



Cayman Islands
Government

Nurturing Our Future: A United Sustainable Path to Recovery, Hope and Prosperity

Budget Policy Statement

Premier of the Cayman Islands
Minister, Finance and Economic Development
Minister, Education
Minister, District Administration and Lands

Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP

Friday, 8 December, 2023
House of Parliament

Mister Speaker, as I rise to present the plans of the Government, first and foremost, I give thanks to God for his grace and lovingkindness individually, as a Parliament and as a nation that we can all gather to deliberate on the people's business and recommit ourselves as instruments of His will.

Mister Speaker, indeed it is a great privilege to be elected as a representative of the people and to be further given this tremendous responsibility of leading the Government. It is my fervent prayer that God will grant me the requisite wisdom, knowledge and understanding so to do.

I take this opportunity to thank Her Excellency the Governor, Mrs. Jane Owen for her thoughtful delivery of the Throne Speech this morning and her commitment to a modern and transparent partnership and collaborative efforts to deliver a prosperous and secure future for all our people.

Mister Speaker, I also want to recognise Her Excellency's diligent efforts to take the time to get to know us by reaching out and making herself available to all the people and communities of these Cayman Islands. It has been my observation that as Governor she brings incredible wisdom,

proportionality and balance in her approach- one that truly represents our monarch, His Majesty King Charles III while respecting the Caymanian way of life.

Mister Speaker, I am very grateful to my Cabinet colleagues who came together with the united purpose of finalising this said budget. We have had to deal with a number of challenges over the said past few months, weather many storms and we have make tough decisions - but the love of country and the interest of our people keeps us united - and we will continue to use this as our guiding light and principle.

The United People's Movement (UPM) has hit the ground running. I wish to take this opportunity to publicly congratulate the three Parliamentary Secretaries - Hon. McKeeva Bush, Mr. Bernie Bush and Ms. Heather Bodden, who received their instruments of appointment from Governor Owen on Wednesday, 6 day of December. They bring a wealth of knowledge and experience and will be supporting several Cabinet Ministers to deliver on Government's priorities over the next fourteen months.

I also want to thank my friends on the other side of the aisle **Mister Speaker**, and I call them my friends because they are, for their conscientious engagement with all the issues which we all seek to address for the betterment of our constituents.

Yes, we have the naysayers, **Mister Speaker**, those who question our motives in this House but as former United States President Theodore Roosevelt said in his famous **Citizenship in the Republic Speech**, 1910:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming;

but who does actually strive to do the deeds;

who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Mister Speaker, with the help of almighty God, the UPM is willing to take on the challenges that confront us because we believe we can make a difference in the lives of our people and we therefore urge our residents to continue to pray daily for those of us in authority.

Mister Speaker, I also want to express my gratitude for your acceptance of this most important task of presiding over this esteemed House of Parliament. Your duties are indeed very challenging, however you do bring to the table a tremendous wealth of knowledge and a deep passion for the history of our beloved country and our Parliament which will no doubt serve this Honourable House and all members extremely well.

We are confident that our renewed sense of purpose, unity and commitment will help assist in charting the way forward as we work to create a sustainable path to recovery, hope and prosperity.

Vision

From our commitment, springs our vision - the vision of a unified Government and country by extension, focused on continuing our Islands' ongoing economic recovery in a measured and sustainable manner that provides hope and prosperity for all Caymanians.

Mission

When our Government was recently formed, we chose the roles and assignments of each member to emphasise the group's shared ideals, as we continue to work together in pursuit of the Government's five broad outcomes for the people of the Cayman Islands, which are to:

- Improve the Quality of Life for Caymanians;
- Enhance Our Competitiveness While Meeting International Standards;
- Modernise the Government to Improve Public Sector Performance;
- Future Proof to Increase Resilience; and
- Protect and Promote Caymanian Culture, Heritage, and Identity.

Mister Speaker, you see, our overarching goals have not changed. This Government remains determined to empower Caymanians to live productive and prosperous lives and ensure that future generations have much better opportunities.

Building on Our Achievements

Mister Speaker, as Members of this Honourable House will see in the 2024/2025 budget, the key priorities of the next fourteen months will build on the successes achieved since 2021 and show a continued and renewed commitment to people-centred policies and projects.

The wellbeing and success of our people is at the core of the 2024-2026 Strategic Policy Statement and therefore remains our guiding principle.

This Government continues to focus on preparing our people to deal with the realities of an ever-changing world and equip them to face the future with hope and confidence.

Mister Speaker, over the last two and a half years, we have seen our economy on its way to full recovery primarily due to robust increases in most sectors led by construction, real estate and financial services. The prudent actions that were taken after the pandemic have borne economic fruit.

Mister Speaker, I want to pause and thank Hon. Wayne Panton, Member from Newlands, namely for his dedication and service during his tenure as Premier. It is through his leadership of the country in the second half of the pandemic that we were able to successfully reopen the country's borders without having to re-implement any lock down measures. This is another remarkable story, against all odds.

Mister Speaker, the economic expansion we are undergoing is expected to continue with projected growth of 3.1% in 2023 and 2.2% in 2024.

However, along with economic growth, we have also had to deal with inflationary pressures, which are not, **Mister Speaker**, for the avoidance of doubt generated within our local economy, but driven by significant global events and occurrences way beyond our shores. The Consumer Price Index inflation rate accelerated to an average of 9.5% for 2022. Average inflation for 2023 is projected at 5.2% and for 2024, inflation is projected at 2.5%.

These inflationary pressures have become a heavy burden on the shoulders of our people, increasing the cost of living for them and their families. We have seen the unsustainable situation and have taken action to relieve this burden.

Mister Speaker, some of the substantive actions we have taken to ease the burden of the cost of living include but not limited to:

- Free meals to all primary and secondary students in Government schools;

- Reintroduction of private school grants;
- Increased 'A' level scholarship funding to cover two years;
- Increased funding for scholarships at both the undergraduate and graduate school levels plus an additional stipend to cover expenses such as travel to get student visas;
- Increased benefits for seafarers;
- Senior citizens, seafarers, and people living with disabilities will receive an additional \$250 for the upcoming Christmas season;
- Public service pensioners, who have served for ten years or more, will also receive an ex-gratia uplift, starting this month.

In addition, **Mister Speaker**, we have sought to cushion the blow of inflation through the following measures:

- Reducing fees for seniors on motor vehicle licensing and passport applications;
- Providing financial and technical support to over 400 micro and small businesses through the Cayman Islands Centre for Business Development;
- Stipends for displaced workers in the tourism industry;
- Waived import duties on feminine products and baby items; and
- Increasing the duty-free allowance from \$500 to \$1000 for returning residents to the Cayman Islands from 1st December 2023 to 5th January 2024.

In the important area of housing, we made a commitment to help Caymanians secure a home they can afford and followed through on our commitment in several ways.

Mister Speaker, earlier this year, amendments to the stamp duty concessions for prospective Caymanian homeowners made it far more affordable for Caymanians to buy both first and second properties.

The amendments will help prospective Caymanian homeowners by:

- Increasing the value of existing property prices eligible for a full waiver of stamp duty for first time Caymanian buyers and
- Introducing a new formal tier of stamp duty concessions for Caymanians purchasing their second property.

In real terms, **Mister Speaker**, the revised concessions will provide significant financial relief for Caymanians purchasing homes or land.

For example, a young couple purchasing their first home for CI\$600,000 would normally have to pay CI\$45,000 in stamp duty. The revised concession saves them CI\$45,000 which they can put towards their children's education or save for their own retirement.

While we are focused on our economic recovery, **Mister Speaker**, our policies have remained people-centric.

We reduced unemployment to the lowest rate in decades and encouraged the growth of small businesses.

In addition to ensuring that Caymanian families benefit from the country's economic development and supporting growth in the local economy and tourism sector, we also acted to protect and sustain our Islands' key economic pillar - the financial services industry.

Ministry of Financial Services and Commerce

Mister Speaker, Financial Services remains a strong, resilient driver of our economy which presents significant educational and employment opportunities for our people and contributes in immeasurable ways to the expansion and robustness of our economy. It will continue to be supported and promoted by the UPM administration.

