PARLIAMENT OF
THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

Fourth Meeting of the 2023/2024 Session
Fifth Sitting

Friday
26 July, 2024
(Pages 1-39)

Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin
Speaker

PRESENT WERE:

Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin, KCMG, MBE, KC, JP, MP
Speaker

MINISTERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP	*Acting Premier*, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce and Investment, Innovation & Social Development
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, MP	*Acting Deputy Premier,* Minister of Tourism & Ports
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, MP	Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure and Transport & Development
Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, MP	Minister of Health & Wellness and Home Affairs
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP	Minister of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency
Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, JP, MP	Minister of Youth, Sports and Heritage
Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, OCI, JP, MP	Minister of Border Control & Labour and Culture

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. Gloria McField-Nixon	*Acting Deputy Governor*, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of the Civil Service
Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin, KC, JP	*Attorney General*, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of Legal Affairs

ELECTED MEMBERS

GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS

Hon. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP	*Deputy Speaker*, Parliamentary Secretary to Tourism *and* Social Development, Elected Member for Savannah
Mr. Bernie A. Bush, MP	Elected Member for West Bay North

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP	*Leader of the Opposition*, Elected Member for George Town East
Mr. Joseph X. Hew, MP	*Deputy Leader of the Opposition*, Elected Member for George Town North
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, NP, MP	Elected Member for George Town South

INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town West
Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP	Elected Member for Newlands

APOLOGIES

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP	*Premier* and Minister of Finance & Economic Development, Education and District Administration & Lands
Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, JP, MP	Elected Member for West Bay West
Hon. Franz I. Manderson, MBE, Cert Hon, JP	*Deputy Governor*, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of the Civil Service
Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, OBE, JP, MP	Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman
Mr. David C. Wight, JP, MP	Elected Member for George Town West

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
FOURTH MEETING OF THE 2023/2024 SESSION
FRIDAY
26 JULY, 2024
11.45 A.M.
Fifth Sitting

[Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin, Speaker, presiding]

The Speaker: Parliament is resumed. Good morning.

I'd like to invite the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency to grace us with prayers.

PRAYERS

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, Elected Member for West Bay Central: Morning, everyone.

Let us pray:

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

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

Let us say The Lord's Prayer together:

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

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

The Speaker: Amen. Please be seated.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS OR AFFIRMATIONS

The Speaker: None.

READING BY THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF MESSAGES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Speaker: None.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

The Speaker: None.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

Electoral District Boundaries Order, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Acting Premier.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce and Investment, Innovation & Social Development: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable House the Electoral District Boundaries Order, 2024.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Acting Premier wish to speak thereto?

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Only to once again thank the Electoral Boundary Commission for their work; and to notify the public that I'll be making further comments on this matter later on in the agenda, when we get to the relevant Motion.

The Speaker: Thank you.

QUESTIONS TO HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Speaker: None.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: None.

OBITUARY AND OTHER CEREMONIAL SPEECHES

The Speaker: None.

RAISING OF MATTERS OF PRIVILEGES

The Speaker: None.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS

THIRD READING

Supplementary Appropriation (January 2023 to December 2023) Bill, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Acting Premier and Acting Minister of Finance.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg to move that the Supplementary Appropriation (January 2023 to December 2023) Bill, 2024 as amended in its Schedule by Finance Committee, be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that the Supplementary Appropriation (January 2023 to December 2023) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. Those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.
Agreed: Supplementary Appropriation (January 2023 to December 2023) Bill, 2024 passed.

MOTIONS

Government Motion No. 9 of 2023-2024 Recommendations of the 2023 Electoral Boundary Commission

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Acting Premier.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to move Government Motion No. 9 of 2023-2024 – Recommendations of the 2023 Electoral Boundary Commission, which reads as follows:

WHEREAS in accordance with the 2009 Constitution (as amended) an Electoral Boundaries Commission (EBC) was duly appointed on 4th January 2023;

AND WHEREAS the EBC has reviewed the Electoral District Boundaries of the Cayman Islands and submitted its findings thereon to the Governor and the Parliament in a report dated 4th August 2023 (the "Report");

AND WHEREAS the EBC recommended that the electoral district boundaries except North Side and East End be adjusted, and that the nineteen electoral districts be renamed;

AND WHEREAS the recommended names of the 19 electoral districts and the estimated population sizes are set out in Schedule A of the EBC report.

AND WHEREAS the precise boundaries of the nineteen electoral districts are set out in Schedules B and C of the EBC report;

AND WHEREAS schedule D of the EBC report included an alternative recommendation for 20 electoral districts;

AND WHEREAS the Governor has drafted an Order giving effect to the recommendations contained in the Report

BE IT NOW THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Parliament hereby approves the draft Order of Her Excellency the Governor, giving effect to the recommendations contained in the Report.

The Speaker: The Motion has been duly moved.

Does the Honourable Acting Premier wish to speak thereto?

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe I'm duty bound to speak hereto in order to provide a formal update to this honourable House, and the public, on the constitutional obligations to review and determine whether any changes should be made to the Cayman Islands electoral boundaries.

We may recall, Mr. Speaker, that in accordance with section 88(1)(b) of the Cayman Islands Constitution, an Electoral Boundary Commission, (EBC hereafter), was appointed on 4th January, 2023. Mr. Speaker, a previous commission submitted its report on the 20th of August, 2015. More recently, Mr. Speaker, the 2023 EBC made their recommendations, which I Tabled in the House yesterday.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, we should all thank the EBC for their time, commitment, and diligence to this matter. To provide background and context, Mr. Speaker, according to section 89(1) of the Cayman Islands Constitution, the EBC is tasked with the exercise of reviewing the boundaries of the electoral districts into which the Cayman Islands are divided; considering the changes or proposed changes, if any, in the number of electoral districts, or the number of elected Members of Parliament. As required by the

Constitution, the EBC submitted their report to the Governor and Parliament with its recommendations for any changes in the number and the boundaries of the electoral districts on 4th August, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, it is noted that consultations were conducted by the EBC with key government departments and agencies, and there were discussions with the Governor, and sessions with representation from both the Government and the Opposition. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the EBC held two rounds of public hearings throughout the Cayman Islands. These hearings were held in person and virtually, using multiple communication channels.

The EBC also held various media events to raise awareness, and invited feedback on the proposed adjustments to the constituency boundaries. Accordingly, solid efforts and considerable work was produced; against this background, Mr. Speaker, I now turn to confirm a few key legal and procedural points.

1. Cabinet has approved that the Premier of the Cayman Islands Table a Motion at this Meeting of Parliament dealing with the Draft Order from Her Excellency the Governor, concerning the 2023 EBC Report;
2. Importantly, for the avoidance of doubt, it is only this Parliament, under the Constitution, that can approve or reject the Draft Order from the Governor, and by extension, the recommendations from the EBC; not the Cabinet, not the Premier, nor the Governor;
3. Furthermore, as the Office of the Premier—and I express it that way to distinguish the individual person from the constitutional office held— is duty bound by section 89(3) of the Constitution to bring the Draft Order by Her Excellency the Governor to give effect to the recommendations;
4. The powers of the Office of the Premier have been vested in me this week by the substantive Premier with the consent of the Governor; and whenever acting, Mr. Speaker, I have long held the view— which I believe is correct, whether in my capacity as a past civil servant or acting in the capacity of another Minister— that the person acting is a mere caretaker for the substantive post holder, and should act within the known wishes or express instructions of the absent substantive post holder. As such, in the case of this matter, I confirm that I have directions from the substantive Premier, the Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, who has laid the EBC report, the related Draft Order and this Motion in this meeting of the House;
5. Once I conclude this contribution, and the exchange between the House is concluded, it then becomes the responsibility of this honourable House to either approve or reject the EBC's recommendations contained in the draft Order;
6. Indeed, section 89(5) of the Constitution expressly provides that the Parliament can reject or give leave to withdraw the draft Order of Her Excellency. Again, for clarity, Parliament, therefore, is the only Body that can approve or reject.

Mr. Speaker. I now pivot to outline considerations for the House in determining whether to accept or reject the draft Order.

Mr. Speaker, following discussions informally with all Members of this honourable House, who in turn have consulted, canvassed, considered, conferred with electors in their respective constituencies and all Members of this honourable House receiving a civil service briefing on the practical implications of implementing the proposed boundary changes, there are important considerations to weigh.

For the purposes of this presentation, Mr. Speaker, I have grouped and summarised these considerations under four main headings:

1. Engagement efforts and methods;
2. Voter awareness and understanding;
3. Practical implications, particularly near to a general election;
4. A preference for specific terms of reference.

Mr. Speaker, taking each of those four main considerations in turn, I'll start with engagement efforts.

Engagement Efforts

Mr. Speaker, despite best endeavours, unfortunately, the engagement efforts to offer public consultation were met with little public engagement. Though the EBC also made field visits to each constituency, alongside other activities I mentioned earlier— and again, we thank the EBC for their dedication and hard work on this arduous task—we are advised that the post-evaluation metrics show that the turnout at EBC meetings, as well as participation on radio shows, was very low. Unfortunately, this is not unique to the EBC, Mr. Speaker, as the entire public service is having to re-evaluate how it conducts public consultation, as the way our community engages has tremendously changed in recent years.

Post the COVID pandemic, there's little motivation for members of the public to attend meetings in person. [With] the advent of social media, and other electronic means of communication, there's less turnout to physical meetings, and without a high and intense degree of promotion on social media, there's a risk that meetings online will not draw large participation online. By way of example, within the last 12 months there was a consultation on food security and when I arrived at the West Bay Primary School, to the best endeavours of the relevant Ministry, I think there was only one person in attendance other than me.

Mr. Speaker, it requires much more creative, robust and targeted approaches to be taken, to yield the public's attention and awareness that we have gotten in years gone by. The civil service has invested in transparent and open dialogue with the public, as well as the government and, I'm sure, the Opposition, to make decisions for the future well-being of the country as its evolving.

