we were elected. Throughout it all, my colleagues and I remained steadfast in our vision.

Vision

Our vision is of a Cayman Islands that is held up as one of the most sustainable countries in the world, a trio of islands where ALL its citizens can thrive; a peaceful and prosperous place known for its resourcefulness, its diligence, its excellence, and its innovativeness.

And for us, prosperity without sustainability is not an option.

Mission

This Government is determined to prepare and assist Caymanians to avail themselves of the opportunities to live their best lives, and allow future generations to have the same opportunities. As you will see in our budget, the next two years our priorities and projects reflect a very clear statement of the change that the people of the Cayman Islands voted for and demanded in April this year.

Guiding Principles

Our guiding principles reflect the approach to governance that the PACT will represent. It of course begins with People-centred, Accountability, Competence and Transparency.

We intend to approach our mandate with resourcefulness and diligence while striving for excellence.

Current Situation

Mr. Speaker, it is evident the Cayman Islands has enjoyed decades of prosperity. With a budget about to be tabled that estimates revenue in the next two financial years just shy of CI\$1Billion, we are blessed and truly fortunate. In the eyes of many ours is a most incredible story.

We have for some time been able to tell the world our success story, which boasts of a strong economy, an enviable Gross Domestic Product with relatively low debt, a world leading Financial Services Industry that is strong and growing and a galloping real estate development industry. That story also included an unemployment rate that many countries would envy, and certainly based on the numbers of work permit grants, there still remained more jobs available in the economy than the local population could fill. And up until the pandemic hit, that narrative also included a Tourism Industry reporting record air and cruise arrival numbers.

At an individual level, we all share various versions of a vision of what the Caymanian dream looks like. Caymanians have always proudly striven to own their own home. The Caymanian dream for many was to complete their education, find employment, buy a piece of land, build a home, and raise a family; save, invest and for some, start their own business. We were diligent savers and the prudent approach to a family's finances often allowed families to travel overseas for a summer holiday or buy a little watercraft to enjoy our beautiful waters with friends and family. Remain connected to your community, retire some day and live out your sunset years surrounded by friends and

family. It was a point of pride to leave behind a legacy for your children and grandchildren, and if you were fortunate enough, leave them assets in the form of savings or land, to give a head start toward their Caymanian dream.

And for the most part Mr. Speaker that has always been attainable, until recent years. Those with even greater ambitions and a larger vision were able to advance in education, rise along the corporate ladder, or start-up businesses, build an investment property, and compete on a level playing field in a vibrant market. That is perhaps a snapshot of the Caymanian dream and way of life we have painted for the world, but more importantly that many of us have collectively accepted as the way things ought to be. In other words, that is the picture we have of ourselves.

If we accept that this is close to the truth, let us pause for a moment and ask ourselves another important question. Is this picture reasonable? Are these expectations fair? Should all Caymanians reasonably expect to be able to enjoy a high quality of life?

So Mr. Speaker the world looks upon us and sees the beautiful property developments, the many symbols of modernity and technology, wide availability of luxury items and experiences, countless philanthropic and charitable efforts, the general peace and safety of the community and for the most part, a harmonious society. This paints an idealistic picture to the world of three idyllic islands brimming with confidence and optimism, and enjoying an economic miracle. We boast about many things including having one of the most beautiful beaches on the planet, being the culinary capital of the Caribbean and being perfect for the ultra-wealthy. This is what we tell the world in glossy magazines, social media posts, Youtube videos and advertisements for real estate and relocation services. All of these things are true.

However, Mr. Speaker, a closer examination of what lies beneath sadly tells a very different story. But in order to hear this story we must carefully listen, and maintain a close connection to the growing numbers who are suffering in silence.

Mr. Speaker, as I begin this national conversation, I am compelled to explore some uncomfortable truths. So before I go any further, I want to start off by making one thing abundantly clear; this is not intended to give the impression that those of us on this side of this chamber love this country any more than my colleagues on the other side. We all share a burden for this country and a passion for service.

Many of us have been privileged to work together in the past, and I know as a collective unit of members of this Honourable House, we all, on a daily basis, make many sacrifices as we seek to serve our people. So as I expand, I am certain that all of the Members and indeed the listening public will be able to identify with what I am about to say in some way, shape or form.

Mr. Speaker, one does not have to be engaged in a conversation for a very long time with a Caymanian or someone who has resided here for many years before the discussion turns to the recitation of a list of concerns. Oftentimes, these concerns are not pitched at a personal level, but speak to a growing fear for the future of our children, grandchildren and the community as a whole.

People openly wonder:

“How can we afford to live here?”

“Will my children or grandchildren be able to afford a piece of land or a modest home when they grow up?”

“Will my children even want to live here when they grow up?”

“What will Cayman look like for them in the future?”

“Ole boy, if you got anything now, try so hold on to it because God knows your children won’t be able to afford anything”.

“Are we going in the right direction?”

“Who are we developing for?”

“We talkin’ about all this prosperity, but I nuh seein it, or I don’t recognise the people who are benefiting from it”.

“I know so and so is struggling to make ends meet and they can’t seem to get any help”.

“Cayman gone”.

These are but a few of the regular topics that come up in conversations across all three Islands amongst average Caymanians and many long term residents. Even those who are doing well express concerns, not just about their own offspring but about the general condition of our community.

And Mr. Speaker, every one of us in this hallowed chamber, especially those of us who have had the privilege of serving more than one term as Parliamentarians, know when Government pay day is. Without making light of the situation, every last one of us regularly receives phone calls, texts, WhatsApps and messages around Government pay day, with a growing list of heartbreaking stories, telling of desperate need, from a seemingly increasing number of people who are falling between the statistics and the

proverbial cracks. Yes, amongst the genuine situations there are always a few questionable requests - especially when we figure out that the one individual has made the same request of several if not all of us in here....but if we are being frank, this growing trend is cause for concern and sometimes alarm. The warning signs have been there and we chose to balm it over with temporary relief.

Too many of our people are facing a growing crisis.

Too many cannot cope let alone adapt.

Too many are getting left behind.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that in the years leading up to April 2021, Caymanians saw a rapid freefall in the one thing we all proudly shared whether we came from well to do or humble means - that has been an equal access to a high quality of life. That was the Cayman way. There was a pull towards the common good and a shared prosperity and well-being. Or perhaps it was simply more accessible to a wider number of us.

Our great Caymanian poet, Mr. Leonard Dilbert described Caymanians in this way: *"We are a people culturally encoded to watch the weather, to eke a living from rocky ground and an uncertain sea, to endure and to seek peace"*.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the narrative that you and I know is that Cayman was not an easy place. But somehow, by sheer grit and God's grace, our ancestors made it. There wasn't a lot but it was enough. And when more came, there was still enough for everyone. Contentment and happiness accompanied the patience and so we continued to exist peacefully. Each with their own 'cultivated' as it were from these three Islands.

As the quality of life was declining for many, their shared experience has led to a sense of unhappiness and discontent. Traffic, especially in the Eastern Districts, made a daily gridlock not only during the morning commute (as had often been the case), but also in the evenings. Many hard-working business owners, and employees found themselves one medical bill or one paycheck away from financial ruin. Housing and land prices have soared out of reach for most Caymanians, including our well educated young professionals. Even Seven Mile Beach, a beautiful natural attraction that had been accessible to us all, has been altered and disfigured.