Mister Speaker, you and all Honourable Members may recall media reports detailing our progress in being removed from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in October this year.

The tremendous effort made by Government, in particular the elected Member for West Bay South and our Deputy Premier and Minister for Financial Services, who worked hand in glove with our Honourable Attorney General, our regulators, and our Islands' financial services industry for over two and a half years to achieve this outcome - demonstrates what can be accomplished through unity, determination and foresight.

As a highly regarded international financial services centre, with financial services as being backbone of our economy, the Cayman Islands came together with singlemindedness - to achieve our FATF delisting through the implementation of effective sanctions, beneficial ownership, money-laundering prosecutions and convictions.

Mister Speaker, I take this opportunity to publicly thank the many people who contributed to this outcome. On behalf of Government and the people of these Islands, we are grateful for your professionalism, expertise and nation-building.

I also wish to acknowledge the capable leadership of Deputy Premier and Minister for Financial Services, Hon. Andre Ebanks and our Attorney General Hon. Samuel Bulgin, in this critical task.

A key component of our FATF delisting was demonstrating that our beneficial ownership regime met the global standard. Just last month, we strengthened our alignment with the FATF by passing the Beneficial Ownership Transparency Act, 2023. Again, I wish to thank my colleagues on both sides of this House for their cooperation and commitment to ensuring that this matter of paramount importance was dealt with expeditiously, sending a signal to the entire world that we are united when it comes to the protection of our economy and the maintenance of global standards.

Mister Speaker, at its heart, the Act will help competent authorities both locally and globally prevent, detect and prosecute crime, wherever it occurs.

These two key achievements position our financial services industry for continued success as we move into a bright future. Strong and coordinated efforts of this kind is what is needed to deal with any challenges that may arise in the face of Cayman's continued success, stability and upward trajectory.

A central element to our success story with financial services has been telling our story. The Deputy Premier and his team in the Ministry of Financial Services has engaged in face to face dialogue with some of the individuals and bodies that have been most critical of the Cayman Islands, often relying on outdated information or even worse, unfounded claims to paint an unfair picture of our industry. This high level of engagement and professionalism demonstrates that firstly we have nothing to hide, and secondly that we are ready for the world stage.

Most importantly, they are hearing directly from a competent professionals Caymanians who have worked in both the financial services industry and the public sector. So, I wish to express my profound pride in the way our Deputy Premier has represented us not only to the FATF, but to the European Commission, United Kingdom and regionally.

This Ministry's 2024/2025 budget is driven by its objectives to achieve a positive assessment on FATF 5th round review; maintaining market/commercial leading edge in financial, maritime and aviation services; enhancing local intellectual property registration and streamlining the licensing framework for local businesses.

I also welcome the opportunity for Parliamentary Secretary who hails from the West Bay North Constituency to support his Minister in the area of Commerce, which I will allow the Minister to expand on during his contribution.

Of course, **Mister Speaker**, as mentioned earlier the Ministry will continue to advocate on behalf of our financial services industry, dispelling untruths and defending our solid record of compliance with global standards, providing our allies and partners with accurate information so they can defend us whether in the Brussels, Westminster, Whitehall, Washington DC or international media. We will continue to valiantly defend this pillar of our economy.

Please permit me to introduce **Mister Speaker**, some of the key initiatives to be undertaken across Ministries in the upcoming financial year. The respective Ministers will elaborate and elucidate during their presentations.

Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development

The Hon Member for West Bay South also carries the responsibility for a second and important Ministry namely Investment, Innovation and Social Development.

A few of the initiatives to be undertaken in 2024/2025 under this Ministry include the launch of the eID card programme for residents of our Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, legislation, a cornerstone of social development efforts, remains a priority. Amendments to the Children Act, 2012 are underway, which will see the establishment of an Office of the Children's Commissioner. Simultaneously, the Ministry will be working on the repeal and replacement of the Adoption of Children Act and amendments to the Older Persons Act. These legislative measures will be vital in fortifying the protection and welfare of the most vulnerable in our populations.

The Ministry will also be strengthening the work of the Department of Children and Family Services, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Sunrise Adult Training Centre to meet the evolving needs of the clients they serve. For the subject of Social Development, our Deputy Premier is assisted by a Parliamentary Secretary, the elected Member for Savannah who is known throughout these islands for her compassion and her care. I think we are all thankful that she gets to continue exactly where she left off.

So Mister Speaker, our Deputy Premier demonstrates that it is possible to focus on the welfare of our people, while also remaining focused on the economy. That balance, you see, embodies the spirit of the UPM and I dare say every member of this Government.

Ministry of Tourism and Ports

At the end of 2021, due to closing our borders as a result of the pandemic, our tourism industry like others across the world, suffered tremendously. We were therefore eager to re-open, but we had to

so wisely. Having carefully navigated the critical recovery phase of the pandemic, our economy has emerged stronger.

I am pleased to report **Mister Speaker**, that as of September this year, Cayman Islands tourism showed steady upward trajectory.

Between January and September 2023, stayover and cruise arrivals to the Cayman Islands maintained an upward momentum with the destination seeing a 105% increase in total visitation compared to the same period in 2022.

Our Islands welcomed 323,038 stayover visitors and 930,621 cruise visitors between January and September 2023. This represented 83.6% of 2019's visitation numbers - far surpassing the destination's target of 70% of 2019's visitation. Standout months included January with 89% of 2019's visitation and September with 88%.

Mister Speaker, with Cayman having exceeded its visitation goal of 70% of 2019's record numbers in the first three quarters of the year, my colleague Minister of Tourism and Ports, and Member for George Town Central, Hon. Kenneth Bryan is very confident that we are on track to full tourism recovery by the end of the year.

Mister Speaker, permit me again to please convey my appreciation to the Hon. Minister of Tourism and his diligent team for their continuous efforts in improving this most important pillar of our industry. Again, I want to make it known that the UPM stands behind our tourism industry.

I also want to commend the Hon. Minister not only for his tireless efforts locally, but for his regional leadership as the Chairman of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation. He has advocated on behalf of Cayman and has represented us well on the global stage, showing that we Caymanians can succeed when we are afforded the opportunity. Some may question why our Minister should spend time on efforts that arguably support our competitors? Well, it is because our international engagement and advocacy is like a rising tide which lifts all boats. A strong Caribbean region means more potential visitors for all of our destinations. After all we are our brothers' and sisters' keeper. One could easily argue that the pace of our tourism recovery has been hastened by our Minister's direct involvement in the CTO! Well done Minister, you continue to enjoy our unequivocal support.

Mister Speaker, while the Minister will go into further details, I want to mention that some of the Ministry of Tourism and Ports' projects and priorities for 2024/2025 include construction of a new general aviation terminal and runway extension at Owen Roberts International Airport; expansion of Cayman Airways' routes, and activities to attract new screen production business to the Islands.

The team will also be focused on diversification of the tourism product with a greater emphasis on eco-tourism and expansion into emerging and secondary tourism markets.

Of course, it would be remiss of me to overlook the Parliamentary Secretary assigned to Tourism, my dear friend, the Member for Savannah. There is no one who has championed beautification in these islands like her. And as we open our doors to welcome the world, we will need to ensure that our highways and by-ways, our communities and corners are immaculately kept, hygienic and enhanced. Mister Speaker, both the Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary show that good ole' Caymanian way of rejecting uncleanliness.

Ministry of Health and Wellness

Mister Speaker, neither our people nor our economy can thrive without us having a healthy and well society. The UPM administration is fortunate to have a strong and qualified champion in the form of our Minister for Health and Wellness, my esteemed colleague, the elected Member from Prospect. She is dynamic, energetic and committed to this area. A trained nurse, she has naturally taken to her Ministerial responsibilities, never ever shying away from the hot button issues. Over the next two years some of the new initiatives by the Ministry of Health and Wellness will include the development of a national healthcare strategy, including clinical standards; facilitating the promulgation of a new Public Health Act and Environmental Health Act and Regulations to effectively regulate and manage all public health and environmental health functions.