As a recent example that the civil service has helped the government to learn from, Members in the House and the listening public will remember that several weeks earlier, prior to Hurricane Beryl, there was a heavy rainstorm that caused flooding, in which I believe the communication feedback that we received as a Government could have been a bit more succinct, precise, and frequent. The Government worked with the civil service to improve those not even knowing that Hurricane Beryl was on the way. Taking those lessons from the heavy rainstorm weeks prior, the Department of Communications worked assiduously with the government and created bite-size and rapid messages on social media on channels such as WhatsApp frequent messaging, particularly because that's how you reach younger folks; and we could see a marked improvement in terms of the information flow that went to persons, based on the two weather events. That's an example, Mr. Speaker, of the way and new way in this area that I think we need to engage on particularly important public matters for consumption.

Voter Awareness and Understanding

Mr. Speaker, this point then links to the second main consideration of voter awareness and understanding.

Consequently, Mr. Speaker, as only a few people participated in the consultation process, relatively speaking, this leads to concerns about the level of support and moreover, the awareness of the proposed boundary changes; and arguably, a decision could be made without adequate public endorsement or understanding, the result of which can lead to broader public dissatisfaction with the electoral or proposed electoral system changes.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the next key consideration regarding practical implementation of the recommendations.

Practical implications of the recommendations

There are concerns, Mr. Speaker, that changes to the electoral boundaries less than 12 months from a general election has the potential to confuse voters about their voting area, which could lead to potential decreases in voter turnout, particularly among voters who may already be less engaged. Mr. Speaker, this would be counterproductive to the overall goal to have as many Caymanian voters turn out to have their say. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure we will all agree that the number of people voting in elections is an indicator of democratic health.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we have been briefed on the deliberation taken under the Venice Commission, formerly known as the European Commission for Democracy through Law, which introduced the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters in 2002. Mr. Speaker, allow me for the benefit of those who may not know this Code, to detail its background and its purpose. The Code acts as a benchmark for electoral standards focusing on key principles such as **"universal, equal, free, secret and direct suffrage."** It also highlights the importance of stable electoral laws, and procedural safeguards like unbiased election management, and efficient appeal mechanisms.

Mr. Speaker, while we believe that the United Kingdom (UK) has not officially adopted the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters as a binding legal framework, the principles and guidelines outlined in this Code have influenced electoral practices and reforms within the UK. The Code serves as a benchmark that the CPA international observers use to measure the conduct of general elections including elections in the Cayman Islands.

The Code states, on page 45, that the amendments to election legislation should be completed within one year of a general election; however, for completeness, the provision also recommends that the Code, where necessary, should take precedence over this time factor. Therefore, an amendment to implement good practice in the Code could be viewed as acceptable during the one year lead up.

Mr. Speaker, before I go further I will note that, while the report was finalised and handed in on 4th August, 2023, a number of pressing priorities, including creating a fiscal two-year budget had to be considered by the government in the context of the country emerging from a depressed economic cycle which, I believe my colleagues will agree, took considerable toil and months of work. Given this, and a range of other factors, we were not able to address the EBC report within the time frame that would be deemed appropriate to allow for proper public awareness and education *ahead* of implementing the new boundary recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, the constricted timeline would adversely impact the Elections Office, as we have been advised, as we stand less than 12 months to the next general election. Mr. Speaker, I will remind my colleagues that if the recommendations are accepted, they would have to be immediately implemented at the dissolution of Parliament, and in time for the next general election. We are advised that preparations are already underway by the Elections Office to manage the

2025 elections, and implementing the recommendations of the EBC report now, would negatively impact resources.

A Preference for Specific Terms of Reference

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I turn to the final main consideration concerning a preference for specific terms of reference.

Mr. Speaker, a key difference between the 2015 and the 2023 EBC, is that the 2015 EBC were more specified in terms of the terms of reference for which they would operate within, such as drawing 19 single-member electoral districts. Unfortunately, this was not the case with the 2023 EBC, which followed its constitutional mandate to review the electoral boundaries without any specific guidance. Therefore, there has been some consternation and concern that implementing changes now may be not as much of a comprehensive exercise as could be done, whereas the next EBC could be guided by more specific terms of reference to cover matters which came up through consultation after the report and have a similar framework to those that were followed to the prior (2015) EBC, for example.

Looking ahead now to Cayman's rate of population growth— even more, to really study the number of Members of Parliament there could be; to have more guidance and consultation on the specific names of the electoral districts and, although the Constitution forbids the EBC from taking in racial considerations— which is good because I'm happy to say, and I think we would all agree, that Cayman has not had the deep-rooted racial issues that has existed in other countries— it does not prohibit the EBC from taking into account economic diversity.

There were concerns raised, I understand, on where some of the proposed changes could lead to a more homogenous economic district which would then lead to what others in society are concerned about, of having "two Caymans". Part of Cayman's success is our harmony— to live in a country where the community sees itself as one Cayman; and other factors that we need to address are driving the society into two Caymans. We certainly need to consider whether or not we would then crystallise that in the electoral boundaries. So, those are a flavour of some suggestions that could be looked at by the next EBC to be able to have a more rounded and comprehensive, fit-for-purpose, specific terms of reference that could guide the next Parliament in making its decision should this be rejected.

Mr. Speaker, after outlining and summarising those four main considerations, I now draw this important presentation to a close. It will now fall to this House to decide formally whether the good intentions and the merits of the current EBC report should be accepted or, on the other hand, if it is outweighed by the main considerations I summarised in this presentation.

I think it is worth pausing for a moment, Mr. Speaker, to say that, after conferring and discussing with constituents, [and] all of us Members of the House talking to each other, this is not an easy decision. I know it has weighed on a number of Members' minds. No one wants to be perceived as not willing to implement changes in the event that you are unhappy with your electoral or campaign prospects— which is an implication that could be drawn; while at the same time there are real, valid matters of concern in the overall interest of the country which, given a little bit more time, may lead to a more robust and comprehensive, fit-for-purpose, electoral system.

Mr. Speaker, with all of these matters being duly considered, the Motion before the House is to implement a draft Order for Her Excellency the Governor, which reads as follows:

WHEREAS in accordance with the 2009 Constitution (as amended) an Electoral Boundaries Commission (EBC) was duly appointed on 4th January 2023;

AND WHEREAS the EBC has reviewed the Electoral District Boundaries of the Cayman Islands and submitted its findings thereon to the Governor and the Parliament in a report dated 4th August 2023 (the "Report");

AND WHEREAS the EBC recommended that the electoral district boundaries except North Side and East End be adjusted, and that the nineteen electoral districts be renamed;

AND WHEREAS the recommended names of the 19 electoral districts and the estimated population sizes are set out in Schedule A of the EBC report.

AND WHEREAS the precise boundaries of the nineteen electoral districts are set out in Schedules B and C of the EBC report;

AND WHEREAS schedule D of the EBC report included an alternative recommendation for 20 electoral districts;

AND WHEREAS the Governor has drafted an Order giving effect to the recommendations contained in the Report.

That is what is before us today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I laid this Order for consideration, and shortly hereafter you shall put the matter for determination by the Parliament of those in favour of the Order and its related materials or not. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the task to deliver, [to] lay this matter before the Parliament on behalf of the Office of the Premier, is now, in my humble submission, discharged.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Acting Premier. Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]*

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town East: Mr. Speaker, good morning and thank you.

I only have a very brief, brief, statement to make in relation to the Motion before us. Mr. Speaker, in the considered view of the official Opposition, this Motion to implement is simply just too late. I have advocated— and have made several statements publicly about it— that it was too late for the EBC to be implemented and brought forth for the 2025 election, and it is unfortunate that such is the situation.

Mr. Speaker, I find and think that it will be nigh impossible for the Elections Office to implement and get these changes done. I think what we will end up with is setting ourselves up for real voter confusion and disquiet leading up to the 2025 elections. Large-scale changes to the boundaries— in terms of the changes, in some cases they are extremely substantial, potentially adding a 20th seat. It is going to be very significant in its effect on our electoral boundaries, not to mention the voter confusion that will take place because so many thousands of our electors are going to find themselves assigned or given new voting districts.

Mr. Speaker, a Motion like this needs to be dealt with at the start of a term, not at the end, sir; not seven, eight months outside of an election that's staring us in the face. So I will leave things right there, Mr. Speaker, and let this matter proceed.

Thank you, sir.

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

If not, I'll invite the Honourable Acting Premier to exercise his right of reply.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for his contribution, which made several key points, and thank you to all Members of this honourable House for collegial discussions on this matter of significant importance, where we all want what is best for our beloved Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your indulgence in allowing the Standing Orders to be reordered so that we could take this matter in priority today; and the staff of the Parliament and their customary way of running around behind the scenes which the public doesn't see.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I pray that God will guide and protect us— guide us in our decision on this important matter; and for all of the country to know that the result, however it goes, will be, deeply, in the overall interests of the country as a whole.

May God bless the Cayman Islands.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Acting Premier.

Honourable Members, I am going to read the entire Motion and not just the resolution; and the reason for that is that the resolution can only be properly understood if the context is clear, because the resolution simply refers to "a report", and not the detail that is necessary to make it clear, and this is such a critically important constitutional matter, that I want no questions to be left hanging.

Government Motion No. 9 of 2023-2024
Recommendations of the 2023
Electoral Boundary Commission

WHEREAS in accordance with the 2009 Constitution (as amended) an Electoral Boundaries Commission (EBC) was duly appointed on 4th January 2023;

AND WHEREAS the EBC has reviewed the Electoral District Boundaries of the Cayman Islands and submitted its findings thereon to the Governor and the Parliament in a report dated 4th August 2023 (the "Report");

AND WHEREAS the EBC recommended that the electoral district boundaries except North Side and East End be adjusted, and that the nineteen electoral districts be renamed;

AND WHEREAS the recommended names of the 19 electoral districts and the estimated population sizes are set out in Schedule A of the EBC report.