In recent years, Caymanians started relocating overseas because they simply could not afford to live here any longer, especially once they retired and reached their golden years. Families too were leaving, at times because the cost of services for children with special education or medical needs was out of reach here at home and there was too little, if any, practical support. Unsupported, they felt compelled to pursue a new life elsewhere. If they hadn't already relocated, many Caymanian families engaged in difficult conversations and gave serious consideration to their long-term future here. And for the first time ever in our modern history, many Caymanian university graduates faced a stark realization that despite 22,000 work permits, there were no jobs and no future for themselves at home.

Despite prosperity all around them Mr. Speaker, a growing number of Caymanians felt anxious and marginalized, and at times unwelcome in their own homeland. Our beloved Isles Cayman did not feel like home to them anymore.

Against this backdrop Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic hit us like a Category 5 hurricane and ripped off our roof - laying bare the dramatic inequalities hidden

underneath the impressive statistics of record-breaking economic growth and opulent prosperity. Where was the sweet spot now?

The pandemic exposed just how fragile and ill-equipped our social systems were to protect our people. Increasing numbers of Caymanian families were reliant on local NGOs and charities to meet their basic needs. And while we applaud those NGOs and charities for their stellar work, are we not shocked by the staggering levels of need that exist?

A very clear, yet sad picture was beginning to emerge. Too many of our people had been left behind.

Mr. Speaker, I will once again reiterate, while we are grateful to the previous administration for their hard work in keeping our community safe during the lockdown of the border, countless numbers of Caymanians were locked out of opportunities for economic prosperity and entrepreneurship. One example of this, is the alarming number of waivers under the Local Companies Control Act and uncompetitive concessions to large scale developers, which seemingly became the norm.

The LCCA formerly known as the Local Companies Control Law was there to ensure Caymanian participation in businesses but waivers have seemingly become expected, a minor inconvenience easily overcome.

The problem is, this has the real effect of keeping Caymanians on the outside looking in at a society that is quickly drifting out of their reach. At a time when the investments were pouring in, we opted to exclude Caymanians. For too long, we have been satisfied with the measures that inflate the success of the few while narrowing the pathway to

prosperity for the many. The socially corrosive issues like income inequality and wealth disparity must be tackled head on. We must work together to find solutions for these problems as that is the way to build stronger communities and a stronger country.

We have to implement policies to assist and protect our middle class, while continuing to encourage investment and a global outlook.

Our Commitment

It would be easy to conclude that the challenges we discovered upon taking up office in April of this year are both common in other countries and insurmountable at home. Certainly, if one looks at the world we live in today, and compare it to the nostalgic Cayman of yesteryear, you might very well concede that there is no hope and that our best days are behind us.

Well I am proud to say that I am joined by 11 individuals as part of the PACT Government who collectively share a vision for a sustainable Cayman where all people can thrive, a country that balances the needs of the society, the economy and the environment. We are committed to making a meaningful and measurable difference by 2030. It won't be easy. Yet, I am optimistic that working together with the private sector, non-governmental organisations and the various like-minded communities across our three Islands, we can become a modern model of sustainability as a small island developing state. We have to get to the root cause of some of these complex issues and start there.

Mr. Speaker, the story of our country, of our people, is one that says we are too rich to be poor, too talented to be denied opportunities, too blessed to have the daily stresses we do and too proud to be disheartened without pursuing solutions.

The PACT administration has had the opportunity to align our individual perspectives and priorities in order to develop a shared vision for a better, socially and economically fairer Cayman. From the day we took office, it has been our mission to protect our people while promoting economic resilience and diversification.

With this first budget, my colleagues and I are here to deliver on our promise to put our people first, to strengthen our communities and ensure all Caymanians can live their best lives.

Mr. Speaker we believe it is our duty to prepare our people to participate in and benefit from the prosperity all around them. This is our main promise and the anchor point of my address today so I will once again repeat - it is our duty to prepare our people, to participate in, and benefit from, the opportunities to achieve sustainable prosperity that still exist here in these three beautiful Islands that we call home.

As Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer outlined in their essay titled 'The True Origins of Prosperity', we should *"....remember the old ways - the truth that lasting growth and shared prosperity come from the middle out, not from the top down. Now we are joined in a battle of ideas to see whether middle-out economics can dethrone trickle-down."*

We intend to preserve a middle class because we believe it is better for sustainability. That is our duty, as leaders, to prevent the disappearance of the middle class. We are

small enough and we are resourceful enough to avoid a future Cayman characterised by extreme inequality.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who studies the history of the Cayman Islands will know that the first plan that prepared our people for prosperity involved the employment of the majority of our able bodied men to work on large merchant marine and shipping vessels around the world. This was a prosperity that was shared by all in the community. It was as remarkable as it was transformational. Virtually, every family across these Islands benefited, when their turn came. Receiving one's call to sea meant a real change in fortunes for your family.

Perhaps no one has captured the impact of our men going to sea like Mr. Brainard Watler, one of our finest citizens. If you ever have the privilege of a conversation with Mr. Brainard, you will quickly recognise him as a well-spring of history and information. When interviewed by the Celebrate Cayman team for the Celebration of our Seafaring Heritage, he shared the following reflection:

"Things were hard back in those days. The very ground was hard like cement. Very little would even grow. But when the men started going to sea and money started coming back home, it was like somebody had spread fertilizer all over the place. People started to build. Businesses started to spring up and the people started to really live."

This is such a vivid description and captures the incredible economic miracle that took place in Cayman starting back then.

So Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning, Cayman's journey to prosperity was driven by the establishment and sustenance of a vibrant Caymanian middle class. We should

never forget that the amount of remittances sent back by seafarers to their families here created the demand for the first commercial bank to be established.

Then as more and more men returned from sea in the 1970s, they were able to parlay their earnings into business opportunities. Some were able to transfer the skills they acquired while at sea into tourism, real estate development and even financial services as these new economic drivers began to take off. As I reflect on this point, I cannot help but think of my own father now of blessed memory, and fondly recall the profound impact seafaring had on his life and how that experience changed the trajectory for so many Caymanian families, including ours.

Mr. Speaker, as we exited the 1970s and entered the 1980s, our now established middle class was thriving. For the first time, some of the children of seafarers were going off to colleges overseas and returning home to take up professional jobs. Small businesses were flourishing. Many Caymanians were able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Prosperity meant that the average family was able to buy a piece of land, build a home, take an annual vacation overseas, and more importantly find meaningful, fair paying work, and don't forget the most popular flower of that period - the satellite dish, dotting almost every yard and garden from North West Point to Spot Bay.

There were of course social issues and challenges. No period of human existence is without its challenges, but opportunity was within reach of a greater percentage of people. It was grasped and diligently pursued by the majority of Caymanians, not the few. There was a sense of hope, and people aspired to experience their own Caymanian dream. Frankly, if you were willing to work, success was expected. If you didn't achieve it, people said, "Cheh, he don't have no ambition". It's amazing to think

that just a few years ago, diligence, ambition and a confidence in your own ability to succeed in your own country was imprinted in the national psyche of every Caymanian family. We nudged each other forward to it. It was the collective expectation and we celebrated each other's accomplishments.