Focus will also be on continuously improving the current solid waste management on the landfills in Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman through investment in necessary staff, replacement of outdated equipment and inadequate infrastructure.

Ministry of Home Affairs

Mister Speaker, I will use this time to highlight Home Affairs, which is the second Ministry under the elected Member for Prospect. During the financial year, the Ministry plans to further professionalise public safety services through accountability, and development of employees. It will also focus on youth development programmes that provide career pathways into our uniformed and public safety agencies! For example moving young people from Cadets to Fire Service or the Coast Guard is modernising government, future proofing and improving the quality of life for our people all in one.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has taken an intelligence driven approach to justify its largest expenditures, such as starting the design work on a prison that will meet international standards. They will also be investing in prison offenders' management and rehabilitation reform. Additionally,

the Ministry will be upgrading the national CCTV system to collect more specific sets of data to aide in public safety.

Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency

Mister Speaker, I am so honoured to serve in a Cabinet comprising three Caymanian women. The third woman to join the Cabinet is none other than our former Speaker, Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, the elected Member for West Bay Central (who will speak later). Even as a first time Parliamentarian she has demonstrated to this our country her abilities to wrap her mind around a very complex yet important subject. I am therefore most thankful to her for not only taking the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency but also for seeking to take responsibility for the Gender Affairs Unit which will be moving to her Ministry.

We cannot have a sustainable society without properly addressing gender gaps, gender violence and other key issues.

My colleague, the Hon Member for West Bay Central has demonstrated a willingness to build on the gains that we made as we seek to cultivate a lasting legacy of sustainability in the Cayman Islands by achieving environmental, social and economic balance, to make the lives of present and future generation of Caymanians much better.

With its focus on developing programmes to enhance Cayman's sustainability and supporting climate change resilience, the Ministry will in the upcoming year work to complete a 2023-2040 Cayman Islands Climate Change Policy; support the creation of an overarching sustainability framework to guide the work of public entities and further enhance protected areas and protection of indigenous species.

The Ministry intends to work collaboratively across Government agencies for the development and implementation of strategies to create a more sustainable and climate resilient future including innovation, biodiversity, food security, green technology, and renewable energy.

Mister Speaker, I want to take a moment to thank the leadership and staff in the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency for all the hard work they have undertaken over the past two and half years.

Some of the gains made in the area of environmental sustainability and resiliency are as follows:

- Facilitated the purchase and protection of significant acreage across the Cayman Islands, including parcels in the Salina Reserve, Sand Cay, Western Mangroves Area and Central Mangrove Wetlands in Grand Cayman, Tarpon Lake and the East Interior of Little Cayman, and Hemmington Forest in Cayman Brac;
- Commenced the Darwin Grant-funded Cayman Deep 'See' Project with partners Marine Conservation International and Beneath the Waves to better document the deep-sea resources of the Cayman Islands at depths between 50-200 metres (165-6500 feet);
- In February, released the Climate Change Risk Assessment 2022, final evidence report for the Cayman Islands and most comprehensive review of climate risks undertaken of our Islands;
- Launch of Cayman Home Energy Efficiency Retrofits to include some of National Housing Development Trust affordable homes; and
- Completion of public consultation meetings for the draft 2023-2040 Cayman Islands Climate Change Policy;

Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure/ Transport and Development

Mister Speaker, for the 2024/2025 financial year, the Ministry will develop a comprehensive National Development Plan; implement the 2022-2037 Cayman Islands Food and Nutrition Security Policy and undertake several key road projects through the National Roads Authority.

The Ministry, through the National Housing Development Trust, will undertake multiple-projects to develop homes throughout the districts in Grand Cayman, while completing a National Public and Affordable Housing Policy and 10-Year Strategic Plan to implement initiatives that support a sustainable approach to housing.

In an effort to improve the quality of the service delivered to the public, organisational reviews will be completed on several of the key departments and agencies within the Ministry. Furthermore, the

National Road Safety Campaign will continue as we make a genuine and coordinated effort to reduce the number of lives lost through traffic fatalities to zero!

Mister Speaker, I would like to applaud the drive and passion of the elected member for North Side and Minister for Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport and Development. He cares deeply and compassionately for the areas he has been assigned. In particular his vision and passion for farming and food security demonstrate wisdom far beyond his years and should be a source of hope and inspiration for Caymanian farmers. The Minister's willingness to introduce innovation into the industry and improve farmers' access to the support and services of the department have all gone very a long way to boosting morale for our local farming community.

I am also pleased that he has accepted the support of the Hon. Member for West Bay West to serve as a Parliamentary Secretary in the areas of Planning, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport and Development.

Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture

Mister Speaker, it is my pleasure to welcome back to the Cabinet my friend and esteemed colleague the Hon Member for Bodden Town East and Minister for Border Control, Labour and Culture. He brings with him a wealth of experience and wisdom to our team.

Mister Speaker, you will likely recall, perhaps with a smile, the dedication and commitment of this Minister having spent every day for over 2 months on television with him keeping our country informed and connected during the height of COVID-19 pandemic. He is also very sensitive to and keenly aware of the needs of our people. It is a most admirable trait that he possesses and one which will help to keep us focused on the most important things. He is also passionate about Caymanian culture and is excited to add this subject.

Key initiatives for his Ministry for the upcoming financial year include continuation of upgrades to the customs online system and collaboration with enforcement agencies locally and internationally to protect our communities from the importation of firearms and drugs.

In the upcoming year, Mister Speaker the Ministry intends to bring legislative changes to the Immigration Reform Act in order to address many outstanding issues. We believe that sensible immigration reform is needed. While we accept that foreign labour will be required to maintain our economy, we also do not accept that everyone who upon arrival should be on an automatic pathway to citizenship. These are important yet sensitive discussions that we must have as a community. I

am therefore pleased that the Minister is committed to this but that he will be ably supported by the Hon. Member for West Bay West who will also serve with him as a Parliamentary Secretary.

Mister Speaker, labour issues remain important as we must always ensure we provide pathways for Caymanians to advance in their profession of choice. We should also be fair to our low paid workers. The final report of the Minimum Wage Advisory Committee has now been duly noted by the Cabinet. I will give the Minister the opportunity during his debate to touch on the timeline for this matter being taken forward by this Government.

Finally, **Mister Speaker**, I wish to highlight that Postal Services will fall under this said Ministry which coincides with the Cayman Islands hosting the Caribbean Postal Union Conference in 2024. However, again I will allow the Minister to provide further details.

Ministry of Youth, Sports and Heritage

In 2024/2025, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Heritage intends to ensure facilities are upgraded and maintained to an international standard; increase awareness of Caymanian our heritage through development of materials, stories, videos and displays of artefacts in more locations throughout our islands; and promote and support athletes and young people in forums that will ensure their development and maximisation of opportunities available to them.

Mister Speaker, we have all borne witness to Cayman's exceptional regional and international performances in swimming. We all agree that it is time to invest in a state-of-the-art 50 metre Olympic-size pool and warm up pool. Our first competitive pool sponsored by the Lions Club, was constructed in 1986 and has served us well. Cabinet has this week approved the assignment of Crown Land near the Truman Bodden Sports Complex (and incorporating the current Lion's Pool), to be utilised for the development of a New Aquatic Centre for the Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, you too share a deep love and keen interest in the preservation and promotion of Caymanian history. Some amongst us still struggle with our sense of identity, and desire a deeper understanding of our past, especially as we navigate new uncharted paths. That is why we are looking forward to celebrating for the very first time in two generations, the reinstatement and celebration of Emancipation Day which will replace the Discovery Day as holiday in May of next year.

The decision to celebrate this holiday each May is in recognition of Cayman's unique emancipation story, one which sets it apart within the Caribbean.

While Emancipation came almost one year after it was implemented in the other British Colonies, such was the outrage of the British Governor that Cayman had delayed its implementation, slaves in the Cayman Islands immediately received full emancipation on 5th May 1835 and bypassed (the multi-year) period of apprenticeship which took place across other colonies. So, **Mister Speaker**, the slaves in the Cayman Islands were the first to be truly free!