AND WHEREAS the precise boundaries of the nineteen electoral districts are set out in Schedules B and C of the EBC report;

AND WHEREAS schedule D of the EBC report included an alternative recommendation for 20 electoral districts;

AND WHEREAS the Governor has drafted an Order giving effect to the recommendations contained in the Report

BE IT NOW THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Parliament hereby approves the draft Order of Her Excellency the Governor, giving effect to the recommendations contained in the Report.

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

NOES.

The Speaker: I believe the Noes have it.

Agreed: Government Motion No. 9 of 2023-2024 failed.

The Speaker: The Motion has failed and the Report is rejected.

Madam Clerk.

STATEMENTS BY HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Speaker: I have given permission to the Honourable Minister of Sports who is about to fly off to the Olympics, to make a brief statement about his proposed trip.

Honourable Minister of Sports

Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, Minister of Youth, Sports and Heritage, Elected Member for East End: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, right now the opening ceremony for the Olympics is about to start. I know that Sports Max is one of the channels that's carrying it, but I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to extend congratulations and best wishes to our Olympic athletes who will be competing in the games in Paris. We have Jordan Crooks and Jillian Crooks, both are competing in the swimming events; Devonte Howell in athletics and Charlotte Webster in sailing.

The hard work and ambition of these young people are a testament to the talent and ability right here in our Cayman Islands, Mr. Speaker. We are looking forward to seeing each of them compete and I know they will make us proud, but I also want to extend heartiest congratulations to the Chef de Mission, Ms. Shakeina Bush, who has done a wonderful, tremendous job thus far.

I also want to extend congratulations to Sierrah Broadbelt, who competed in aquatics in the Great Britain Summer Championship 2024. While competing there, she broke an eight-year old senior national record set by Miss Lara Butler in the 200-metre butterfly, so, as of Tuesday 23rd July, 2024, Miss Broadbelt holds a new record for a time of two minutes, 16.79 seconds (2:16:79) — a record which, I am proud to say, Mr. Speaker, now belongs to East End.

[Laughter]

Hon. Isaac D. Rankine: We are extremely proud of her achievements and look forward to her reaching higher heights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

I recognise the Honourable acting Premier for a statement.

Honourable Acting Premier

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to ensure that it's been distributed to all Members, so if you could just give us a moment.

[Pause]

The Speaker: I have it already. Thanks.

[Pause]

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe it has now been distributed to all Members and I thank you for your indulgence in allowing it on short notice, because the statement is from me in my capacity as the Minister of Investment, Innovation and Social Development on bus wardens and bus drivers employed by private entities.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement as to the circumstances and the reason why I, the Minister for Investment, Innovation and Social Development, referred to hereafter as "the Ministry", through discussion with Caucus, will be implementing a one-time stipend for bus wardens and bus drivers employed by private entities contracted to provide school bus transportation services to the Cayman Islands Government (CIG) education system.

Mr. Speaker, the CIG education system has provided bus transportation services for primary and high school students for many years. Historically, this service has been provided through a combination of government assets and personnel, and outsourced services. The outsourced bus companies or bus businesses are normally engaged for 10 months, the equivalent of an academic year, from August or September of one year, to June the following year.

Further, the bus companies are paid for the days of service provided in each month and not paid for weekends, public holidays, or vacation breaks. This equates to approximately 8.75 months out of the calendar year in which these bus wardens and bus drivers are paid by these outsourced bus companies through a contract with the Ministry of Education. In contrast, civil servants employed as bus wardens and bus drivers are paid for the entire year at a fixed salary rate. This difference in the payment structures between civil servants and outsourced bus company employees has been a cause of concern which many have expressed.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is finalising a policy to deliver a one-time stipend programme for the outsourced bus wardens and drivers. This stipend will be delivered through TP41 for financial assistance, and administered by the Ministry directly from the Ministry, and not a programme of the Needs Assessment Unit (NAU). The development of a supporting policy for this stipend will set out its payment parameters and enable continuation of this programme in future years, budget permitting. Mr. Speaker, through the delivery of this stipend, we are seeking to address the discrepancy in the pay structures between civil servants and the employees of private bus companies who all deliver the same service of providing transportation to our children so they can access education.

Mr. Speaker, very briefly, just to make two points slightly off script; but I believe it's important if you'll indulge me, to give credit where credit is due. There is one particular Member in the Caucus who's been saying this for quite some time— the Minister of Border Control and Labour. The Ministry of Social Development is the facilitator, but the main advocate for the programme, which was supported and seen as the right thing to do by all the Caucus, was the Minister of Border Control and Labour, so I ask my colleagues on the Government bench to give him a hand.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: The second point, Mr. Speaker is, again, an example of trying to assist— because this discrepancy has been there for years but the difference here, is the exact conversation we had last night about the cost of living pressures that are more exacerbated— to enable those particular employees to make it through those two months without pay.

In a sense, when I stepped back to think about which Ministry— because we could have the Ministry of Education make the distribution— but really, when you take a step back to think about it, it is the type of financial assistance that we want for workers because these are workers. What they want from the Needs Assessment Unit, which is the primary purpose for those who can work and are able to work, is a bridge to make it, and then they will return to work. The beauty of this is that you're dealing with a category of persons who you know will be employed, and draw a salary; they just need something to get through those two months, which are the hottest of the year, to pay their bills and get back to work.

This is where we were betwixt and between last night, because on Wednesday, in Finance Committee, we were asked, *will TP 41 ever slow down?* Yet in a debate last night, *can we increase it by increasing some of the stipends?* Now, I'm not trying to get into anything with the Leader of the Opposition, because the [same] questions that he was asking last night come up in the Ministry and in Caucus: how far do you expand TP 41, but you know that people need help, so where do we find the budget?

It may cause an increase where it might have to be an 11(5) or a section 12, but is it within the limits of the surplus, and is it the right thing to do to help the people, so we can begin to have these direct contributions to get support into our people's hands when we know it's blindingly obvious.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I don't want to take time because I know many Ministers have statements, and this one was late so, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

May God bless the Cayman Islands, and hopefully, we can get this support running and see it adopted for future years.

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, Minister of Border Control & Labour and Culture, Elected Member for Bodden Town East: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Minister?

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: I'm so sorry. I beg your indulgence under [Standing Order] 30(2) just to thank the acting Premier. I know you're supposed to ask a question under [Standing Order] 30(2), but this is long overdue and I wanted to thank the Premier [on behalf of] the bus wardens.

The Speaker: You want to thank him for thanking you; very well.

The Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, Minister of Health & Wellness and Home Affairs, Elected Member for Prospect: Honourable Speaker, Members of Parliament and fellow Caymanians: It is my privilege to stand here once again, to update you all on the work of the Ministry of Health and Wellness over these past five months. Much has been, and continues to be, undertaken by my Ministry, our Departments, and Statutory Authorities, and as the work is ongoing, it is important for me to highlight some of the key pieces that we have been focusing on.

Before speaking of the work of our departments, I will highlight three pieces of work which are currently being undertaken by the core Ministry of Health and Wellness. Let's focus our attention on STEPS.

STEPS National Health Survey

Mr. Speaker, as all the Members of this honourable House know, my team at the Ministry has been working on the STEPS National Health Survey for the past 22 months. Following the planning and execution of the survey, we are now finalising the data analysis and working on the creation of the report. I have spoken of a data-driven approach to decision-making many times, Mr. Speaker, and the importance of the STEPS data, not only for my Ministry, but the entire government and the nation as a whole, cannot be overstated.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that the real work begins when that data is on hand, and I would like to highlight some of the preliminary results to give us all an idea of what we have been uncovering as it relates to the nation's health. The first set of preliminary results relates to obesity, Mr. Speaker. I know that this is a sensitive subject for us as individuals [and] as a nation, but the data does not lie and we need a wake-up call.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: I'm in that line myself. I'm trying my best. I'm really trying to focus on the wellness side of health. It is hard, because it is a culture; but again, data-driven—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Too much rice and beans, you're quite right.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the first set of preliminary results relates to obesity. This data are national estimates which reflect residents in the Cayman Islands between the ages of 18 to 69. The results of the survey have been weighed according to age groups, sex, and district. The data is provided by a random sample of the population, therefore, the following results are population estimates which we have 95 per cent certainty fall within an accompanying range.

Body Mass Index, or BMI, is a measure to determine if a person has a healthy weight for their height. A healthy BMI is in the 18.5 to 24.9 range. A BMI of 25 to 29.9 is considered overweight; 30 to 39.9 obese; and anything above is often referred to as severely obese.

The preliminary results for the STEPS 2023 National Health Survey indicate that 69.6 per cent of our population falls within the range of overweight or obese; as many as 41 per cent of women, and 24.6 per cent of men fall within the obese category, Mr. Speaker— and we know that obesity increases the risk for numerous health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. For the nation, the implications are tremendous, Mr. Speaker; also, from an individual perspective, all of these conditions significantly impact one's quality of life.

While the STEPS survey concentrated on 18 to 69-year olds, our team at the Ministry is taking a holistic, 360-degrees approach to understanding the health of the nation, and this means looking at the data relating to children as well.

The Cayman Islands school Health Programme is offered to all school children at the school entry and in Year 6. Normally, school entry refers to Reception, but in light of our transient population, it can occur when a child arrives on Island at any age. The health screening component of the programme is intended to detect any possible health problems early, and to provide treatment for these at an early stage. Along with the growth and development assessment, the screening also includes a vision, hearing and dental assessment, and the administering of the required immunisations.

In the 2023-2024 school year, per the school entry screening obesity data report compiled by the Public Health Department, 70 per cent of children entering Reception had a healthy weight, while 9 per cent were overweight and a further 13 per cent were obese. Among older children ages 7 to 18, who arrived on Island and entered school after Reception, a higher proportion were overweight at 14 per cent and obese at 20 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, over the past six years of available school entry screening data, the proportion of children starting primary school who are obese has fluctuated between 13 and 16 per cent, peaking at 22 per cent for the year 2021 to 2022. The data, Mr. Speaker, difficult as it may be, serves as a mirror, reflecting the reality of our nation's health back at us. It helps us to better understand where our priorities need to lie as individual citizens [and] decision makers; and whether multi-ministerial and multi-agencies response will get our nation on track to health and wellness.