However, the realities of globalization and the digital revolution began to close in on Cayman. As the 1990s wrapped up and the 2000s rolled around, a clear shift began to occur. New strains were placed on the middle class. Our people began to lose pace as a number of new factors were introduced into the economy. Educated Caymanians increasingly felt pressure from above as they struggled to overcome glass ceilings and increasing structural biases. New terms started to creep into our conversations such as 'over qualified', 'no global experience', 'competitive edge', 'outsourced', 'downsized'.

At the other end of the spectrum, labour costs plummeted owing to the introduction of growing numbers of skilled and unskilled workers willing to work for far lesser wages than their Caymanian counterparts. This became increasingly common without the balance of a minimum wage and resulted in Caymanians in the skilled and unskilled categories who found that they could not work for the same wages that new arrivals on work permits were willing to accept.

This was arguably the beginning of the crisis facing the Caymanian middle class. A crisis that has been papered over and ignored by the staggering success of select groups and exacerbated by other factors - including a reliance on low-paid workers - whether by employers who prefer the ease, convenience or control of a permit, or from successive governments who enjoyed the revenue generated by work permit fees.

And yes, while I understand that there are not enough Caymanians to fill every job created by this economy, meeting the demands for more and more work permits or Government revenue from work permits cannot come at the expense of the middle class and opportunities for Caymanians. The growing inequality is an existential threat to a prosperous future for all of us who call the Cayman Islands home.

So Mr. Speaker, the Government has to take action in light of this changing situation. As Kate Raworth, a Senior Associate at Oxford University put it, *“Don’t wait for economic growth to reduce inequality—because it won’t. Instead, create an economy that is distributive by design.”* That is precisely what we are experiencing now. We have staggering growth. Today we are considering a budget of almost CI\$1 billion. We are steadily attracting investment. Cayman is still an attractive place to live, work and play.

But Mr. Speaker, our eyes and ears are not misleading us. The truth is staring us in the face. The gap is widening. Lower income Caymanians are sleeping in their cars, unable to afford rent. Our middle class is under assault. I have yet to read an economic theory or encounter a successful policy that espouses shrinking the middle class. Mr. Speaker, the question we should ask ourselves is if our middle class is disappearing, where are the people going? Sadly, I strongly suspect that for the majority, they are sliding into the lower income end of the spectrum.

The sad fact is economic growth alone is not the solution. It isn’t working for our people. Not when a 2-bedroom apartment costs upward of \$400,000. How many people making \$3,000 a month can afford that?

I pause right here to say that this issue of inequality is what keeps me up at night when I am not thinking about COVID-19. Our people need hope. That is one of the core issues that drove me to get back into the political arena. The Caymanian success story should not become an exception or relegated to history. Access to opportunities and being prepared to succeed must be the norm for Caymanians. Inequality threatens that norm but the PACT Government stands unified in our determination to break this cycle for our people. This is why the people elected us. That is what voters demanded. They demanded change.

At the heart of this matter is restoring the dignity and self-image of our people. Caymanians are proud people. We have a right to be proud. We have come from good stock, people who struggled to create a bright future for the generations that came after them.

I hear echoes of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s reflection, when he stated *“I want young men and young women who are not alive today...to know and see that these new privileges and opportunities did not come without somebody suffering and sacrificing for them”*. And yes, Mr. Speaker, while Dr. King's words were in relation to an entirely different inequality struggle, there is a recognition that those who came before us made tremendous sacrifices. In honour of our forbearers, we should not discard their efforts; neither should we allow them to disappear.

Mr. Speaker, there is no shortage of literature on this issue of inequality. Research by the World Bank indicates that when markets are imperfect (in credit, insurance, land and human capital), inequalities in power and wealth turn into unequal opportunities, leading to wasted productive potential and to an inefficient allocation of resources.

Unequal power is found to lead to the formation of institutions that perpetuate inequalities in power, status, and wealth, which typically are also bad for the investment, innovation, and risk-taking that underpin long-term successful growth (World Bank, 2006 and 2013).

Our approach to strengthening our country and creating a more sustainable future will be informed by the United Nations Agenda for Change and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Reducing inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind are integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and it is the subject of Goal 10.

The UN puts it this way *“COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable communities the hardest. It has put a spotlight on economic inequalities and fragile social safety nets that leave vulnerable communities to bear the brunt of the crisis. At the same time, social, political and economic inequalities have amplified the impacts of the pandemic.*

On the economic front, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased global unemployment and dramatically slashed workers’ incomes.

COVID-19 also puts at risk the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women’s rights over the past decades. Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex.”

The Highlights of This Budget

Mr. Speaker, there are many wins for our people in this budget. In 2022 we have budgeted to enhance food security for children through the school meals programme with a further increase in 2023 to expand the programme to all public secondary schools.

There is an increase for primary and secondary education in 2022 and a further increase in 2023 while we have budgeted more for tertiary education through scholarships, bursaries and continued funding of UCCI and grants to ICCI over the two-year budget period.

While education will remain the primary focus for this administration, we know that students and their families must have decent housing and a place to lay their heads at night. For those families that need help, we have budgeted for housing repairs assistance and for initiatives administered by the National Housing Development Trust and Sister Islands Affordable Housing Trust and for the construction of affordable housing options over the two-year budget period.

Mr. Speaker we have budgeted for the expansion and enhancement of healthcare services including treatment of persons older than 59 who are not insured, or underinsured, and persons with chronic ailments.

Our youth also feature in the 2022-2023 budget with the expansion and enhancement of youth services and development.

There will be an annual increase for Public Safety personnel, which are police and fire, and Extraordinary Relief Payments in 2022 to continue to assist workers displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding for technology through support services by the Computer Services Department, Cyber Security, and the increased digitization of Public Services; and a further capital investment in a submarine cable system are also accounted for in this budget.

You will see important investments in infrastructure, such as funding for roads and technology, and completion of a number of schools projects.

It is impossible to have a sustainable country, especially a country such as ours, made up of three low lying islands in the middle of the sea without a commitment to preserve and protect the environment.

Climate change is no longer debatable. We must responsibly engage with the natural environment. For this reason, I have made it my priority to address Climate Resiliency and ensure all our plans are designed for long term Sustainability.

We need to set targets for becoming carbon zero, for the electrification of transportation, and adopt a robust plan to make up for doing hardly anything to achieve our renewable energy targets under the National Energy Policy. We are ambitious in relation to protecting the environment - we plan to make up for the years of inadequate funding for environmental needs.

The Government has developed 10 Strategic Broad Outcomes and specific actions aimed at achieving these outcomes through the delivery of Government programmes, Cabinet policy actions and legislative changes.

The first of these is improving education to promote lifelong learning and greater economic mobility.

The second is ensuring an equitable, sustainable and successful healthcare system.

Third, providing solutions to improve the well-being of our people so they can achieve their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, our fourth broad outcome is strengthening good governance for more effective government.

The fifth is supporting climate change resilience and sustainable development while the sixth is increasing social justice in the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, the seventh is utilising sports to enhance the lives of our people, while the eighth is building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands.

Our ninth broad outcome is to improve our financial services as an industry, product and economic driver for our Islands and No. 10 is to improve our tourism, as an industry, product and economic driver.

Mr. Speaker, keeping these broad outcomes in mind, each ministry's budget has been tailored to meet those outcomes while delivering on our vision, mission and guiding principles.