This along with the incredible story of a strong, intrepid and unbowed female slave named Long Celia will be celebrated and highlighted as we tell our own story to future generations. We will be educating the public more on slavery's impact on our islands as we approach the first official celebrations in May 2024.

Mister Speaker, I wish to offer my sincere appreciation to the Hon. Member for East End, our Minister for Youth Sports and Heritage. He has embraced his new role with enthusiasm. He is deeply connected to our Caymanian Heritage and has throughout his life volunteered with organisations who work closely with young people to protect our heritage. I am confident in their abilities to see the important work of the Ministry of through. And **Mister Speaker**, in the true spirit of sports that is a team spirit, the Minister has welcomed his predecessor in the role, the Hon Member from West Bay North to serve as Parliamentary Secretary to support the efforts to complete major sporting, youth and heritage projects which the Parliamentary Secretary started. There is no question about the Parliamentary Secretary's heart and passion for these subjects so I am confident that together the Minister and PS will make a dynamic duo.

Office of the Deputy Governor

Mister Speaker, the top priorities for the Office of the Deputy Governor for the 2024/2025 period are to provide strategic support to establish and operationalise two new key units with important good governance functions.

These will be the Enterprise Risk Management Unit responsible for providing coordination, leadership and support services for effective risk management within the core government, and advice to Statutory Authorities and Government Companies (SAGCs) and a Secure Vetting Unit, responsible for providing security checks, vetting clearances and continuous monitoring for sensitive roles within core government, uniformed services and SAGCs.

Mister Speaker, the Office also intends to continue to provide targeted, effective policy advice and strategic support to the Deputy Governor, to help him achieve his goals for the effective functioning of the Civil Service including coordination and delivery of the Deputy Governor's priority projects and related training for civil servants.

Before I continue **Mister Speaker**, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the hard work, dedication and unwavering commitment of our Honourable Deputy Governor. He is a servant leader who deeply cares for the welfare of his civil servants. Civil Servants should know that the UPM administration values their service, their advice and their ability to deliver on our commitments. While we set policy, the Civil Service carries it out and so we look forward to them delivering on the policies and priorities in this budget in a true spirit of partnership.

Portfolio of Legal Affairs/Judicial Administration

Mister Speaker, this is also much important work that is being done by the Portfolio of Legal Affairs as they draft so many pieces of legislation that we are considering to move this country forward, either by revision or reform and they will continue by the Portfolio of Legal Affairs. They have done tremendous work on anti-money laundering, counter-terrorist financing, proliferation financing and financial sanctions requirements to meet FATF.

They could not be let by anyone better than the Hon. Attorney General. We will also continue to support the requests from the judiciary to ensure the important work of the courts are not in any way interfered with, delayed or fettered. We are proud of the judiciary as they are not only renowned in the Caribbean but internationally as well.

Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

The Ministry's team will be focused on developing and implementing a government-wide results-based management and accountability framework for assessing financial and non-financial performance.

Ministry of Education

Mister Speaker, the Ministry of Education's focus will be on strengthening the delivery of education at all levels from early education through to tertiary level, while developing both curricula and physical facilities.

Technological Advancement in Education

Mister Speaker, throughout my tenure as Minister for Education, I have prioritised enhancing the technological infrastructure in our government schools. This commitment is evident in several initiatives, including providing digital devices to all government school students, investing in enhanced network equipment for schools and crafting a National Digital Learning policy to guide

schools in implementing effective digital learning strategies and equipping students with essential computing skills.

In August 2022, **Mister Speaker**, we took another significant step towards this goal by introducing promethean panels to replace the current interactive whiteboards. These advanced panels will significantly enhance the quality of education imparted in our schools. Our ICT team has successfully installed 314 Promethean display panels across our schools and provide comprehensive training to approximately 275 educators on their effective utilisation.

I am also pleased to share, **Mister Speaker**, that all 15 of our school leaders now have easy access to information on the go through iPads. Additionally, all 13 secondary school physical education teachers can now comprehensively evaluate accurate techniques for various athletic activities and provide pupils with video-based evaluations.

Supporting Caymanian Learners

Minister Speaker, the Ministry of Education is committed to increasing support to Caymanian students. Our scholarships and grants currently enable 634 students to pursue overseas studies and over 1,200 to pursue post-secondary, TVET, and tertiary studies locally. This demonstrates our unwavering commitment to providing equal opportunities for all aspiring learners.

Mister Speaker, last December, we introduced the prestigious Government High Schools Scholar Award, valued at CI\$100,000 to inspire and recognise excellence among our valued students while highlighting the importance of government schools.

Congratulations are in order to Abigail Rose and Diamond White, both John Gray High School graduates, who were the first to receive this distinguished recognition. We look forward to announcing the next high school scholars in January 2024.

Also notable among our efforts to empower Caymanian learners, **Mister Speaker**, has been our introduction of the local Technical, Vocational, Education, and Training (TVET) Grant. This is a programme designed to equip Caymanians, who have already completed their compulsory education, with the essential skills and training they need to succeed in the dynamic field of TVET.

The grant which is valued at up to CI\$15,000.00 per year covers tuition fees, course materials, and required equipment for eligible courses lasting 18 months or less, offered by registered local private

institutions. Prospective learners, Mister Speaker, may apply for the grant online at www.moescholarships.gov.ky.

Mister Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that all Caymanian students have a strong foundation in mathematics. We have developed a Numeracy Strategy for Government Schools to ensure that every single primary school student have a robust foundation in mathematics before moving on to secondary education.

In addition, we have provided extensive training to school leaders through the National Centre for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics Mastery Pathway and have now recruited 14 specialist math teachers to enhance math instruction in primary schools. Mister Speaker, we no longer have general teachers teaching maths but we have specialists teaching maths.

Mister Speaker, as part of our strategy to improve the quality of teaching in schools, the Ministry has also engaged approximately 80 assistant teachers across government primary schools and secondary schools up to Year 9.

Our aim is to support our classroom teachers as they apply teaching and learning strategies to help students, particularly those with special educational needs, realise their full potential.

We extend our gratitude to our recruitment team for their diligent efforts to ensure that our schools have the necessary support to provide quality education to our all students.

Fostering Inclusive Education

Mister Speaker, over the past few years, we have witnessed a growing number of students with special educational needs and disabilities. In this view, we are working diligently to create a more inclusive education system by providing small-group instruction as needed, so that our most vulnerable children can participate fully in the mainstream education system.

In 2021, we introduced a comprehensive Code of Practice for identifying, assessing and providing additional learning support needs in education. Throughout the academic year, we trained and supported all principals (both public and private schools) and Special Education Needs Coordinators in relation to the Code of Practice.

Mister Speaker, the Additional Learning Support Needs Policy has also been put in place to ensure that children and young people have the additional learning support needs, which include special educational needs and disabilities are able to access appropriate learning opportunities and provisions.

I am pleased to report that 42 students now benefit from learning support classes at Prospect Primary, John Gray and Clifton Hunter High Schools.

Minister Speaker, as part of our ongoing efforts to cultivate a supportive and inclusive learning environment that caters to all learners' needs, we have also repurposed the physical education room at Sir John A. Cumber Primary School to create an autism-specific classroom and a sensory room.

This supportive and calming environment caters to the needs of seven critical stage 1 students and those who require a quiet place to de-stress. These specialised facilities aim to better equip students for integration into mainstream classes.

Education Capital Projects

Mister Speaker, I am sure you are no doubt aware, in March of this year, we officially opened the doors of the spectacular, long-awaited, purpose-built John Gray High School. The school was meticulously designed to foster innovative teaching methodologies and provide ample opportunities for vocational pathways.

The institution boasts a state-of-the-art performing arts centre and automotive workshop, specialised labs for clothing and textiles, food and nutrition, design and construction technology. It stands as a testament to our commitment to providing every student with the resources and support they need to realise their full potential.

Throughout the year, we advanced several capital projects also aimed at increasing the schools' capacity to accommodate the growing population in their respective communities.

Minister Speaker, as part of these efforts, you would be happy to hear that work has now commenced on a new Year 6 block at Red Bay Primary School and on converting the existing Year 6 area to reception classes.