Mr. Speaker, the STEPS National Health Survey data will include information not only on obesity, but also diabetes and elevated blood sugar; high blood pressure; tobacco and alcohol use; cancer screening, physical activity, diet and cardiovascular disease amongst others. I look forward to presenting the full STEPS report to this honourable House later this year.

National Health Strategy

Mr. Speaker, all of the work that is taking place with the STEP survey is not happening in a vacuum. My team at the Ministry is simultaneously working on the development of the new national health strategy for the Cayman Islands.

As you may know, Mr. Speaker, the last national health strategy was developed in 2012 for a period of five years covering 2012 to 2017. To say that our population has changed significantly since then is an understatement. Along with the changes in our population, our health care landscape has also changed significantly. The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the way that we view and respond to health emergencies and collectively, we have recognised the importance of mental health and wellness to one's overall health.

Mr. Speaker, my ministerial team, with support from technical experts from the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) have completed a month-long public consultation engaging in a series of focus groups, stakeholder meetings, surveys, interviews and more, to obtain as much information as possible to ensure that the final product is representative and inclusive of the needs of the people of the Cayman Islands. Over 800 persons have responded to our survey and we have engaged with over 200 persons in face to face meetings, along with countless others via social media and radio.

This consultation period has been very beneficial, Mr. Speaker. We solidified some things that we already knew; mainly, that the Cayman Islands' health care system is incredibly varied and comprises a mix of skilled professionals from a range of different health care fields, and [that] we have a highly talented workforce who offers quality care to our patients.

We also found that there are some areas that should be addressed in a new strategy, among them:

- Access to affordability of health care, especially for the elderly or lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- The need for governance and enforcement to be strengthened;
- The need to be more data-driven, as health data is more readily available than it appears; there is just a need to pull it all together via the establishment of data sharing agreements;
- The need to enhance the safeguarding of electronic records and personal health information;
- Addressing gaps relating to insurance and inadequacy of the SHIC plan— two items that my Ministry staff has been working on behind the scenes;
- Enhancing mental health awareness, education and services, especially among children and young people, which I know that our entire community understands;
- The need to empower young people with information related to their bodies, growth and development, including the provision of evidenced-based, age-appropriate, comprehensive sex education;
- Enhanced overall screening and health education for the general population, so as to focus on preventative care and raise health literacy at an individual level;
- Offer different modules of care, such as district and home-based care, to reduce the demands on the public hospital; and last, but not least
- To address other social determinants of health such as housing, homelessness, social deprivation, and the need for more integrated social support services to address root causes of issues and difficulties.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, health does not only impact all of us, as individual citizens, but it impacts all of our Ministries and departments, and their work. Following the analysis of the consultation feedback, a multi-agency working group, comprised of government, non-governmental organisation (NGO), and private sector partners will review drafts of the new National Health Strategy and will help us to finalise not only the strategy, but an accompanying implementation plan to bring it to life. I look forward to sharing the completed strategy with the honourable House, and the people of the Cayman Islands, later this year.

Development of National Clinical Standards

Mr. Speaker, as we look forward to creating the blueprint for Cayman's health care for the next decade via the new National Health strategy, we are also looking at creating and enhancing the needed structure to ensure that health services that are delivered within our shores are at the highest standards. As such, the Ministry of Health and Wellness is providing support to its main four councils— the Medical and Dental Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Pharmacy Council, and the Council for Professions Allied with Medicine— to set standards for practice that patients may reasonably expect, as it relates to care provided by health care professionals.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, licensed health care professionals are in a unique position of being trusted by their patients with their lives and their health. In turn, clinicians must be able to show that they're upholding the principles underpinning the privilege of holding a licence to practice. Thus, the development and implementation of national clinical standards will cover areas such as:

- Clinical practice principles, such as performance and scope of practice;
- Clinical practice holistic and preventative approach,
- Good standard of practice and care;
- Non-discrimination;
- Peer collaboration and duty to ensure continuity of care;
- Consent and the capacity to consent;
- Prescribing and handling medicines including the use of unlicensed medicine and continuous prescribing;
- Patient-related provisions like patients' rights— access to the medical record and patients' right to a second opinion;
- Partnership with patient and patient complaints.

In the line of safety:

- Unsafe premises and practitioners;
- Proper decontamination of space equipment and medical devices;
- Disposal of medical hazardous waste;
- Quality assurance;
- Reporting adverse events;
- Safeguarding concerns;
- Public health safety requests;
- Cyber and data security;
- Trust, honesty and integrity;
- Improper behaviour;
- Conflict of interest;

- Openness in legal and disciplinary proceedings;
- Social media guidelines; and
- Duty of candour.

Update on Acts and Regulations

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to draw your attention to the work being done relating to the updating of laws and regulations that relate to health and wellness. More specifically, Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on three key pieces of legislation, namely, the Health Insurance Act and Regulations, the Public Health Act, and the Environmental Health Act.

The Health Insurance Act

Work on amendments to the Health Insurance Act has been ongoing, Mr. Speaker, and one of the main proposed changes will be the type of health insurance contracts that are regulated and monitored by the Health Insurance Commission (HIC). Currently, only the Standard Health Insurance Contracts are being monitored by the HIC, and the intention is to expand that monitoring to include contracts with supplemental benefits. Other areas under review include, but are not limited to:

- Definition of employer and civil partner;
- Clarification on the meaning of indigent person to ensure that the meaning and application is clearly understood by all stakeholders, and to assist with improved processing;

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Long awaited on by my colleague.

- Compulsory health insurance;
- Voluntary additional health insurance;
- Recovery of damages from employer or self-employed persons in default;
- Streamlining the processes around the approved insurer certificate; and
- Termination of health insurance contract.

The Health Insurance Act is accompanied by the Health Insurance Regulations, Mr. Speaker, and these, too, are undergoing a major review to ensure they reflect the changes being proposed to the Act. Among key areas of the work are:

- Creation of procedures that regulate the voluntary withdrawal of an approved insurer;
- Matters relating to health insurance identification care; and
- Payment of claims.

Mr. Speaker, as I noted when speaking of the public consultation for the National Health Strategy, health insurance is one of the topics already identified as being front of the minds of our people.

It is clear to us that the issue is, at least in part, due to the lack of information or clarity in the information. As such, part of the work being undertaken is to enhance health literacy, and to make health insurance information more accessible via the development of easy-to-read health insurance guidelines. These guidelines will be developed with patients, employers, health providers, and approved insurers in mind, as key stakeholders, and the aim is to create something simple enough to be understood by all.

The Environmental Health Act

Moving on to the Public Health Act and the Environmental Health Act, Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin with a short update that drafting instructions approval is being sought from Cabinet to separate the Environmental Health Act from the overall Public Health Act as a standalone piece of legislation. This request is being made to ensure a more comprehensive, fit-for-purpose legislation that deals with matters relating to environmental health more holistically.

The separate Environmental Health Bill is intended to enhance our people's quality of life by increasing protections and controls around food hygiene, harmful chemicals, hazardous waste, water and air quality. The proposed Bill also aims to better the Department of Environmental Health by strengthening their authority and increasing the tools at their disposal to keep the people of the Cayman Islands' natural environment safe.

The Public Health Act

As it relates to the Public Health Act, Mr. Speaker, you will remember that the Ministry of Health and Wellness has been considering the manner in which public health services are delivered in the Cayman Islands, with a view to modernising and improving the delivery of such services. One aspect of this work has been examined— legislation touching upon issues related to public health with a view of updating it to be more in line with the vision of the Ministry for the future delivery of public health services.

As previously discussed, Mr. Speaker, the current Public Health Act was first enacted in 1981 and has been updated incrementally since then, thus the reason for proposing that a new statutory framework be implemented, which would ensure that services related to public health are managed more centrally through a Department of Public Health governed by legislation which is focused upon the delivery of such services in a modern, post-pandemic age. Other changes to be included in the Public Health Bill are:

- formally establishing the roles of Chief Medical Officer (CMO)— a role referenced in other legislation, but not formally in legislation; and Chief Nursing Officer (CNO);
- Providing a mechanism for collaboration between government laboratories whose work may inform public health initiatives;
- Providing for the annual publication of national health statistics;
- Facilitating a swift, effective and proportionate response to take to serious public health emergencies;
- Providing a framework for monitoring capacity to deal with public health threats; and
- Enabling the CMO and CNO to take steps to address imminent risk of serious harm to patients.

The decision to provide for functions and duties relating to environmental health under a separate Bill will ensure that the new Public Health Act will be far more streamlined than the current one, and is better focused upon the provisions of modern public health services.

Mental Health

Moving on to matters pertaining to mental health, Mr. Speaker.

Within the community, mental health concerns continue to grow. This was captured in the early findings of the National Health Strategy consultations. Many reported worrying observations, particularly about Cayman's youth. These concerns have unfortunately come too close to home for some, with the recent occurrences of suicides. To those impacted, please know that our thoughts and prayers are with every family member and every friend touched by these tragic losses.

The Ministry is committed to preventing suicide; it is not an easy topic to discuss, but it can be prevented. As individuals, and as a nation, we must embrace the fact that in order to protect our loved ones and ourselves we need to be comfortable talking about the subject. Suicide prevention begins with awareness, awareness of our own internal mental health, as well as empathy for those around us— you just cannot assume to know someone else's struggles.

Education is also a critical component for prevention. We need to empower ourselves, our family, our neighbours, our co-workers, and most of all, our children, with knowledge of warning signs, and with information on how to access the services and support available out there. Together, we as a community need to make a social change by debunking the “taboo” nature of suicide. Pause for a moment and imagine a society where everyone feels safe to ask for help. By collaborating with stakeholders and engaging our community, we aim to create a comprehensive and inclusive suicide prevention plan that offers hope. The taboo around suicide, the hushed tones with which we speak about it, and the inconsistencies of messages that are disseminated, serve only to enhance the vulnerabilities of those most at risk, whatever their age; by continuing to treat suicide as we always have, we ignore the critical fact: *suicide is preventable*.