In the Ministry of Education, this budget commits to plans to design and construct halls at Theoline McCoy Primary School and the Joanna Clark Primary School. Additionally, there are plans to expand the Lighthouse School and to design and build a new building for the Layman Scott High School on Cayman Brac.

And then, Mr. Speaker, there is the free lunch programme. We learned a sad but important lesson last year during the COVID lockdown that many of our children depend on the meals they get at school to sustain them every day. Again, this is further evidence that the gap is widening and too many of our people are being left behind. Our precious children, some of whom will become our future leaders, were not getting the nutritious meals at home that they need to survive, sustain, and grow because their parents or guardians have a challenging time making ends meet. We identified this need sir, and this Government, through the passion and commitment of the Minister of Education, stepped up to the plate and made a real investment in our future.

The Hon. Minister of Education decided no child should go hungry, so our free meal service began with the primary schools. We all know how hard it is to concentrate on something important when our bellies are aching from hunger. And we know from assorted studies that hungry students make poor students. Getting our students fed is a basic step, but one that is critical to give them a foundation to earn the education we owe them and that they deserve. Our approach with this programme is to maintain the dignity of all families attending our schools. Requiring assistance should not come with a stigma attached.

I again wish to acknowledge the passion and care for which the Hon. Minister and her Ministry team lead by Chief Officer Cetonya Cacho carry out their work. We often hear the Hon. Minister refer to 'her children', because that is the affection and duty of care she feels for all of our students. It is impossible for me to forget the presentations by Chief Officers after our swearing in ceremony, when Chief Officer Cacho laid out for us in plain but passionate terms the issue of inequality as it relates to education.

That moment left us all deeply moved and confirmed that the Ministry is in good hands, hands that care, hands that will work tirelessly to give our children the best learning environment possible.

She pointed out to us the error that is often made by judging and mischaracterising our children - when we aren't aware of the disadvantages many of them face before the bell rings. Beyond hunger and poor nutrition many face neglect, some experience verbal, physical or other types of abuse at home and others were traumatized by witnessing abuse. Some have started to use alcohol and drugs in their homes, or witness the same at home. Some lack supervision or supportive parenting, others have undiagnosed learning disabilities and even mental health and emotional health issues. Many have no father or positive male figure in their lives. Others are bullied. Some very unfortunate souls have been through most if not all of the experiences I just listed.

Yet we expect them to be focused on their school work, and worse, we misjudge them as being less worthy of our very best efforts. This is what inequality looks like at its core. Not all inequalities are because of decisions of previous administrations or 'competitors' but we have an obligation to support those children who are disadvantaged in their ability to focus and learn due to their home environment or personal circumstances. Those children deserve our assistance to get the same starting line rather than being left on their own, several steps behind their peers who come to school each day from a safe, stable, peaceful and loving home, where they are loved, supported and prepared to thrive at school.

Each child is of equal value and is worth our very best effort. That is why we have all agreed to prioritize Education. Quality Education is Goal 4 of the Sustainable

Development Goals, equal access to quality education enables upward socioeconomic mobility - it is part of preparing our people to avail themselves of the opportunities all around them in the booming Cayman Islands.

I also wish to applaud a programme that is pushing back against the forces destroying our young men. The Boyz 2 Men Programme, which was started by school counsellor Mr. Christopher Murray at John Gray High School, is an example of bridging the gap of inequality. The socialisation of our young men has proven to be a struggle due to the lack of positive male figures but for 11 years this programme has helped to provide role models and teach life skills, teach self-awareness and teach self-development. It is another great example of the wonderful people in our education system who partner with many others in our public sector, private sector and community at large to make a difference in the lives of our school children.

The Minister's other area of responsibility is District Administration and Lands where improvements will be made in the innovation and efficiency in Lands and Survey by modernising its legislative framework, policies and procedures as well as increasing the staff complement. The Ministry will support the growth of the Sister Islands through new programmes such as special needs adult learning while also enhancing existing programmes and infrastructure such as roads.

Beach access will be enhanced through the acquisition of land and amenities at public beaches, such as restrooms, will be enhanced.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has placed one Ministry in the spotlight above all others. Mr. Speaker, what can I say about the Hon. Minister of Health? When she

speaks, the people listen. Mister Speaker, my Minister for Health came to me not long after we were in office and said, "I don't want this Ministry to be just about health. Our people expect more. We need an equal emphasis on wellness." So because of her clear vision and advocacy, today we have our Ministry for Health and Wellness.

I commend our Minister who without hesitation has taken on the single greatest threat to our community. She takes her nursing training and applies it on a regular basis - educating people in her constituency and offering guidance, especially to caregivers. This is her passion. So today Mr. Speaker, given that the public regularly hears us discuss the COVID-19 Pandemic, I will not spend an extraordinary period of time speaking about our ongoing efforts there.

However I must take a moment to applaud and salute all of our healthcare professionals. They have shown up every day since the pandemic began. Our HSA, Public Health Department, our Faith Hospital team at the HSA in Cayman Brac, our one nurse in Little Cayman, all of the testers, lab workers, the incredible vaccination team, our physicians and nurses, porters and administration staff, our cleaners and contractors in both the public and private sector. They are doing cutting edge work. We are conducting genomic sequencing right here, led by our own Caymanian people. If ever there was an example of innovation and the importance of Caymanians succeeding in STEAM subjects, it is this. We should all be proud of Mr. Jonathan Smellie and all of his colleagues in the HSA laboratory.

I wish to offer this message to all of our healthcare workers in both the public and private sector. Thank you. And I say it again, thank you. Your response, your sacrifice and dedication has saved countless lives. And yes your belief and support of our

mission to drive vaccinations to 80% of a higher figure. We applaud all of you today. (Pause)

Mr. Speaker, let me expand a bit further on healthcare. We believe that healthcare is a basic human right and that all citizens should be able to reasonably access quality healthcare and preventive services regardless of their employment, income or age. Goal 3 of the SDGs is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

In the Ministry of Health and Wellness, our aim is to train and educate more Caymanians so that they can enter the healthcare industry. The Minister of Health and Wellness is keen to have our healthcare facilities and services enhanced to beautify the premises and grounds and provide more efficient service and less wait times.

But Mr. Speaker we also have to address some of the burgeoning issues around health insurance costs and coverage. Finally, anyone who knows me knows that the area of mental health is very near and dear to my heart. I also know that our colleague shares a deep personal passion for addressing mental health. So I wish to reassure the public that we will continue to advance the Mental Health care facility. We are judged by how we care for our most vulnerable. It pains my heart when I see some of the beautiful souls out there struggling with mental health, and we still don't have the facilities available but it will be. Soon come.

And we need to equally and urgently address the mental health of our children and youth. We cannot truly measure prosperity and success when our people cannot be near their families and loved ones when they experience a mental health crisis.

I turn now to the work of the Deputy Premier, the Hon. Minister of Finance and Economic Development. We will hear from him shortly as he presents today's budget. But Mr. Speaker, let me begin with his other portfolio - that being the Ministry of Border Control and Labour. If we are going to address inequality, then we have to maintain our commitment to protect all workers in this economy.