Additionally, work progressed on the construction of the Theoline McCoy Primary School Hall and a walking track was established at the Creek and Spot Bay Primary School.

As stated in the budget overview, we also have plans in place for the construction of a new Cayman Brac High School, a new high school in West Bay, a new hall in the Joanna Clake Primary School in Savannah and the expansion of the Lighthouse School to include 11 additional teaching spaces.

The Department of Education Services' Facilities team has implemented several smaller projects to enhance our schools' physical infrastructure. These include the construction of a new wheelchair ramp at Prospect Primary and the creation of a new student holding area at Theoline McCoy Primary in Bodden Town.

Minister Speaker, we are committed to providing world-class education to all students in the Cayman Islands. By fostering inclusive learning environments, investing in state-of-the-art facilities, the question is often asked who are we developing for – it is in order for us to break those ceiling, we have to do it through education. After this Minister has exited the stage of politics no one should ask who we are developing for – we are building these state-of-the-art facilities for our first-class citizens, not ghost Caymanians but our belongers and Caymanians on this island we call home.

We are continuously improving our infrastructure, we are ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Regarding the issue of a project-based grants programme **Mister Speaker**, I want to inform Members of this Honourable House that this has enabled government schools to embark on specific non-operational projects that directly benefit students.

During the 2022/2023 academic year, four schools were awarded funding support for a total of eight projects. These projects included the development of mobile science lab stations, upgrading design and technology equipment, and building student benches for breaks and lunch at Clifton Hunter High School.

Additionally, Red Bay Primary received funding for the development of a reading café and nature garden, as well as outdoor enrichment and learning centres for reception. East End Primary, long thought to be forgotten (not under this Minister) received support for the installation of security systems and improvements to the audio-visual systems, while Layman E. Scott High School received specialised resources for children with special education needs.

Mister Speaker, the Ministry also re-instated funding to all 19 registered independent and assisted schools to the tune of CI\$2 million. The schools used the funds to enhance school facilities, improve

student health and safety, provide scholarships to Caymanian students, support staff development, and improve Special Education Needs capabilities.

With this said, the Ministry of Education maintains its vigilance over private institutions. In 2022, three independent institutions consistently judged "weak" following their Office of Education Standards inspections were served Notices of Improvement to facilitate progress and ensure compliance. By virtue of Section 18 of the Education Act, 2016 we also enacted by the Ministry and the three schools received school improvement support over 6 months.

Dual Enrolment Programme

Mister Speaker, we have strengthened our support for Dual Enrollment students through a Memorandum of Understanding with the University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI). This partnership has led to renovations and refurbishments of the dual enrollment classroom at UCCI, with plans for further expansion to accommodate the growing demand.

The Ministry is also currently piloting a TVET Dual Enrollment pathway programme, at UCCI. This aims to benefit up to 25 promising students. Through this programme, Year 11 students are identified and provided with a comprehensive training module, enabling them to acquire an internationally recognised certification in Year 12.

This unique initiative equips students with the necessary skills to secure fulfilling careers. Upon completion, students will earn a level 2 diploma from UCCI, their high school diploma, and industry certifications.

The pilot includes courses in computer technician and construction technology.

Child Safeguarding/Positive Behaviour in Schools

Mister Speaker, to promote child safety and positive behaviour in schools which is of utmost importance, the Ministry has implemented various initiatives. The online child safeguarding module has been completed by over 2,700 participants, while the in-person module has been successfully completed by 1,250 participants from 43 educational institutions.

Additionally, the Team Teach programme, introduced in October 2022, has provided training to approximately 300 teaching staff and school security officers on effective behaviour management strategies.

Following extensive consultations, the Education (Amendment) Act was successfully passed by Parliament last year. This pivotal legislation now requires that all schools implement an anti-bullying policy that aligns with the national policy.

Mister Speaker, we have also developed the Anti-Bullying (Schools) Regulations and an update to the national policy.

Thirty per cent of schools have revised their school policy to align with the new national policy. Remaining schools are expected to do so before the end of 2023. Earlier this year, we launched an extensive awareness campaign to promote the provisions of the Anti-Bullying (Schools) Regulations pertaining to the prevention, reporting, and response to bullying. And I wish to thank the Honourable Member from West Bay, Miss Katherine for her key assistance with this programme.

Early Childhood Assistance Programme

Mister Speaker, the Ministry has also taken significant steps to support early childhood education. The Early Childhood Assistance Programme (ECAP) was extended into the summer months of 2023 to provide financial assistance to eligible parents for early childhood centre fees. Additionally, the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit launched the ECAP Online Programme to simplify the application process.

To address the lack of early learning facilities in the North Side and East End districts, we introduced the Smart Start Early Stimulation Programme. This 30-week programme aimed to improve young children's readiness for school and support families in creating a conducive home learning environment.

Upon its conclusion, the Ministry opened a nursery, annexed to the East End Primary School, catering to 20 young learners from the East End and North Side Catchment areas. This facility provides a safe and nurturing environment with morning and aftercare programmes, free meals, and an Early Years Framework-based curriculum.

Mister Speaker, Members of this Honourable House will be pleased to learn that my Ministry has provided significant strategic support for Early Childhood Care and Education Centres through its Early Childhood Care and Education Unit.

This support includes:

- Hosting weekly support sessions with centres that receive a weak rating on their Office of Education Standards Inspections;

- Collaboration with the Wellness Centre to train over 100 parents and caregivers as part of the Growing Brain Programme;
- Partnering with KidsAbility to provide financial support for five parents and their children to attend 'More Than Words', the Hanen Programme for Parents of Children with Autism or Social Communication Difficulties; and
- Providing one-to-one support to 85% of the designated leads for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities assigned to ECCE Centres to facilitate a clear understanding of the process and with the preparation of their administrative files.

Before I conclude with the Education Ministry, **Mister Speaker**, I want mention a few other programmes that we have expanded and will continue to do so.

This year, the Public Schools Meal Programme has been expanded to include students on alternative placement arrangements and those enrolled in the East End Nursery.

This expansion ensures that all students have access to the nourishment they need to succeed academically. As the Members of this Honourable House are fully aware, the Meal Programme ensures that all students enrolled in compulsory government programmes receive nutritious meals twice on a daily basis.

Swim Free Initiative – This year, **Mister Speaker**, the Ministry supported private community partners, including the Flowers Group, DMS, Fosters Group, and YMCA Cayman, in the launch of the Swim Free initiative in government primary schools.

This programme involves a mobile pool that travels from school to school, offering free water skills training to children from Reception to Year 2. The training equips children with life-saving skills, ensuring their safety in water.

Since starting at East End Primary School, it has now been introduced at Edna Moyle, Theoline McCoy and Joanna Clarke Primary Schools and it continues to move throughout Grand Cayman.

Finally, **Mister Speaker**, we are consistently working to ensure the safety students in our care.

This term, we introduced a new visitor sign-in platform at the Lighthouse School, Prospect Primary and the John Gray and Clifton Hunter High Schools. The system enhances school safety and security by efficiently managing and monitoring the entry and exit of visitors.

Visitors sign in on a digital display kiosk and receive a visitor badge with their name, photo, and visit details. Visitors are required to wear their badges at all times while on campus. This additional safety measure will be deployed in all schools in the coming weeks to ensure student well-being and I wish to thank my IT Department for ensuring the programme reach the implementation stage.

Mister Speaker, the Ministry of Education is on a trajectory of excellence. For 2024/2025, the projects will be focused on school improvement, leadership development, Inclusion, early childhood care and education.

Some of the upcoming projects and strategies include:

- Increase capacity in public high schools with the hope to reintroduce 'A' levels;
- Expansion of the TVET curriculum and pathways at UCCI;
- Enhancing Caymanian culture and heritage in our schools;
- Establishment of an Early Childhood Development Hub to increase and strengthen early education programmes;
- Provision of financial assistance to help working families offset the costs of day care services. This will include assistance of children from age 3 to 4 years to access day-care provision though out the year; and
- Inclusion of mental health education programmes to reduce stigma and to promote emotional wellbeing among children.

Mister Speaker, additional focus will be on those students who are most the vulnerable, with individualised assistance for these children as well as information and assistance for those in need of support in a timely manner.