On June 27th, the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Health Services Authority began engaging a multi-sectoral group of stakeholders to discuss the creation of a robust National Suicide Prevention Plan, and that work is ongoing. The importance of mental health is such that it will be a key element of our National Health Strategy, and ours will continue to be a holistic, data-driven approach that effectively meets the needs of all of our people throughout their life cycle and for all aspects of health.

While we wait for the strategy and plan to be finalised, efforts are being made to improve and expand existing mental health services. The Department of Counselling Services (DCS), and the Health Services Authority (HSA) are two entities under the Ministry of Health and Wellness which provide direct mental health support to individuals and families. Under the DCS umbrella, the Counselling Centre provides a variety of mental health support services to clients of all ages. Its sister agency, the Family Resource Centre, offers parenting classes and support to parents and families in an effort to strengthen relationships and connection, and enhance the protective factors around youth as it relates to suicide prevention.

The Health Services Authority also provides an array of mental health services to the community, ranging from outpatient services to acute care. Alex's Place, the youth mental health hub, has been operating since January 2023, and is open to youth ages 10-20 who are experiencing mental health issues. Cayman’s civil society has also embraced suicide prevention and mental wellness. The Alex Panton Foundation leads the way in youth mental health advocacy, providing support groups for young people, awareness and education sessions for persons of all ages, and now a kids’ helpline to help children and teens get not only information but also real-time help as needed.

The Employee Assistance Programme, an NGO which can be accessed free of cost by individuals and families via an employer's membership, is another avenue for these services. Numerous private sector partners have also been providing mental health services to the community for years— I mentioned these because I want to emphasise that there is help, and in many cases, it's only just a phone call away.

Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre

Mr. Speaker, I have already updated this honourable House on the progress relating to Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre. As discussed, the issuance of the Special Permission to Occupy (SPO) puts us closer to the opening, and both Poinciana's and the Ministry's teams continue to work diligently towards that goal. We are eager for the facility to come online as it will be a key component of our mental health landscape, and will directly impact the continuum of care within our Islands.

This directly ties in with the work being undertaken by the Mental Health Commission, Mr. Speaker, which has been providing guidance for the completion of a number of operational improvements to strengthen mental health service delivery. These changes were facilitated by the recent amendment to the Mental Health Act last year, and the Mental Health Commission Act, which was updated in February 2023. The operational improvements include:

- Clarifying the procedure for emergency detention;
- Introducing a protective custody form to streamline the process for the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service (RCIPS) officers to act upon an order made by a medical officer;
- RCIPS officers are now able to intervene more rapidly in situations where a person is an immediate danger to themselves or others due to mental impairment or illness.

The Mental Health Commission is also exploring ways in which they can best engage the community, and they held a public meeting in Bodden Town during the first quarter of this year.

Department Updates

Moving on to my departments, Mr. Speaker, I would now like to take a moment to share with the Members of this honourable House, some key achievements from our departments starting with the Department of Counselling Services.

At the end of 2023, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Counselling Services worked to complete its updated strategic plan. This strategic direction has shaped the focus of many of the activities that have been taking place within and across the three agencies for the department during the first half of 2024. These agencies are the Family Resource Centre, (FRC); the Counselling Centre, (TCC); and Caribbean Haven Residential Centre (CHRC).

From a human resource perspective, Mr. Speaker, DCS' Strategic Plan emphasises "creating a professional, ethical and inclusive culture where our people feel valued and have opportunities for growth". This has translated into:

- A concerted effort to employ intake and assessment officers at TCC with aspirations and qualifications to progress into a counsellor position, and providing development opportunities in terms of group facilitation, training and observations to enable them to do so;
- The completion of various training opportunities by staff across all three agencies;
- Participation in workshops on CliftonStrengths Model designed to allow individual staff members to understand their own strengths as well as how these contribute to the overall team; and
- Revising the department's Code of Ethics to ensure that it adequately provides the ethical framework necessary to protect both staff and clients as they engage in a therapeutic process. These revised expectations will be presented to all staff at the start of Q3 of 2024.

As it relates to programming, Mr. Speaker, the DCS strategy has focused on creating programmes or adjusting their approaches to service delivery to more effectively meet the needs of and be relevant to families and individuals who utilise their services. There has been a steady increase in the number of clients presenting for services at TCC, so the team has been looking at how best to proactively meet the needs of the community within existing resource limitations. This has resulted in increased engagements in a variety of groups currently on offer that tackle anxiety and depression support, enhance relationships, and improve self-esteem.

In 2024, we will also see an increase in interdepartmental support across CIG in the form of monthly mental health workshops for civil servants delivered by TCC; a decision that was made based on requests coming to our department from Cayman Islands Government entities, for delivery of bespoke workshops that support managers to manage their staff's mental health needs more effectively. The first Mental Health Signs and Symptoms session was held at the Government Administration Building on April 30th.

TCC has also worked collaboratively with the Department of Community Rehabilitation (DCR) to help address the low motivation of some offenders referred to TCC for services; this has in turn translated into quarterly 90-minute presentations, titled "Thinking About Change", being offered to clients at DCR to increase their understanding of therapy and the cycle of change, prior to being referred to TCC, to hopefully increase their engagement in these services.

The FRC team has rolled out a series of short-term parenting workshops to address common parenting issues such as managing screen time, and parenting children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or anxious behaviours, as well as to equip parents with strategies for positive discipline. Since the start of this year, four such workshops have been delivered. The FRC team also continues to roll out educational and public awareness campaigns, such as Honouring Women Month and Teen Pregnancy Prevention, as well as delivering training for front line professionals, such as the Domestic Violence Intervention Training Programme (DVITP).

At CHRC the focus remains on seeking and implementing feedback for continuous improvement, and this has resulted in the implementation of two programmatic changes— one involving schedule changes within the residential programme to provide the clients with more structured activities in the afternoons and early evenings; and amendments to the self-discharge policy which seeks to facilitate earlier referrals for clients who demonstrate the motivation to effectively reengage in the treatment programme. These changes have been reported to have had a positive effect for clients. The team is also working on exploring ways to increase bed utilisation for female clients, including investigating potential barriers to treatment, the needs of the female population, and what kind of programming would best support them.

It is also important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the department has recently moved, and the services of the TCC and FRC are now available to the public at Adonis House, a more confidential space for the community-based operations of the Department, which also offers opportunities for future growth to meet increased needs for service delivery.

Department of Environmental Health

Focusing our attention now on the Department of Environmental Health. The team at the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) has been busy since the beginning of the year, which started with their annual Christmas tree recycling programme to sustain their free mulch distribution in February. DEH staff engaged with youth and members of the public in various settings, from Science Fairs, Career Fairs and Health Fairs, to the Agriculture Show in Grand Cayman and in Cayman Brac. Staff from DEH also participated in Environmental Health Laboratory Refreshers, theoretical training via Environmental Health Public Health Online Courses, and a three-day course on asbestos awareness, indoor air quality and ventilation.

DEH also developed and implemented additional reinforcement strategies for addressing environmental noise nuisance per the Public Health Act (2021 Revision), forged a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Vehicle and Drivers' Licensing (DVDL) to help facilitate the investigation and identification of derelict vehicles, and assisted in securing one prosecution for breach of the Public Health Act, and Litter Act (1997 Revision). DEH continues to serve our community, having recently completed their annual bulk waste collection, continuing to meet their targets for the residential waste collections on time, and processing and shipping over 180 tonnes of material for recycling in the United States.

Department of Health and Regulatory Services

Mr. Speaker, the team at the Department of Health and Regulatory Services (DHRS) continue to play a pivotal role in the regulation of our health care system. The following are their milestones:

The department continues to seek ways in which to improve on the services offered, which includes the development and implementation of an integrated Online Service Platform with the view of going paperless, as well as the utilisation of Zendesk software to enhance customer service. In addition to operational improvements, DHRS has also contributed to proposed amendments to the Health Practice Act and Regulations, and the Health Insurance Act and Regulations.

If you remember, Mr. Speaker, DHRS worked closely with the two Commissions and all of our Councils such as Medical and Dental Councils, Professionals Allied with Medicine, Nursing and Midwifery Council and Pharmacy Council, and these Councils help to oversee the licensing and regulation of health care practitioners, health care facilities and health insurance companies. These Commissions and Councils also help to maintain the healthcare standards within our Islands through facility inspections, the licensing of health care practitioners and the examination of health insurance providers.

As of April 30, 2024, the records indicate that there are 2,073 Licensed Health Care Practitioners, 190 Registered Health Care Facilities and seven "Approved Insurers" licenced by the Cayman Islands Monetary Authority (CIMA); and approved by the Health Insurance Commission (HCI) to sell insurance to residents in the Cayman Islands.

Mosquito Research and Control Unit

Mr. Speaker, the team at the Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU) continues to redouble efforts to move away from responsive mosquito control towards more preventative measures. As a result, in the past five months they have increased the acreage treated with larvicides; so far, 12,600 acres have been treated with long-lasting larvicides, and a further 11,000 acres with liquid larvicide— more than has been done in any other year. Furthermore, MRCU has continued to move to using liquid larvicide which offers both operational advantages and significant cost savings. It's notable, that liquid larvicides cost KYD$17 per acre, compared to KYD$160 per acre using residual larvicide.

A reduction in mosquito abundance, and an increase in preventative measures controlling mosquito larvae, have resulted in a 96 [per cent] reduction in the number of acres treated with adulticides so far in 2024. This underscores how significantly the team at MRCU have reduced their dependency on responsive controlled operations targeting adult mosquitoes. The team is now utilising the most modern field data collection and data management system available, and training all operational staff on the usage of these systems.