That is why we have agreed to reconvene the Minimum Wage Committee early in the New Year, amend advertising requirements for work permits and increase the visibility of job vacancies that will not require login, registration or any personal details. We will also review the points system to ensure that they fairly recognise the contributions of many residents that call the Cayman Islands Home. A Pensions Committee will be set up to review the pension system and make recommendations to increase adequacy.

Yes Mr. Speaker we have hesitated to immediately discontinue the pension moratorium especially as tourism businesses get back on their feet. However, while this relief has supported businesses and employees in crisis, we cannot for one moment take our eyes off of the fact that many people had to borrow against their future in order to survive today. Given the circumstances the country faced at the time, we all supported the decision of the previous administration. We can all see the wisdom in this approach. But it cannot be lost on any of us that this comes at a tremendous cost down the road.

Therefore strengthening our private sector pension system is something we must address or else we will face another crisis when people retire.

Mr. Speaker there will be a thorough review of all Customs tariffs to ensure fairness and equity while protecting our local industries and most of the services provided by Customs and Border Control will be automated to free up resources to focus more on

compliance and enforcement, which will result in increased job opportunities for Caymanians through Work Opportunities Residency Cayman - or WORC - and increase revenues in Customs.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development will continue to keenly monitor expenditure levels throughout the public sector and review and expand the operations and scope of Cayman Islands National Insurance Company and the Cayman Islands Development Bank to increase product offerings. We are taking the bull by the proverbial horns. CINICO has tremendous untapped potential, which I am certain the Hon. Deputy Premier will expand upon. But as we think of the issues surrounding inequality, we recall that one of the hallmarks of Caymanians accessing their dreams is via financing through banks. Well, again, we will re-examine how the Cayman Islands Development Bank can support Caymanians seeking to meet their needs, manage debt and access opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the PACT Government stands for transparency. We are the first Government to publish summaries of decisions taken during weekly meetings of the Cabinet. We have also implemented a Ministerial Code of Conduct for the Members of Cabinet. The Governor followed suit by publishing a brief summary of National Security Council Meetings. We expect to shortly present a code of Conduct for Parliament very shortly and there is another area for which the public has been crying for transparency and that is around concessions. The Minister for Finance will talk about our plans around providing a clear and transparent policy around concessions for developers, concerns for new ventures and new industries. Decisions on concessions and waivers and the policies, which inform those decisions need to be out in the open.

The Ministry under the prudent stewardship of the Financial Secretary, will also update the accounting and budgeting systems and look into the possibility of debt refinancing.

Already the Government, through the Ministry and the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Border Control and Labour, has approved the reduction of duty on baby food, baby diapers, baby strollers, adult undergarments and sanitary napkins for women. We are confident that retailers will pass the savings on to their customers. If not, I am sure we will hear about it.

Mr. Speaker, our border has reopened and the Ministry of Tourism and Transport has much work to do and our Minister for Tourism has ambitious plans and boundless energy to deliver on the plans reflected in his budget. We believe that one of the most important aspects of the border reopening is that it should allow Caymanians to return to their tourism jobs and should create new employment opportunities within the industry. There is no stronger advocate than the Minister for Tourism on this point. And I want it clear that the minister has the entire PACT Government and most of this country behind him. People want to see change. 'Normal' really wasn't working especially when it comes to Caymanian employment in the Tourism Industry. In fact, Mr. Speaker, some of these battles harken back way beyond us, even your days as Minister for Tourism. I have heard some of the war stories. Again sir, it is about ensuring that our tourism product reflects our society.

So Mr. Speaker, while the industry has undoubtedly come a long way, there are still many miles to go. Administration after administration has identified the recruitment, retention and promotion of Caymanians within the industry as an issue. Mr. Speaker, I revisit the comments I made at the Chamber luncheon earlier this year. If we can have

Caymanians conducting genomic sequencing on one of the most dangerous diseases in the world, if today we can find Caymanians running some of the largest firms on the Island, or conducting brilliant work as we see in our civil service every day, then we certainly can find a Caymanian capable of bartending or working at the front desk.

The pandemic gave both industry and government an opportunity. We had almost 2 years to design and implement improvements in key areas. The industry has already been put on notice that we will not support the wholesale granting of tourism-related work permits while thousands of Caymanians remain unemployed.

Now that the border is open and residents and visitors are making good use of the Owen Roberts International Airport, it is time to turn our attention to the General Aviation Terminal, which handles private and chartered aircraft. A newer, more modern facility is envisioned to enhance the traveller experience and bring the Cayman Islands more in line with similar facilities worldwide. The Cayman Islands Airport Authority is working on a business case, which will evaluate the benefits, anticipated costs, and work out the most suitable procurement model.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Transport is cognizant that traffic congestion is a serious problem that is negatively impacting our quality of life, particularly for commuters traveling from the Eastern Districts. The Ministry will undertake legislative reforms to strengthen and amend laws pertaining to public transportation and will collect necessary data to underpin future decision making. Plans are to identify options for a national transport system to help alleviate traffic and bring relief to commuters. And Mr. Speaker, the PACT Government is committed to using technology and greener solutions in addressing our public transport system. This area is ripe for innovation. If we are going

to improve the quality of our people's lives then we must do it in a sustainable and impactful way.

My dear colleague the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs stepped forward to accept responsibility for the Ministry under which fall the Department of Community Rehabilitation, the Prison Service, Public Safety Communications, Fire Services and the Cayman Islands Regiment. All of these departments provide for public safety, national security, the well-being of the community through effective emergency communications, the detention and rehabilitation of offenders, fire and rescue services, disaster relief and security to the country as well as youth and leadership development within a disciplined military-looking structure.

Some of the highlights that the Minister of Home Affairs will discuss include personnel development at the Fire Service to further enhance the professional standards of the department, improve response times, and ensure sufficient coverage and compliance with international airport standards so that domestic and international travel is not hindered.

Northward prison's estate, quite frankly Mr. Speaker, is not fit for purpose. It is a statement of fact Mr. Speaker that most politicians would prefer to choose funding other areas over improving a prison estate. But Mr. Speaker, if we truly value all of our people, then we cannot turn a blind eye to the state of conditions facing the inmates and the hard working staff. This a matter of decency, human rights and again ensuring that people can work in safe and dignified conditions and that we treat our inmates with dignity. The Government is determined to provide a modern and secure correctional facility. Fortunately, significant progress has already been made with an Outline

Business Case. We will advance to a Full Business Case and anticipate construction to begin next year.

Anyone who knows the Minister will recognise his lifetime of work in the areas of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage and he has some enthusiastic plans for the 2022-2023 budget year. Perhaps there has never been another Minister who embodied their subjects like him. (Rumour has it that he was once known to be a young, fit and quite proficient athlete). Proposed projects include a Youth Empowerment Symposium, the designation as National Treasures for our people who are 90 and older, A Youth Committee to ensure that the voice and views of our upcoming future leaders are heard on all subjects, the reintroduction of district and family fairs, and collaboration with schools to refocus the detention programme to better re-engage students in positive and mindful practices.

But Mr. Speaker, I wish to pause here, because preparing our people for prosperity means developing our creative economy. Culture, heritage and the arts lift our national psyche and our sense of connection to each other. It is also soothing to the soul and healing. Cayman is oozing with talent across the full creative spectrum. The creative economy is getting ready to skyrocket, offering our people an opportunity to work and earn a living in areas for which they are passionate. The Minister is committed to seeing Caymanians reach their full potential in the creative industries, especially as tourism now returns.