I would like to thank my team at the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services for their unwavering commitment and support and their hard work in nurturing our Islands' future.

Turning now to my Ministry of District Administration and Lands, **Minister Speaker**.

The Ministry is contributing directly to broad outcomes one to improve the quality of life for Caymanians and to provide solutions to improve the well-being of our people so they can achieve their full potential. These is being done through the following initiatives:

Disability Policy Implementation

The Ministry has embarked on creating a space and programme for the learning and development of adults with Special Needs and/or disabilities in the Sister Islands. The centre has now been completed and recruitment of staff has commenced. We anticipate a 2024 opening for our adult learners in the Sister Islands.

East End Affordable Lots Programme

Mister Speaker, the Ministry is moving to the next phase of the East End subdivision affordable land lots programme. It is anticipated that the distribution of these land lots will occur in 2024. The programme will support the distribution of 41 affordable land lots from East End subdivision and progress Government's priority to help Caymanians achieve the dream of home ownership.

Improve Beach Accessibility

Improving beach accessibility for the most vulnerable continues to be a priority **Mister Speaker**. The Ministry included funding for mobi-mats in the 2022-23 budget and is seeking to upgrade facilities at many of the public beaches that will include accessible restrooms, accessible parking and other features within the scope of support from other stakeholder entities. So, **Mister Speaker** our efforts go beyond merely identifying public beach access. We want to ensure that it is maintained and more importantly enjoyed by the people for whom it was protected.

Mister Speaker, I am pleased to share how the services of the Department of Lands and Survey have been significantly contributing to the revenue of the Cayman Islands Government, the effective operation of our booming real estate market as well as contributing to activities to address sustainability.

The Department has significantly outperformed all metrics amidst increasing service demands, even though with the increasing interest rates and inflation there was some decline in real estate activity.

As at 29 November 2023, Lands and Survey has generated stamp duty and registry fees in excess of CI\$84 million, exceeding this revenue target. **Mister Speaker**, the Department which is celebrating 50+ years of service to the community, continues to contribute directly to several of Government's broad outcomes.

In order to continue to provide support efficient service to the growing customer base, the Department has implemented a number of new initiatives. One such project is the new online document retrieval portal, which will allow customers the ability to request services, pay online and receive the relevant service from the Land Registry section. This is expected to be launched in early 2024. Additionally, we are pleased to have a new location for Sister Islands Lands and Survey Office.

Other initiatives planned include completing the next phase of the scanning project, creating e-forms for ease of customers and replacing the process mapping of all key customer service channels to create added efficiencies.

A major achievement of the Department is the purchase of twelve properties all of which will be for the benefit of the people of the Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, I am also pleased to share that the Lands and Survey Department has completed the update of aerial imagery of the Cayman Islands. The new imagery will be added to our historical imagery records to better understand the changes of the landscape over the past five years, and to make more informed decisions for a better future.

It must be noted that many Government entities and statutory authorities use the data as part of their development planning process, to support their operations, and to monitor changes to our coastline, particularly the beach areas.

For the upcoming year, **Mister Speaker**, the Department has the ambitious plan to amend a number of land and survey related legislations to include the Stamp Duty Act, Registered Land Act, Land Acquisition Act, Tenancy Act, among many others.

Shifting to District Administration, **Mister Speaker**, I am delighted to say we have worked collaboratively over the past few years to address and remedy several concerns, resulting in positive outcomes in the Sister Islands. We look forward to implementing new programmes and initiatives and enhancing current ones to improve the lives of people in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

Some of these plans include upgrades and/or expansion of district administration building, piers and public beach facilities, road network, cemetery space, public parks and sporting facilities.

Mister Speaker, it is important for members of the public to recognise that Cayman Brac and Little Cayman do not have the same Cayman Islands Government support framework, such as the Needs Assessment Unit. In light of this, provision of assistance for home repairs is not extended to elderly and indigent residents of the Sister Islands through District Administration and the Ministry.

Mister Speaker, the support we provide has been significant to the indigent who need necessary home repairs. We have been able to assist with some 50 projects through the Sister Islands Home Repairs Assistance programme. And I am happy to report, that the Programme has been extended to include provision of hurricane shutters for the indigent and elderly persons so we can **avoid the mad rush on an impending storm for plywood.**

Another programme I wish to mention, **Mister Speaker**, is the Sister Islands Beaches and Community Clean-up Programme. It is very near and dear to my heart, as I created it many years ago. **Mister Speaker**, the programme engages many unemployed Cayman Brac and Little Cayman residents to maintain the beauty and picturesque nature of the Sister Islands.

Upon taking on the reins of the District Administration. I ensured that the necessary funding was in place to positively engage over 60 Caymanians per year, and provide them with a life line during this difficult time in their lives. Our plan is to enhance and improve this programme over the upcoming years to innovatively and creatively ensure much greater success.

Public Land Inspectorate

The Ministry, through the Public Lands Commission Inspectorate, will continue to ensure that beach accesses are maintained and safeguarded. It will also begin to regulate and permit commercial activity occurring on public lands to ensure its continued safe and proper use.

Mister Speaker, I am happy to report that this year the Seven Mile Beach Vendor policy was approved by Cabinet. We also welcomed a new Chairperson and vibrant commission members. I want to take a moment to thank the previous Chairperson Mr. Woody DaCosta for his work with the Public Lands Commission.

Mister Speaker, in the Ministry's efforts to improve customer self-service and innovation, the Shoreline Access Interactive Map (IMAP) - development was initiated. This will provide an online interactive map built on Google map framework to provide real-time navigation to all public beaches and public shoreline access points (just over 200 registered shore access points).

It is expected that the IMAP will launch a pilot test program in the first quarter of 2024.

In addition, **Mister Speaker**, we have been working with the Public Lands Commission to finalise the approval of vendors to the Seven Mile Beach.

For the 2024/2025 budget, new initiatives include procurement and implementation of case management system, review of ticketing process in Public Lands Act and continued installation of signage across the Islands.

Water Authority

Mister Speaker, the Board and the Authority is celebrating 40 years of service to the community and I would like pause and congratulate them on this wonderful achievement.

They have made extraordinary efforts to extend much needed piped water in Cayman Brac and is well on its way towards the eastern district of Spot Bay. The Authority is now approaching Tibbetts Turn and Watering Place. This indeed is truly a remarkable milestone and I look forward with eager anticipation to the day that the entire Cayman Brac and Little Cayman will have access to piped water.

Finally, on this portfolio, **Mister Speaker**, I will briefly speak on the Sister Islands Housing Development Corporation.

A business case and architectural works was recently completed for the much-needed upgrade of sub-division and house plans. We now await required approvals by the relevant department prior to commencing final approval of applications so that construction of new homes can commence in 2024.

Cabinet Office

Mister Speaker, some of actions that will be progressed by the Cabinet Office in the upcoming financial year include the coordination and implementation of the Older Persons' Policy, National Disability Policy as well as other national policies.

Mister Speaker, the Office will continue to strengthen communication by executing Government's communication plan and strategy. Furthermore, I am supportive of enhancing the work of both Radio Cayman and CIGTV as they are most vital sources of information for our people, especially those residing in the Sister Islands. We also anticipate that as new legislation and initiatives are being proposed, we will enhance and further utilise the public consultation hub which has been successfully rolled out.

Also, the work to represent and protect the interests of the Government and people of the Cayman Islands in the United Kingdom will continue to be of significance. We anticipate that when the UK proceeds with the Overseas Territories Declaration and a new Strategy for the Overseas Territories, there will be a cross government and national dialogue on bilateral negotiations we would want to discuss with the UK - an exercise that would be heavily focused on public engagement and to that extent we have already extended our hand to the Opposition and they received a presentation from the Cabinet Office and they were in agreement with our approach. We have sent off the letter to the UK and invited them to come to the Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, Hazard Management Cayman Islands (HMCI), which is now a part of the Cabinet Office is planning the establishment of flood sensors across the Cayman Islands.