Under its research remit, MRCU is in the process of exploring the use of drones for aerial surveillance to identify swamp areas requiring treatment with the objective of reducing insecticide applications in areas that are not important breeding sites. The team will also be looking at monitoring water samples routinely to identify when an area requires treatment; and to prevent insecticide application when not required. In January, laboratory staff were trained to conduct insecticide resistant testing, and MRCU is currently evaluating two rapid-test kits which enable them to quickly identify insecticide levels in the field.

I am also delighted to announce, Mr. Speaker, that six MRCU team members have successfully passed the required exam to become Certified Public Health Pesticide Applicators— the certification is also valid across the United States of America.

Through these efforts, Mr. Speaker, MRCU demonstrates steadfastness in upholding the highest safety standards and operational excellence within the Department.

Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre

Moving on to the operations of that centre, Mr. Speaker, while the facility awaits its Certificate of Occupancy (CO), preparatory work continues in a number of areas. Adjustments are being made to the electrical systems and buildings as requested by the Inspectors in order to obtain the CO. In the meantime, as I've updated, a request has been submitted for a special CO for the administrative building to facilitate the Director and other staff working from that location, as the space currently available is inconvenient— I have been reliably informed that the move is in process as I deliver this statement.

Recruitment of staff who are imperative to the opening of the facility continues. Along with the 22 members of staff, an additional 18 recruits for the Psychiatric Nursing Assistant Programme are expected to come on board for training over the coming months. All 18 recruits will be Caymanian.

Although no additional roles have been added to the revised organisational chart, Mr. Speaker, Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre is considering conversion of a role to accommodate a Deputy Director of Operations. As the onboarding, training and orientation of new staff continues, Caymanian recruitment and training will remain a priority for the facility. In addition to the recruitment drive, Mr. Speaker, security services have been engaged to monitor activities at the facility while the team awaits occupancy.

Two policy drafts are also in the pipeline: the draft Administrative Policy and Procedure document, and the Nursing Policy and Procedural Manual. In the meantime, a draft outline of the strategic plan for the facility has been completed and shared with my team. Other preparatory activities include:

- Purchasing of material and equipment such as stationary, linen, and some medical equipment and supplies;
- Completion and installation of directional signs for the facility;
- Purchase of two printers and a smart board which are currently being installed;
- Engagement of the Computer Services Department to commence installation of computer devices and finalise connections with the CIG system;
- Development of an Electronic Health Records system in collaboration with the Department of Counselling services;
- Work on the new website has commenced;
- Work is also being done to digitise forms;
- Contracts for landscaping, housekeeping, and renewal of security systems are due to be finalised and reviewed by the legal department;
- Procurement of vehicles commenced through the Department of Vehicle & Equipment Services (DVES), namely, a 15-seater bus, one SUV, one pickup truck, and one coaster with wheelchair access; and
- Plans for the Grand Opening and Open Day are underway, pending receipt of the Certificate of Occupancy.

Mr. Speaker, a quick note, on our two Statutory Authorities and Government Companies (SAGCs) — the Health Services Authority (HSA) and the National Drug Council (NDC).

Health Services Authority Update

Mr. Speaker, while I will be Tabling the 2023 Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Health Services Authority, I wanted to include a brief snapshot of their achievements for ease of reference, and to bring them to your attention. These were:

- Integration for advanced technologies in patient care and experience;
- Benchmarking of operations against international standards with the achievement of Joint Commission International (JCI) Accreditation;
- The introduction of new specialised services;
- Meeting demands for innovative and specialised health care among a growing population; and
- Going above and beyond in the execution of HSA's mandate.

Mr. Speaker, a health system is only [as] good as the care it provides, and every employee of HSA plays a role in doing just that, so they have my gratitude. Allow me to applaud the HSA on their sterling contributions and the tremendous progress made over the years to improve and enhance the services of our community. This appreciation and public gratitude also extend to my HSA Board of Directors.

National Drug Council Update

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I Tabled the National Drug Council's Annual Report 2023 during this Session, which contains more details as to the important work that the National Drug Council undertakes. As such, I will highlight that 2023 marked the 25th Anniversary of the National Drug Council. During this anniversary year, the NDC not only delivered on its obligations and fulfilled its mandate, but saw expansion in programme delivery.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Wellness has been hard at work for the people of our Islands. I would like to thank my entire team for their ongoing commitment and dedication; and we all look forward to continuing to serve and delivering to the highest standards.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Tourism and Ports to deliver five statements.

Honourable Minister of Tourism and Ports

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Acting Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism & Ports, Elected Member for George Town Central: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity, as per the Standing Orders, to present a few statements under my constitutional responsibilities. I think I provided copies for the cargo port— I'm going to deal with it first because it is the shortest one.

Cargo Port Expansion Project

Mr. Speaker, this first statement is with respect to the cargo port expansion project's public consultation meetings that will be happening shortly.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this honourable House to provide Members with an update on the Cayman Islands Port Authority Expansion Project. As Members would be aware, the port facility in George Town serves as both the main cruise terminal for passengers, and the primary port of entry for imported goods in the Cayman Islands. The port is approaching the end of its functional lifespan, and within the next decade the current port infrastructure will be unable to support the projected increase in cargo volumes required to sustain our Islands' growing population.

Given these challenges, Mr. Speaker, it is evident that a longer-term solution is necessary, and consequently, the expansion of the cargo port has become a strategic imperative. Whether it means expansion of the current port location in George Town or relocation to a new, dedicated facility outside the centre of George Town, the issue of the port expansion has to be addressed so that a sustainable solution to accommodate the increase in volume of cargo that arrives on our shores on a daily basis can be identified. As a proactive measure, throughout this year, consultants have been diligently working with the Port Authority to identify and evaluate suitable options for the future expansion and development of a new cargo port.

Understanding the scale of the importance of this project, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Tourism and Ports is committed to consulting with the public at each stage of this very important decision-making process. Two public meetings have been planned to give residents an opportunity to learn more about the potential options before us and give them a chance to voice their opinions on a matter that will significantly impact our country's development and future.

The first meeting, Mr. Speaker, will be held on Wednesday, 31st July at the Compass Centre on Shedden Road, George Town. The second meeting will be held the following night— Thursday, 1st August— at the Church of God Chapel on Shamrock Road, Bodden Town; both meetings start at 6.30 p.m., until 9 p.m. This consultation is an opportunity for residents to share their opinions, ask relevant questions, and provide feedback on the cargo port project. The input received will play a crucial role in the decision-making process, ensuring that the chosen options meet the needs and expectations of our community.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot overstate the importance of public participation in this process, and so I beg the public to play their part in this consultation. The expansion and potential relocation of the cargo port is not merely a logistical necessity, but a strategic move to ensure that we can continue to handle the level of imported cargo required to maintain our quality of life on an island and keep our supermarket shelves filled. Therefore, I am appealing to all interested parties to attend these public consultation sessions and be a part of the crucial conversation about our country's future.

Public feedback is vital to help us make an informed decision that reflects the community's vision for the future of a cargo port and the economic development of the Cayman Islands— and Mr. Speaker, just for the listening audience I'll say the dates one more time.

The first meeting will be held on Wednesday the 31st July, at the Compass Centre on Shedden Road, George Town. The second meeting will be held the following night, on Thursday, the 1st August, at the Church of God Chapel, Shamrock Road, Bodden Town; both meetings start at 6.30 p.m. until 9 p.m.

Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority

Mr. Speaker, I rise to give Members an update on the ongoing initiatives and achievements of the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority, better known as CINAA which falls under the remit of the Ministry of Tourism and Ports.

The entities managed by CINAA, namely Pedro St. James, Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, and the Cayman Islands Craft Market are central to the Ministry of Tourism's efforts to provide an enriched, authentic experience to our visitors by showcasing the natural and cultural heritage of the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, following CINAA's participation in the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association's Seatrade Cruise Global Conference in April of this year, I'm pleased to announce that the Authority has secured a two-year contract with Celebrity Cruises. This partnership will allow the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority to offer cruise passengers customised, authentic excursions to our Islands' most iconic natural attractions, allowing our guests to gain a deeper appreciation for the Cayman Islands' national treasures.

I'm also happy to share that CINAA is in the final stages of signing a contract with Carnival Corporation. This agreement is similar to the partnership with Celebrity Cruises in that it will allow CINAA to offer customised shore excursions which will enable the country's culture and natural heritage sites to be promoted to a broader audience. The primary focus of these tailored excursions is to prioritise quality over quantity, Mr. Speaker, meaning the quality of offering over the quantity of visitors at any given site. This will allow CINAA to deliver an exceptional visitor experience, while effectively achieving its sustainability and financial objectives.

Speaking of finances, Mr. Speaker, an audit of CINAA's 2023 Financial Statements have been completed and officially approved. The Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority group received an unqualified audit opinion indicating that the financial statements represent fairly the financial position, as well as the results of their operations and cash flows, in accordance with the applicable accounting standards. This achievement not only reflects CINAA's commitment to financial transparency and accountability, but also strengthens the trust and confidence of their stakeholders which is us, the people.

Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park

Moving on to initiatives currently in progress, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce the completion of the Darwin Project at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park. This project established 100 permanent survey plots in the woodland preserve to monitor plants and how they change over time due to factors like invasive species, tropical storms and climate change. The Botanic Park led the project with help from partners like the Department of Environment, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands and the Royal Botanic Gardens in the United Kingdom, Mr. Speaker. The project has significantly contributed to our understanding and preservation of the park's biodiversity, and the data will also inform the national Tropical Important Plant Areas throughout the country, ensuring the continued protection of our natural environment.

The Children's Garden Project at the Botanic Park continues to be a significant attraction for many residents, evidenced by a 34 per cent average increase in resident admissions over the past three years—something that we should all be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, the installation of three water-bottle filling stations donated by the Water Authority has commenced, and the architectural design work on the Water Authority pavilion is underway. Additionally, landscaping and rear-access pathways adjacent to the discovery tower, and the recycled garden are expected to be completed in the first half of this year; both of these enhancements are made possible by private sector donation support, and will further enrich visitors' experiences.