Mr. Speaker, broad outcome No. 7 speaks to using sports to enhance people's lives. The Ministry will promote the benefits of regular participation in sports, some of which include improving physical and mental health, learning the values of teamwork,

perseverance and the pursuit of excellence. We will raise the profile of sports in the Cayman Islands and improve standards of instruction and performance through accountability. The Ministry will also facilitate healthy competition to improve performance. And I am pleased that Sports at the community level will be heavily promoted and supported.

Now Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister and I share a dream of seeing a Caymanian athlete medal at a major international event. We are overdue! I know that we have the talent and if some of the up and coming juniors are any indication, we will soon be hearing *Beloved Isles Cayman* playing as our flag is raised during a medal ceremony. So we must continue to invest in our elite athletes.

I offer sincere congratulations to our Olympic team. Each member performed brilliantly and lifted our collective spirits during the summer games in Tokyo. Our hearts surged with pride when we saw our flag on their uniforms as they gave their all for their country. I am also excited that a Caymanian basketball player has reached Division 1 of the National Collegiate Athletic Association putting us one step closer to having our first Caymanian National Basketball Association player. We really want to continue to invest in the grass roots programmes so that we can push our young people who are gifted athletically to the next level.

Turning now Mr. Speaker to the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure the Hon. Minister has ambitious plans, which I will highlight. Initiatives that will help improve the quality of life for all in the Cayman Islands include the provision of affordable housing through government guaranteed-assisted mortgages; funding for land acquisition for agricultural purposes; the creation of a national infrastructure fund;

and provision of funding for the implementation of a new subsea communications cable to ensure Cayman remains connected to the world. Again, the Minister will go into more detail when he stands to make his contribution to the debate.

Access to an affordable home remains too great a challenge for many of our people. When the Minister set out his goal of around 100 homes per year, I knew he meant business. With a newly appointed board for the National Housing Development Trust, we believe we can make this dream attainable for a much larger number of Caymanians.

During the course of the next two years, we will update the National Development Plan and the community can rest assured that we will listen, we will take on board the input and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders and that we will ensure our physical development planning is part and parcel of a sustainable plan for our future which is inextricably linked to the social and economic plans for our future.

Mr. Speaker, if we have learned anything from the pandemic, the global supply chain is fragile. Food production and agriculture production have all suffered. While Cayman has been fortunate, we have been forewarned. That is why the time to invest in our food security is now. Sustainability means reducing the distance between the farm and the fork. We encourage our farmers and local entrepreneurs to grow more products domestically. We are also improving the quality of food available in our local restaurants and supermarkets. It is simply a win-win scenario and I am grateful to the Minister for his passion.

Mr. Speaker in 2022-2023 the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development will carry out critical work to re-tool the departments that deliver Government's financial assistance and services to meet people's current and future demands and needs. The Ministry will draft and propose modern legislation that will transform the delivery of Government's financial assistance and replace existing legislation and regulations intended to protect the elderly, disabled and others who lack the wherewithal to protect themselves.

This Ministry is near and dear to the Minister's heart as he was instrumental in social development when he served as deputy Chief Officer in the Ministry of Community Affairs. He has a passion and drive for ensuring that Caymanians are treated fairly and equally and brings to the table many innovative ideas to improve life situations for our people.

Next year the Ministry will bring legislation to this House to create a legal framework for the national and digital Identification System that will streamline how the Government works. This is an important first step towards using technology to reduce expensive complexity, lower the cost of doing business and creating platforms to innovate at scale.

The Ministry is also tasked with promoting the Cayman Islands, and fostering global opportunities for our people. This will be done by increasing the viability and sustainability of Caymanian entrepreneurs and small businesses, fostering Caymanian creativity and investment and attracting appropriate inward investment. The Cayman Islands is internationally renowned as a jurisdiction of choice and a center of excellence for innovation across industries.

The Minister's other Ministry is Financial Services and Commerce, which has necessary and ambitious plans for 2022-2023 in line with its vision of the Cayman Islands being a globally respected centre of excellence. To achieve this vision, it will continuously improve Cayman's platform for competitive, transparent and compliant financial services.

In terms of the commencement of the legal services act, we acknowledge the previous administration passed the legislation and this Government wanted to review the legislation before issuing a commencement order. We expect to work around that to commence early next year and be finished in a period of weeks.

No doubt the work continues to defend our Financial Services Industry on the international stage. Further engagement with the private sector will be expected of both the Minister and the Ministry.

However, Mr. Speaker, before I move on, I wish to once again acknowledge the importance of this industry to our economy. We have gone through a global pandemic. The technology, the innovation and the competitive structure of our stakeholders meant that work continued without missing a beat almost. The quality of service our industry continued to offer clients during the pandemic was first class. As usual, this is a testament to the dedication, commitment and professionalism of all who work in the industry. Our ability to keep our economy going for almost 2 years without tourism is owed much in part to the strength and robustness of our Financial Services Industry.

Mr. Speaker, turning to my own Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, the budget includes funds for the on-going remediation work at the George Town Landfill. It

also includes the National Weather Service's new headquarters on Grand Cayman and the expansion of the Automated Weather Observation System. We plan a Cayman Brac workshop for the Department of Environment and renovations to their offices on Grand Cayman, the establishment of a flood sensor network and the creation of a contingency site for the National Emergency Operations Centre.

The public will be pleased to know that we are ready to move forward with the ban of single use plastics as well. We do not believe in reinventing the wheel and will therefore resurrect the work previously done on that and move forward.

As mentioned earlier, the tragedy of Seven Mile Beach was a failure of successive governments to be led by science. While substantial damage has already been done, we remain hopeful that beach re-nourishment will prove to be successful. Again, we will let science guide us as we are committed to saving the beach.

Mr. Speaker, I recently returned from COP26 held in Glasgow, Scotland. It was a deeply somber yet inspiring experience. The world is facing another major crisis- and that is the urgent need to take collective action in respect to climate change.

Despite the Caribbean's combined efforts at COP26, the bottom line is this: developed nations are not cutting emissions fast enough.

More than 100 countries signed a pledge at the summit to cut methane emissions by 30% by 2030. The world needs to take immediate action to ensure the continuity of our marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

To this end, the broad themes of our action plan include the integration of adaptation and resilience into our national planning consistent with Goal 13 of the SDGs which

speaks to Climate Action. The timing could not be better. The lessons learned with Seven Mile Beach, with traffic, with the expectation for perpetual growth all speak to the importance of weaving sustainability into everything we do. One of the Ministry's first steps in the new financial year will be to commence the revision of the National Development Plan in conjunction with the Planning Ministry. While the department of Planning and CPA fall within the Ministry of PAHI, I undertook to carry forward the long awaited update of the National Development Plan and thus the policy side of that sits within my Ministry.

Mr. Speaker please allow me to clarify one important point, that sustainability cannot be pigeon holed in this Ministry alone. If we are to be truly successful, which I absolutely believe we can, then we all have to share the commitment to approach all decisions and actions through the lens of sustainability. As you would have heard this morning, this Government intends to reference and use the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework and the 17 SDGs to help shape and measure our own approach to sustainability. While the Government will set national priorities and targets, and facilitate the implementation of actions, achieving the targets will require both public and private sector commitments. Fortunately, many organisations in the private sector are already on the path toward greater sustainability.