This project expands on a collaborative effort with a number of stakeholders, including the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, Cayman Islands National Weather Service, Department of Environment, Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure, Lands and Survey Department, National Roads Authority and the Water Authority. HMCI intends to expand this project across all 3 islands post pilot phase.

HMCI will also be overseeing a risk analysis consultancy for improved understanding of the storm surge and seismic threat, including acquisition of ground speed acceleration data for earthquakes.

In partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), HMCI is working on producing a storm surge and wave impact model for the Cayman Islands. Mister Speaker, data from the project will inform preparedness and mitigation activities, particularly in regards to the positioning and development of critical infrastructure and emergency shelters.

Mister Speaker, in the upcoming year, HMCI will be requesting capital budget for a feasibility and technical requirements consultancy for an extension of the National Emergency Notification System. This system currently includes the radio interrupt and a mobile alert app which provided real-time, location-specific alerts, designed to keep Cayman Islands residents and visitors informed and safe.

Additionally, **Mister Speaker**, I have also taken responsibility for the National Weather Service. While their new purpose-built facilities near Lyndhurst Road should be completed during this two-year budget cycle, I also anticipate improving the performance of the Doppler Radar which is a vital resource in covering the black hole in Western Caribbean.

Mister Speaker, we are grateful that the Atlantic hurricane season ended a few days ago and we have been spared yet again. While it was one of the busiest on record, most of the storms veered into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. There were 20 named storms, with seven hurricanes coming to life and none of them affecting the Cayman Islands. This year gave us an even more fulsome reason to celebrate Cayman Thanksgiving.

Mister Speaker, no one can predict whether we will dodge the bullet again next season but I can confidently say that we strive to be as prepared as possible. I take this opportunity to thank the Hazard Management team led by Ms. Danielle Coleman for their continued dedication and hard work.

Mister Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Minister for so many important entities. I want to thank the leadership teams and staff in all my Ministries all their hard work, dedication and support.

Mister Speaker, Members of this Honourable, thank you for your indulgence as I present this afternoon.

I would like to quickly address a few issues that I know remains of concern in our community, the issues of safety and traffic.

Safety and Security

Mister Speaker, while the Cayman Islands remain one of the safest places to live and do business in the region, we have seen a spike in crime in recent times, particularly robberies.

I want to reassure our people that the Government will continue to make it a priority to ensure that everyone remains safe and secure as possible.

Mister Speaker, we have confidence in the leadership of Police Commissioner Kurt Walton and the brave men and women of the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service (RCIPS) as they work to address this pressing issue.

Mister Speaker, the RCIPS' top six strategic priorities over the upcoming budget cycle will be to:

- Prevent and tackle crime
- Make our roads safe
- Deliver justice for victims of crime
- Protect vulnerable and at-risk people
- Improve public confidence in the police and;
- Continue to modernise the police service.

Among the key initiatives for 2024/2025 are senior-level professional development training for officers and police staff at both the commissioned and non-commissioned ranks, expansion of the digital forensic lab to support data recovery and cyber-crime investigations, introduction of body worn cameras for the Firearms Support Unit as well as acquisition of a fit for purpose medium-sized multi-mission patrol and response vessel for use between the Sister Islands to address the increase in illicit maritime activity and safety concerns in particular the Jamaica drug canoe boats.

Mister Speaker, during the recent district community meetings across the Islands led by Commissioner Walton and his senior command team, the RCIPS heard the key concerns are and intends to act upon them.

To prevent and tackle crime, the RCIPS plans to continue with the deployment of a task force dedicated to investigating leads and leveraging intelligence to apprehend suspects; patrol high risk areas and maintain its presence on the roads.

There will be focused community policing to help prevent anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood and property crime while at the same time disrupting and investigating serious and organised crime, particularly involving firearms, and violent and gang related crime.

To deliver justice for victims of crime, Mister Speaker, the RCIPS will support victims at every stage of the investigative process, work to reduce re-offending and provide feedback to victims of crime. Finally, **Mister Speaker**, to improve public confidence in the police, RCIPS is strengthening their organisational culture of strong integrity and ethics. They are working to deliver a visible police service and improving through accessibility to the community, particularly through community officers.

Traffic

Mister Speaker, another issue that we are actively seeking to address is traffic. It is a challenge that affects Caymanians and residents alike, particularly those who live in the Eastern Districts.

While my colleague, Minister responsible for roads, will speak on infrastructure and transport in a fulsome manner, I want to mention that the National Roads Authority is well underway in upgrading the road network to provide better connectivity and efficiency for travel especially for daily commute including the highway system such as the East-West Arterial which our Government is committed to developing as well as the completion of the Linford Pierson highway.

The Government is cognisant, **Mister Speaker**, that roads are an important part of our infrastructure for the efficient commute of people and delivery of goods and services. As these upgrades take place, they will continue to be sensitive of the environmental impact and also focus on the importance of integrating storm water management systems in the roadwork design.

Highlights of People-Centred Budget

Mister Speaker, while I have earlier gone into great detail on my areas of responsibility as Minister, I would like to briefly outline some of the highlights of our UPM Government.

As can be expected of a Government that is putting people first, we have focused our operating expenditure on the areas that most impact our people's wellbeing and success – notably, in Education, Health and Wellness, Housing and Infrastructure as well as our natural environment.

We will also focus on supporting and growing key industries of Financial Services and Tourism as well as Sustainability.

Mister Speaker, some areas which we have prioritised the allocation of our operating expenditure include:

- Enhancing the budget of the Portfolio of Civil Service to ensure that public service pensioners who worked for 10 or more years receive an increase in their minimum pension to \$1,250 from \$950.00 per month;
- Offering property and casualty insurance through CINICO in 2024 to introduce greater competition in the market and with a vision of reducing the high insurance rates;
- Supporting the operationalisation of the first residential long-term mental health facility in 2024; and
- Ensuring the Ministry of Education's plans to develop and implement a framework for free tertiary education and local universities for Caymanians.

Mister Speaker, as our people navigate the increase in living expenses caused by the pandemic, rising oil prices, global conflicts and other factors, we want to give the assurance that the United People's Movement Government is heavily invested in providing economic and social programmes to support them.

Mister Speaker, we will:

- Continue the free meals programme in all public schools to provide parents with peace of mind that their children are receiving good nutrition which is a key for enhancing learning;
- Implement an affordable residential land lot pilot programme in East End and Cayman Brac through the Ministry of District Administration and Lands; and
- Continue the construction of affordable homes through the National Housing Development Trust and the Sister Islands affordable homes.

New Revenue Measures

Mister Speaker, to fund our intended programmes and to achieve our goal of helping our people thrive, the Government requires revenue to fund our expenditure. To meet our projections and adequately fund the important programmes outlined, we had to implement new revenue streams.

Mister Speaker, while it is necessary to increase fees, we all understand that these actions are taken in order to address specific financial demands and to achieve broader economic objectives for the benefit of our people.

The revenue generated through new fees plays a vital role in funding critical public services, healthcare, education, and other essential social programmes that contribute to the overall well-being of our society.

The decision to introduce new revenue measures was not taken lightly, and we have made every effort to ensure the new or increased fees are non-inflationary and do not impact the already high cost of living for the average Caymanian.

The 2024/2025 Budget includes new measures that will yield additional revenue of \$52.0 million in 2024 and \$80.0 million in 2025.

The additional revenue measures primarily relate to:

- New and increased administrative and regulatory fees charged by the General Registry, the Department for International Tax Compliance, the Cayman Islands Monetary Authority and the Department of Commerce and Investment;
- Increased immigration application fees;
- Customs duties and fees including increasing the environmental tax on hybrid and electric vehicles; increasing the import duty rate on hybrid and electric vehicles with a value of more than \$70,000; increasing customs and procedural fines; and increasing the fees for visas and extensions, for persons wanting to extend their time; and
- Increased stamp duty rates payable for properties purchased in “high-end” geographical areas on Grand Cayman.

These new revenue measures will go towards funding operating expenses, **Mister Speaker**.