Mr. Speaker, the Botanic Park is currently in discussions with the Ministry of Sustainability to explore a potential partnership for the cultivation of native plants. This collaboration, which I know the Member for Newlands would be very happy about, aims to establish a formal contract that would support and enhance the park's efforts in growing and preserving indigenous plant species. Such a partnership would not only contribute to the park's shared sustainable goals, but would also promote bio-diversity and environmental conservation within our community.

An educational programme for children is also being developed at the park and will feature small informative classes and demonstrations led by the educators at the children's park. This programme is expected to be rolled out for all school visits in the coming school year subject to scheduling constraints, and will help to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of our natural heritage among our younger generation.

Pedro St. James

Mr. Speaker, turning our attention now to Pedro St. James, which I know is dear to the heart of the Member for Savannah—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Acting Deputy Premier: And to the Member for Bodden Town West but more importantly, to the Member for Savannah. The procurement process has commenced for a new, accessible walkway to enhance accessibility across the site for all visitors.

A feasibility study is also under way for the first phase of the Pedro St. James' Cultural Playground.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Acting Deputy Premier: This initiative aims to foster a deeper connection for children with their culture and their heritage, ensuring that our history and our traditions are preserved and celebrated.

Efforts are also under way to improve both digital and physical signage throughout Pedro St. James' premises. These include the installation of new quick-response (QR) codes, three identification signs and informative signage from the rooms of the Great House. These improvements will significantly enhance the visitor experience, but also our local tourist experience, by providing informative and engaging content.

Mr. Speaker, rounding out my update on Pedro St. James, I'm excited to announce that CINAA is currently working on a partnership with Cayman Airways to ensure that more stayover guests visit this beautiful, historic location. The goal of this initiative is to create a package that includes free admission to Pedro St. James along with the purchase of an airline ticket, thereby promoting our national historic site as a must-visit attraction for stayover guests arriving on our national airline.

Cayman Islands Craft Market

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly update Members on some of the developments of the Cayman Islands Craft Market. As Members would be aware from my previous reports, the Craft Market is now permanently established at the old Tower Building site behind Parliament.

Over the last quarter, eight new vendors have been approved by the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority to operate in the Craft Market meaning that, for the first time in a long time, the available space is now at capacity when all of the vendors are present.

Earlier this year, as part of an educational outreach, Year 7 students from the Footsteps School were granted the opportunity to operate a booth at the Craft Market, Mr. Speaker. This activity was a part of the students' enterprise project aimed at teaching them entrepreneurial skills such as baking, marketing, budgeting, and investing, through practical experience.

While at the Craft Market from noon to 3 p.m., the students sold homemade Cayman-style treats such as cookies, cakes and coconut delights, and the profits, totalling over $640, were donated to the school's Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), and I congratulate those young people: You're doing well. Overall, the initiative received overwhelming support from cruise visitors, parents and peers, making it a resounding success, and it's something I'm keen to see more of.

On that relatively high note, Mr. Speaker, it is safe to say that the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority is working hard to enrich the visitor experience and create new, authentic excursions which promote our cultural heritage and our diversity. I applaud their creativity and their educational outreach to our younger generation.

I would like to publicly thank the management and staff at the attraction, which falls under the auspices of the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority for their dedication and commitment; and Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me to forget the newly-appointed board members— and the Chair, who has given her dedication over the last eight years.

Cayman Islands Port Authority

Mr. Speaker, I will now provide an update on the ongoing initiatives of the Cayman Islands Port Authority.

Firstly, I would like to commend the Port Authority for receiving a clean audit opinion from the Office of the Auditor General for the year ending the 31st December, 2023; this achievement is a testament to the Port Authority's commitment to financial transparency and sound fiscal management. The Authority also successfully maintained a healthy cash balance ensuring both its continued operational efficiency and its capacity to support both cruise and cargo operations.

Turning attention to the day to day operations, Mr. Speaker, in February 2024 the ports in Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac faced structural damage due to a severe Northwester, which I'm sure we all remember; however, thanks to the Port Authority team's swift and effective response, repairs were completed promptly, ensuring minimal operational delays. The fast turnaround highlights the Port Authority's dedication to maintaining operational integrity and its capability to handle unexpected challenges, Mr. Speaker.

Recognising the need for improved working conditions, the Authority is reconfiguring the interior of its Seafarers Way location to create much-needed additional office space, which will greatly improve the working environment for its dedicated and hard-working staff, enabling them to perform their duties more efficiently.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, several key initiatives aimed at enhancing the cruise passenger experience and improving cargo handling capabilities are in various stages of completion.

Starting with enhancements for the cruise sector, the installation of fencing and shading at the cruise terminals and the Seafarers Way sidewalk have proven to be a welcome development from our cruise passengers. The project, which benefited from technical assistance provided by Disney Cruise Line, significantly improves our cruise visitors' comfort and overall experience.

Mr. Speaker, by offering better protection from the elements, coupled with upgraded safety measures, we are ensuring that our cruise arrivals have a much more pleasant and memorable visit to Grand Cayman— and I didn't say Cayman Islands because we only have one way for cruises to get into our country; but hopefully one day we will be able to host cruises in our Sister Islands.

While passenger comfort and the quality of their Cayman Islands' experience is a priority, it is more important to note that during the first half of this year, the number of cruise passengers visiting our Island has consistently declined compared to the same period in 2023. This ongoing reduction is a serious concern because the longer it continues, it will have an increasingly negative impact on our local economy and our predominantly Caymanian businesses that rely on this sector for their livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, every Member in this House is aware that the cruise industry business model is dependent on bigger and bigger ships which cruise lines will not tender. Given the rate at which these new vessels are coming onto the market, I would conservatively estimate that within 3 to 5 years, the ships that currently call on the Cayman Islands will no longer be sailing the Caribbean Seas; instead, they will be replaced by larger, newer, fancier vessels for their next generation.

This means, again, that if the Cayman Islands want to continue to be included as a cruise destination in the future, the question of cruise berthing must be definitively addressed; there is simply no other option.

I'm pleased to note, Mr. Speaker, the Authority's staff in both Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac have displayed a renewed commitment to working together in both cruise and cargo— and I'm so proud of them; they don't get enough recognition but without them, we would not be able to survive.

Given that the port serves as both the main cruise terminal for passengers and the primary port of entry for imported goods, I am also pleased to report an increase of 3.8 per cent in cargo tonnage for the period of January to March of this year, totalling 177,523 tonnes— a testament to the solid leadership of the management and the Board of Directors in strengthening the Port Authority's performance, but there's still room for better. Over the next three years, Mr. Speaker, the Port Authority will continue to make significant investment in upgrading its container handling equipment to ensure it can effectively meet the growing demands of our cargo operations, and thus continue to support our Islands' economic needs.

Enhancements in the current cargo infrastructure at both the dock and cargo distribution centre are also ongoing, and are part of a larger initiative to eventually relocate the cargo port to a suitable location outside of the centre of George Town. With the population of the Cayman Islands growing exponentially, the volume of cargo is surging [and] in response, increased demands continue to be placed on the port's infrastructure— Mr. Speaker, [this is] coupled with the update on the port project meetings that will be happening soon, so forgive me if there's any level of repetition.

Moreover, the port facility in George Town is approaching the end of its functional lifespan and as it stands, the current infrastructure is unable to support the projected increase in cargo volumes required to sustain our island's growing population over the next decade. Given these challenges, it is evident that a long-term solution is necessary and consequently, the relocation of the cargo operation to a new, dedicated facility out of the centre of George Town, has become a strategic imperative. Such a move would not only elevate the operational inefficiencies currently being faced, but would also provide a sustainable pathway for accommodating the increasing cargo volumes essential for the Cayman Islands continued growth and prosperity.

Throughout this year, the consultants have been working diligently with the Port Authority Board to identify a suitable location to develop the new cargo port outside the centre of George Town. As I said, and as the media will most likely highlight in their news articles about these meetings, I encourage everyone to come out and have their say as per the consultation to that discussion.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I trust you will agree with me that the ambitious initiatives I have outlined not only support the sustainable growth of our cargo operations, but speak to our Islands' commitment to excellence and innovation. These initiatives also serve to highlight the Ministry of Tourism and Ports' strategic vision and proactive approach to planning our country's future amidst the backdrop of continued growth and development.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the update on the Cayman Islands Port Authority.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister. I'm sure you found one of my speeches there in the Ministry.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Acting Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing wrong with walking in the footsteps of a good man; the problem is that sometimes good men don't want other good men to walk in their footprints. I'll leave that one there for you to ponder.

Mr. Speaker, I asked the Serjeant to hand out these statements as I give an update on the Airports Authority.

Cayman Islands Airports Authority

Mr. Speaker, I rise to bring awareness to the achievements of the Cayman Islands Airports Authority which manages all the services and facilities provided at the three airports operating in the Cayman Islands— a little less with Little Cayman, though, I must admit.

I am pleased to report on their significant contributions over the period of January to June of this year. One of the stand out achievements for the Airports Authority is the successful completion of a comprehensive airport security audit for the Owen Roberts International Airport, better known as ORIA, and the Charles Kirkconnell International Airport (CKIA).

The rigorous audit encompassed 146 inspection points and resulted in only three findings, Mr. Speaker, none of which were operational failures. This exemplary performance underscores the dedication and effectiveness of our airports' security measures. I want to give the staff their dues and highlight them— I appreciate them so much, as our standard in the Cayman Islands is the highest in the Caribbean.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the Cayman Islands Airports Authority was highly commended for the Airport Security Drill Programme which has been recognised as the most advanced among all Overseas Territories (OTs). This Programme is instrumental in the testing and enhancing of the security awareness and performance standards of our airport security officers. The Airport Authority is currently engaged in several critical initiatives that will further enhance infrastructural and operational efficiency.

All of the master plan projects are progressing well, and turning our attention to the first general aviation terminal, I am pleased to report that a vendor has been selected and work has commenced on the general aviation ramp design. Additionally, two Requests for Proposals, better known as RFPs, have been published: one for the air traffic management/surveillance project, and the other for the construction of the associated [Intelligent] Approach module building. These advancements are crucial for modernising our air traffic management capabilities and ensuring safe and effective operations.