As Premier I have responsibility for the budget for the Office of the Commissioner of Police and includes the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service budget and the Cayman Islands Coast Guard.

In 2022-2023 Mr. Speaker the goals of the Police Service include supporting neighbourhood watch programmes in our communities, working with the National

Security Council to improve oversight and accountability of the RCIPS and improve responsiveness and increase law enforcement visibility and crime deterrence in vulnerable communities.

Over the next two years the Cayman Islands Coast Guard will seek to enhance the maritime safety and security of our Islands through the continued development and delivery of professional Coast Guard services.

Mr. Speaker, an important element in any budget is addressing the security concerns of our community. We have had our fair share of challenges since taking up office. I wish today to pay tribute to all of the members of our uniform branches who have served through thick and thin. This pandemic has stretched our resources beyond measure and this particular group of public servants has borne a disproportionate level of exposure throughout the pandemic.

The pandemic also brought to light a number of other issues, some directly related to the safety of families. Lockdowns, quarantines and isolation have arguably had a profound impact on domestic violence issues. The Cayman Islands Child Safeguarding Board reported that the total number of referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub or (MASH) unit increased by 67% between the first six months of 2020 and the first six months of 2021! In real numbers this was a jump from 554 reports to 826!

Even more worrying for the same January to June period, the number of referrals of a sexual nature went from 60 in 2020 to 158 in 2021! This is an increase of 163%. A just and fair society cannot stand aside and allow this to happen. Sexual grooming, drug use, lack of social norms (boundaries) are all risks particularly for young females.

The children of the Cayman Islands are looking to us to protect them. That is why my Government will consider bills that will strengthen the protection of our children and increase the penalty provisions for sexual abuse of children. There can be no room for tolerance of this sort of behaviour in our society. The need is clear and the need is dire.

We also wish to tackle the alarming road safety issues. It is quite frankly unacceptable. We will start by lowering the blood alcohol threshold. We are not in line with the modern world. We are too tolerant of drunk driving. People can have their fun but they need to be responsible.

We will also continue to work with the RCIPS, the National Roads Authority and the National Security Council to strengthen road safety measures.

I want to thank Parliamentary Secretary Kathy Ebanks-Wilks for her dedication, engagement, commitment and contributions to the work of the Minister of Financial Services. Together they make a formidable team and they are doing excellent work. She is also doing excellent work in the Ministry of Education.

I want to thank the Member Heather Bodden who represents my sister constituency for her dedication in assisting the Ministry of Transportation and all the great work they have been doing to ensure people's needs are addressed. She is also over beautification and Miss Cayman. I appreciate her work.

The Member from East End, Isaac Rankine, has also put his efforts, strengths and skills in assisting his ministries, particularly in Home Affairs.

All of them have contributed quite significantly and I am extremely proud of their contributions to the team and the ministries they work with. They have all served as acting ministers in Cabinet.

Governance, Accountability and Commitment to Excellence

Mr. Speaker, the budget we present for the 2022-2023 fiscal year was honed on the back of good governance. We believe that the people elected to lead our country need to be held accountable.

As Thomas Jefferson said, *“When a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself a public property”*.

That is a premise in which I strongly agree and as such we have adopted a code of conduct for Cabinet and have one ready to be approved for Parliament either before the end of the year or in January.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious part of adhering to good governance and being transparent. People outside of Cabinet don't know what Cabinet deals with; they don't understand the standards. This helps build a framework of the conduct they can expect from us and that we expect of ourselves. The more we can be accountable to the public, the better we are at transparency. The better we are at transparency, the better we will get at decision making and resource allocation. Other governments have talked about transparency, but we can demonstrate it. We can move forward and make significant inroads in dissolving public mistrust and speculation about what happens in government.

We must conduct ourselves honourably. I expect both my colleagues and the public to hold us to that.

And there is more that we can do.

One of the things that has always bothered me about the makeup of government committees, national boards, tribunals, commissions and other public bodies is the lack of diversity. I am glad that I am now in a position to do something about it across the board.

It is now our policy to ensure all people are represented in these groups including women, older persons, youth and those who are differently abled. This shows that all people across the country are represented and that diverse views are reflected to the extent possible. The Cabinet Office will continue to support the implementation of this policy.

Staying within the Cabinet Office, the Gender Affairs Unit has been moved to my portfolio as Premier. In collaboration with stakeholders, we will make efforts to publish a Sexual Harassment Act and review the National Policy on Gender Equity and Equality, with a view to identifying where gender-related disparities still exist in legislation, policy or practice and seeking to address these. It is indeed an appropriate time to update it.

I believe that as we look at the quality of life, we must recognise that our people's expectations are now different. Priorities have changed. People desire a greater work and life balance. The pandemic has taught many of us the importance of valuing those we love and those who are charged to our care. However, there is one area in which we

still lag behind the world- and that is in maternity and paternity leave. A fair and just society means that we must support families. There is no time that a child requires greater support than as a newborn. Therefore I will work closely with the Minister for Labour during this administration to revisit maternity and paternity leave. I wish to commend the civil service, which has led the way in this area.

In speaking about the Civil Service, I am pleased to once again confirm that we will be able to provide civil servants who are on or below grade E an honorarium at the end of the year. You have gone above and beyond the call of duty and served our country well.

You are the heart of the Caymanian middle class. You are the ones who get up every day to make a difference. So all of us wish to thank you and we hope that this honorarium will be accepted as a small token of our appreciation for all that you continue to do.

Recovering from the pandemic

Mr. Speaker, any student of history will recognise that throughout humanity's existence, there have been tectonic shifts, cycles of ups and downs, and major events such as natural disasters, global wars, or more recently pandemics that force Governments and countries to completely re-evaluate and even reset their policies, priorities and direction of travel.

The end of both WW1 and the Spanish Flu global pandemic saw the arrival of a period known as the Roaring Twenties between the years of 1921 and 1929. It was a period of

great technological advances, and increased demand for consumer goods. This boom in the United States was fueled by easy credit and stock market speculation but soon proved to be short-lived and unsustainable. In fact, it was followed by the Great Depression as a result of the 1929 stock market crash.

After declaring victory, which ended World War 2, America sought to capitalise on its victory by securing its new-found global leadership role. This required reskilling, retooling and access to credit and for returning soldiers. The New Deal was struck by President Franklin Roosevelt and the transformation of the American economy began in earnest, which ushered in a period of unparalleled growth in America and the firm establishment of a vibrant middle class.

Likewise, Germany and Japan, two of the powers that surrendered to the Allied forces at the end of WW2, faced economies and communities that were literally shattered to pieces. However with the support of the United States, they focused on restoration, reconstruction and reintegration. They leaned into transformation and placed their people and their respective nations on paths to achieving greater heights.