Several capital projects benefitting our people are also planned during this budget period including:

- CIG Land ownership for future projects through the Ministry of Lands

- Major education infrastructure improvements via the Ministry of Education, including:
 - Continuing work on the John Gray High School
 - Phased construction of a new multi-purpose hall at the Theoline McCoy Primary School Hall
 - Phased construction of a new Cayman Brac High School
 - Lighthouse School expansion
 - Phased construction of a new high school in West Bay
 - University College of the Cayman Islands expansion projects.

- To support buildings and infrastructure for entities under the remit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness, including relocation/construction of the Department of Environmental Health's new facility on Grand Cayman at a cost of CI\$2 million; fleet replacement for the Department of Environmental Health at a cost of CI\$1.7 million; and fleet of Mosquito Research and Control Unit aircraft at a cost of CI\$2.5 million.

- Under the oversight of the Ministry of Home Affairs to complete design and pre-construction work of a new prison at a cost of \$3 million over two years.

- Several infrastructure and housing projects under the remit of the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing Infrastructure Development including:
 - Major road works, CI\$26.5 million over two years
 - District upgrades including parks civic centres, ramps/jetties and other development and infrastructural projects, CI\$10.1 million over two years
 - Building and repairing homes under the oversight of the NHDT, CI\$15 million over two years
 - Consultancy and project management services for the proposed sub-sea cable.

- Landfill remediation under the oversight of the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency at a cost of CI\$1.4 million

- Projects under the Ministry of Tourism and Ports including:
 - Establishment of a tourism attraction facility managed by the National Attractions Authority to include a restaurant, bar entertainment as well as on the job training for 200 Caymanians students and a new location for the craft market, CI\$2 million over two years

Compliance with the Framework for Fiscal Responsibility

Mister Speaker, the 2024-2025 budget is in full compliance with the Principles of Responsible Financial Management.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has advised that based on the Operating and Capital Expenditure Allocations, the Revenue Measures will yield additional revenues of \$51.9 million in 2024 and \$80.0 million in 2025, and borrowings of \$150.0 million over the 2024 and 2025 financial years, the Government will be in full compliance with the Framework for Fiscal Responsibility and the Principles for the 2024 and 2025 financial years.

Mister Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, you can clearly see that the 2024/2025 budget has been prepared with our people foremost in mind.

It offers an approach filled with hope and optimism for the people of the Cayman Islands and demonstrates the United People's Movement commitment to the responsible management of public finances. It is also a reflection of our top priorities for the wellbeing of our people.

Mister Speaker, as a former educator, my overriding mission is to ensure that all of our people have access to the opportunities that will allow them to develop their full potential and live the life they envision for themselves and their families.

As a Cabinet, as a Government, we have collectively done our best to be strategic, prudent, and farsighted in our budget allocations going forward, as that is the only way to ensure that all Caymanians and residents continue to have a good quality of life within our shores.

The Government will strategically work to address our inherent vulnerability with the appropriate focus on building resilience.

Movement Forward

Mister Speaker, there can be absolutely no denying that the overlapping global crises of the past three years have been the most severe in decades, and their impact has been felt by developed and developing countries alike.

In the Cayman Islands, we have:

- Weathered the COVID-19 pandemic;

- Experienced the worst global health crisis in our lifetime;
- Struggled with worldwide supply chain challenges;
- Dealt with the damage caused by Hurricane Grace; and
- Navigated and continue to navigate through cost of living challenges

But we remain strong and resilient. We are indeed thankful for:

- Removal from the Financial Action Task Force grey list;
- Economic expansion which is expected to continue with projected growth of 3.1% in 2023 and 2.2% in 2024
- Growth in stayover and cruise ship and arrivals with a 105% increase in total visitation compared to the same period in 2022
- Reduction in the unemployment rate to the lowest in decades.

Mister Speaker, these successes that we celebrate belong to every Caymanian and resident who have played their part in the Islands' progress. From the valiant efforts of our healthcare workers, police officers, fire fighters, tourism workers, educators, construction workers, private sector community, members of the civil and wider public service, every Caymanian has contributed to our collective success.

So, **Mister Speaker**, as I bring my presentation to a close, please forgive me for taking a moment to reflect on the awesome privilege of standing in this Honourable House today to present on behalf of my elected colleagues, a budget of over 1 billion Cayman Islands dollars. It is certainly worth a pause.

Oh to think just how far we've come in these beloved Isles Cayman. In Michael Craton's landmark work, "Founded Upon the Seas", it records that 100 years ago, and I quote, "The islands' budget remained comfortably balanced throughout the 1920's ranging between £6,000 and £8,000 a year. As a result, official salaries were increased and the plan for compulsory education was finally implemented in 1920. Funds were also found to construct a "simple but commodious building" as a Peace Memorial in George Town, which served as a court-house, Assembly room and town hall." (end of quote)

Of course, **Mister Speaker** that building has been aptly renamed Constitution Hall, given its historical importance. But let's consider that important piece of infrastructure was built and funded 100 years ago. And isn't it interesting to see that the more things change, the more they remain the same. A key priority back then was education, much as it remains today, and imagine **Mister Speaker**, they even found a way to uplift the salaries of public servants at that time. None of us alive today bore witness to debates that would have potentially transpired 100 years ago when our budget was between £6,000 and £8,000 a year. Yet we have all benefited from the foresight and stewardship of those decision makers who wisely allocated the budget at that time. And so we take on the baton of responsibility.

They made the best of what they had and while it is tempting to think that the sheer scale of this budget gives us greater latitude, it actually gives us greater responsibility for it has been said that to whom much is given, much is required.

Mister Speaker, I make this appeal today to all my colleagues in this Honourable House. Let us never forget our solemn oaths and our duties as Members of Parliament to serve as trustees for our people. We have been blessed beyond measure to be able to enjoy a level of prosperity our forefathers and mothers could never have imagined. That means we have to be good stewards of these financial resources and ensure that every penny, every project, every effort or initiative and yes every piece of legislation, is for the benefit and betterment of the people of the Cayman Islands, our Caymanian people. More importantly, it should benefit future generations so that our descendants will reap the rewards of our foresight.

In the words of the late Rev. Peter Raible;

"We build on foundations we did not lay

We warm ourselves by fires we did not light

We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant

We drink from wells we did not dig

We profit from persons we did not know

This is as it should be. Together we are more than any one person could be.

Together we can build across the generations.

Together we can renew our hope and faith in the life that is yet to unfold.

Together we can heed the call to a ministry of care and justice.

We are ever bound in community.

May it always be so."

Mister Speaker, it should be our collective prayer that the Cayman Islands will always be ever bound in community and served by caring Governments who put our people first.

This 2024-2025 budget sets out the vision for the United People's Movement and address the question, "Who are we developing for?" and that is the Caymanian people. There are many diverse needs, and yes, there are increasing amounts of wants. That will naturally come with a growing and more diverse population. In placing the needs of our people first, we may have to change directions sometimes or our approach.

So let us proceed, knowing that even 100 years ago, when our budget was a fraction of what is being presented today, we managed those resources well and we didn't depend on aide or intervention from the United Kingdom. I say that to remind us that our hard-fought constitutional autonomy and strong global reputation is because we have demonstrated the ability to effectively manage our domestic affairs especially from a fiscal perspective. It is my intention and that of my Government to ensure that this continues.

Mister Speaker, we are moving in the right direction and I can sense the audacity of hope amongst our people.

I too am optimistic, **Mister Speaker**. We are aligned with the words of Matthew 7:24-27 which tells, *"a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock."*

The Cayman Islands stands on solid rock today, **Mister Speaker**. With the support with every member of this Honourable Parliament and the Caymanian people, we can build on the accomplishments of our past which contributes to a more resilient economy. As well as is the foundation of making our Cayman Islands a great fantastic place to live for everyone who are honoured and privileged to calls these Islands home.

I pray God's continued blessings on these beautiful Cayman Islands and seek His guidance as we discuss and debate the budget for 2024/2025.

I want to thank the hardworking and dedicated team of the Parliament for all their work that has gone into these proceedings and I thank you, **Mister Speaker**.

And I want to especially thank the people of Cayman Brac East for entrusting me to be their voice and to represent them for some 27 years, in this Honourable House of Parliament. I consider it a tremendous honour to be a servant leader.

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