Mr. Speaker, even here in the Cayman Islands, we have seen throughout our history forks in the road remarkable resilience displayed by our people. In his Notes on the History of the Cayman Islands written in 1910, then Commissioner George Hirst, wrote: *'After each hurricane the inhabitants lost no time in pulling themselves together and I am informed that on no single occasion did they seek alms from abroad. This speaks highly for the independence of the people and I believe the same characteristic would be found in their dependents today.'*

There is no doubt that after Hurricanes Ivan and Paloma in 2004 and 2008 respectively, our Islands once again, were given a golden opportunity to reconsider our approach and potentially reposition ourselves in a number of areas. However it can be argued that the changes made were not significant enough to be considered transformational. While we continued to strengthen our building codes, we had a golden opportunity to address high water marks, cease the removal of mangroves and the filling in of wetlands, greater dependence on work permits, developing opportunities for the advancement of our people.

Alas, we find ourselves as a people standing once again today at the proverbial fork in the road. The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it many trials and tribulations. It has been the single greatest crisis impacting humanity in over a century. At this critical juncture we are once again presented with a choice. Along one path, we can resume the pursuit of things just as they were before the pandemic. That may be fine if you accept that everything was more or less OK. But to do that ignores the rapidly disappearing middle class and burgeoning inequality whether it was gender, income or social inequality. Unsustainable practices and poor stewardship of our natural resources were also along this pathway; out of control cost of living, less transparency and accountability in Government.

The PACT Government shares the view that there is another way, a better path. It will involve resourcefulness, innovation and diligence. It will involve a willingness to change and adapt - things that human beings invariably resist. But change and innovate we must. We believe this is the direction that those who went out to vote in April 2021 were seeking. Our recovery from the pandemic must prepare all of our people to participate

in a modern economy, to protect their health and wellbeing and to thrive in a safe and healthy environment. This path ensures we open up greater opportunities for our people to live their best lives. One that closes the widening gap between the haves and the have nots. A direction that gives our people hope for their future. A direction that our young people living and studying abroad desire to be a part of someday.

Before I close Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly touch on where we are with the COVID-19 pandemic. As of yesterday the total number of active cases was 4,132 with 27 COVID patients in hospital and 4,610 people in isolation. The good news is that the lateral flow test policy and use of lateral flow tests is working and people are generally being honest about the results. As of Thursday there had been 1,728 positive lateral flow tests since their introduction here.

Over on the Sister Islands Faith Hospital confirmed yesterday that there were 19 active cases.

In total, there have been 123,277 COVID-19 vaccinations given in the Cayman Islands, of which 57,918 or 81 per cent have received one dose of the vaccine while 55,819 people or 79 per cent of a population of 71,106 received a two-dose course.

Additionally, 9,984 people or 14 per cent of the population has gotten the third dose or booster of the vaccine.

While our COVID numbers have spiked, it wasn't necessary unexpected. We in the Cayman Islands had the luxury of living in a safe bubble so long that we took for granted our safety and some of us stopped doing the things that would keep us safe.

As I said earlier, our border is now open and we are welcoming vaccinated visitors without any quarantine requirements. These requirements will fall away when we enter the final phase of reopening and welcome everyone to our shores.

I reiterate what I said many times before, practice social distancing when you are out in public, wear your masks and if you are able to, get vaccinated. While it won't stop you from getting COVID, it will decrease your level of illness and the risk of death. Do it for yourself, your family, your coworkers and your community. Please.

Summary and Conclusion

As I said at the opening of this address, it is an honour and a responsibility to lead the way as we chart our recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating opportunities for shared prosperity and preparing our people to avail themselves of those opportunities.

Our vision is of a Cayman Islands that is held up as one of the most sustainable countries in the world, a trio of islands where ALL its citizens can thrive; a peaceful and prosperous place known for its resourcefulness, its diligence, its excellence, and its innovativeness.

And for us, prosperity without sustainability is not an option. There is no binary choice between prosperity or sustainability. We need both and we must demand both.

Some of the windows of opportunity for our people are closing. So today we stand here as a new political administration in this third decade of the 21st Century to declare a new day and a new way forward.

In his book, *The Cayman Islands in Transition*, author, educator and former member of this honourable house, Mr. J.A. Roy Bodden, ends his landmark work with this haunting message (and I quote)

“Today the (Cayman Islands) faces a myriad of intractable problems, but has made no attempt to arrive at a politics of inclusion and engagement that should enable the many nationalities who make up the society to feel a closer affiliation - to feel ‘Caymanian’. As a result, the society is an agglomeration of various ethnic, national and social groups with little in common except a thriving economy in the background and an increasing drive toward materialism. Crime, including sophisticated criminal conspiracies, is becoming increasingly widespread, yet there is no sustained, coherent attempt to address family and community issues, as if societal breakdown and combating crime have nothing to do with one another. No solid foundation can be built on such unstable ground. The environment is being stripped, economic shocks are ignored, and there are precious few attempts to come to grips with a sustainable development policy in any sphere. In this writer’s opinion, this is a formula for problematic development, if not abject failure.”

(He continues), *“It is a moot question as to where it all went wrong, since ‘progress’ is still being measured on a faulty report card. Small wonder, then, that what seems a rhetorical question is becoming ever more relevant: For whom are we developing the Cayman Islands?”*

Mr. Speaker, we are here today because the people made a choice in April to elect a government that cares about people; that cares about community; that cares about country. The work we have done to create the budget that you will have details on from my colleague shortly has been crafted with our people foremost in mind. It offers a new, inclusive approach filled with hope and optimism for the people of the Cayman Islands and her residents.

The overall budget demonstrates my Government's continued commitment to managing public finances responsibly. It is also a reflection of our top priorities of the recovery of the Cayman Islands' economy and the safety of our people.

I believe, as does my PACT Government Mr. Speaker, that we have a responsibility to improve the quality of life for this and future generations of Caymanians. The values that have and will continue to guide our decision making are the four values that make up the PACT acronym, which I will repeat: People-driven, Accountable, Competent and Transparent.

Each of us has pledged to be driven by and held accountable to these guiding values, which help us align our objectives and shape our policies. It was these values that came into play when we had to make the tough decisions on resource allocations.

As Thomas Paine said, and I quote, *"A body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody ought not to be trusted by anybody"*.

The road ahead will be challenged by many issues and challenging, but we are clear on why we are here. It is our mission to stabilise our approach. You see Mr. Speaker, whether you are flying an airplane or piloting a large vessel especially through a

channel or a narrow passage, a stabilised approach usually makes for a smoother and safer landing. We cannot promise all smooth sailing ahead.

We are still likely to experience some global, economic and social shocks. Yet there is also more opportunity.

Mr. Speaker this Government is accountable and trustworthy. The budget which we will present today reflects our Government being People-driven, Accountable, Competent and Transparent.

I also wish to thank the Deputy Governor, the Attorney General, and the Cabinet Secretary for their support, help and advice. And thank you Mr. Speaker for your commitment to this Honourable House.

In closing Mr. Speaker I thank my team, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, for their commitment and dedication and for adhering to the values we collectively adopted after being sworn in following the election, which was the collective voice of the people of the Cayman Islands. The people were looking for leadership to create a more sustainable future for these Cayman Islands, leadership that would balance the needs of society, the economy and the environment.

To quote my friend, Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados *"If our existence is to mean anything, then we must act in the interest of all of our people who are dependent on us. And if we don't, we will allow the path of greed and selfishness to sow the seeds of our common destruction."*

I pray God's continued blessings on these beautiful Cayman Islands and his guiding hand as we discuss and debate the budget for 2022-2023.

Thank you.

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