With environmental sustainability remaining a key focus for the Airport Authority, an RFP has also been published with regard to the terms of reference for the Environmental Impact Assessment relating to:

1. The runway expansion at the Owen-Roberts International Airport;
2. The widening of the runway at the Charles Kirkconnell Airport in Cayman Brac; and
3. The relocation of the Edward Bodden Airport in Little Cayman.

These assessments are essential for the understanding of the environmental implications of our development projects and ensuring that the redevelopment works proceed with utmost responsibility and care for our natural surroundings— let's just hope it doesn't get too extreme.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to improve the passenger screening process, an RFP has been published for advanced technology cabin baggage and passenger screening equipment. This state-of-the-art technology will streamline the screening process by eliminating the need for passengers to remove liquids and gels from their carry-on bags— which I know most people are so annoyed by when traveling— thereby reducing the number of manual searches required. This will result in quicker and more thorough passenger and cabin baggage screening, enhancing both efficiency and security.

Another noteworthy initiative being undertaken by the Airports Authority is the expansion of the parking facility at the Owen Roberts International Airport, with the aim to provide additional space for long-term parking. Mr. Speaker, we hope to end the chaos at the airport when everybody wants to go away on the long weekends and the parking lots are full. As Members may be aware, the long-term car park is frequently filled to capacity, especially during public holidays and peak travel periods. This expansion is therefore necessary to accommodate the increasing number of travellers and ensure convenient access to the airport.

The project is currently pending a resubmission for planning approval— which the Honourable Minister has given me his support to try to streamline it as quickly as possible— and will proceed once the necessary approvals have been received. Mr. Speaker, I stop here one second to just highlight the fact that, if we have an airport that is having to grow its parking lot, isn't it a sign in itself of the growth and the great things that we are doing with respect to aviation travel and tourism growth?

With passenger comfort and convenience always at the forefront, Mr. Speaker, in response to negative feedback about poor Wi-Fi coverage at Owen Roberts International Airport, the Airport Authority has successfully revamped and upgraded the free Wi-Fi service. This enhancement now accommodates up to 3,000 users on peak days, with 1,000 concurrent users enjoying seamless connectivity, watching YouTube, watching the Parliament Sessions as you take a trip for the long weekend on a Friday. This significant improvement enhances the passenger experience, and plans are already in place to implement the same system at the Charles Kirkconnell International Airport in Cayman Brac, ensuring consistent and high-quality service across our major airports because we are not leaving Cayman Brac behind.

Looking at the workforce, training and development continues to be a cornerstone of the Cayman Islands Airports Authority Human Resources Development Strategy. I'm delighted to report that six Caymanian students have successfully completed training in Aeronautical Information Services (AIS), offered by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. These dedicated individuals have completed their on-the-job-training, and are now fully functional AIS officers; two have been stationed in Cayman Brac, and the remaining four at the Grand Cayman Owen Roberts International Airport.

Further training in Meteorology is also underway for the Brac AIS officers, and will be managed by the Cayman Islands National Weather Services. Eight Caymanians are also being trained by an overseas training school as Air Traffic Control Trainees, their classroom training is scheduled to conclude at the end of November of this year, and will be followed by extensive on-the-job-training, Mr. Speaker. Once the entire training programme has been completed, five of the air traffic controllers will be stationed at the Owen Roberts International Airport and three will be at the Charles Kirkconnell Airport in Cayman Brac.

I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the Cayman [Islands] Airports Authority for their commitment to investing in the development of Caymanians, particularly in areas that not only are vital for maintaining the highest standards of air traffic management, but also ensure continued safety and efficiency at our airport operations.

The Cayman Islands Airports Authority is also in the process of launching the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Programme, a commendable achievement aimed at providing better support for persons with disabilities, Mr. Speaker. This programme will help airport staff to recognise and assist travellers with hidden disabilities, sometimes when you don't even recognise it, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive environment for all passengers, no matter how God has developed them.

Mr. Speaker, the accomplishments of the Cayman Islands Airports Authority are a testament to the commitment, innovation and excellence that drives the aviation sector and the Cayman Islands' success. These achievements not only enhance the experience of travellers, but also play a pivotal role in facilitating growth within our tourism industry. As the industry continues to advance, and these initiatives are implemented, the Cayman Islands Airports Authority remains dedicated to ensuring that our airports deliver world-class service, safety, and sustainability, particularly when a hurricane is coming— and I want us to remember that because it was because of Cayman Airways and the Airports Authority's commitment to ensuring operations, that so many people could evacuate this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Cayman Airways Limited

My last statement of the afternoon is an update on Cayman Airways Limited.

Thank you, Serjeant; before I deliver the statement I want to say to the listening audience that our Serjeant-at-Arms, Mr. Kim Evans, is one of the most notable men I have ever known— a former police officer, committed civil servant and a man of God.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, I rise for the fifth time today with immense pride to report some of the most noteworthy achievements of our national airline, Cayman Airways (CAL).

Through the astute decision making of its Board and management, the airline has continued to demonstrate exceptional service, resilience and innovation, significantly contributing to the growth and development of our tourism industry, Mr. Speaker.

First, in the wake of Hurricane Beryl, it would be remiss of me if I don't take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the vital role that Cayman Airways played in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our residents and visitors. Our airline operated evacuation flights that enabled over 3,000 residents and visitors to safely evacuate ahead of the hurricane's arrival. Such outstanding and exemplary service underscores the airline's unwavering commitment to our people and their safety.

On behalf of the Ministry of Tourism and Ports, this Government, and every Member of this Parliament, I extend my thanks to Cayman Airways' Board of Directors and management but particularly, the staff, for their exemplary service to our country. With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I will now report on some of the major strategic initiatives undertaken during the first half of this year by our national airline, Cayman Airways.

The successful completion of a lengthy tender and sourcing process culminated in the purchase agreement of a third DHC-6-300 Twin Otter aircraft; acquiring such a high-in-demand, quality aircraft is no small feat, Mr. Speaker. In addition, the new aircraft, scheduled to commence service in the third quarter of 2024, will provide much-needed redundancy and capacity, particularly with respect to inter-island operations to and from Little Cayman— and I am committed to ensure that the good people and tourism businesses in Little Cayman have the greatest opportunity for success.

Cayman Airways also excelled in its operational performance from January to May of this year; both international and domestic operations have consistently averaged on-time performance levels approximately at 85 per cent within 15 minutes, and 95 per cent within 30 minutes. These figures surpass industry averages and the airline's internal targets, so there's much to be happy about. This impressive reliability is partly due to enhanced maintenance support capabilities, especially in Cayman Brac, which have significantly improved the turnaround times for the Saab 340B fleet. Although one of the B737-800 jets proceeded in May for its routine heavy maintenance overseas, which could have potentially impacted the airlines on-time performance temporarily, the overall operational excellence remains commendable.

At the operational level, Cayman Airways is currently undertaking several critical initiatives aimed at further enhancing its operations and services. The integration of the third Twin Otter, and the ongoing fleet instrumentation upgrade project are key undertakings. The project involves overhauling and configuring the newly acquired aircraft to meet the airline's specifications, integrating it into their maintenance and operational programmes, and upgrading the old, analogue instruments with new modern digital features. This upgrade will not only increase the aircraft's value and reliability, but also ensure maintainability given the original analogue instruments are now obsolete, making it very difficult to source new or overhauled parts when needed.

With respect to servicing its Jamaica route, Cayman Airways has for some time now, been seeking authorisation from the Jamaican Civil Aviation and government, to reintroduce what is known as the "triangular flights effect", which combines Kingston and Montego Bay. If approved, this would result in year-round service to Montego Bay instead of the current seasonal service. It would perhaps be useful for me to explain to Members that Montego Bay and Kingston combination flights had to be discontinued some time ago when Jamaica authorities introduced new security requirements for flights between those two destinations, effectively prohibiting Cayman Airways from the triangular operations.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was during the COVID-19 period, whereby they were trying to keep the COVID spread within particular parishes, however, the airline has been seeking an exemption or a variation to those security requirements on the premise that Cayman Airways is confident that it can mitigate any risks associated with the areas of concern for the Jamaican authorities. Cayman Airways remains optimistic that the variation can be approved; there is a bit of politics there, but I will leave it until we get further word. I know we have a strong working relationship with Jamaica, so we hope for the best; it will allow us to provide quicker and easier service for the many Caymanians who have family in Jamaica, and the many residents who live here and travel home.

Mr. Speaker, as you will imagine, running an airline with three different types of aircraft presents unique challenges. I am therefore pleased to advise that a comprehensive study is currently underway to review all possible options for replacing the Saab 340 aircraft. The study is being conducted by a competitively selected consultancy firm, and aims to recommend the best replacement option with realistic timelines for the fleet-enhancement programme based on the airline's capability and resources constraints.

As indicated in my answers to some of the parliamentary questions (PQs) in the earlier sitting of the House, the goal is to select an aircraft that would be suitable for Little Cayman's future development and operations, ultimately streamlining the airline's operation by reducing Cayman Airways' fleet from three types to two.

Mr. Speaker, another significant ongoing initiative is the orderly winding down of the Cayman Airways service to Barbados in accordance with the Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. (BTMI) request. The service, which concluded earlier this month, generated approximately $4 million in revenue with profit margins of 25 per cent net of all associated costs. Now, Mr. Speaker, you will remember in my debate last night, how heated I was about the loss of that opportunity so, I dare not repeat it.

The Barbados service was financially successful from the onset, as the airline's financial position was protected by a minimum revenue guarantee from BTMI regardless of the passenger numbers, which I explained to the Opposition before the start of this year. It is crucial to note that the days and times of the operations for Barbados flights were ones where the airline had much excess capacity and therefore the risk-free endeavour did not inhibit Cayman Airways' operations in any way.

Mr. Speaker, in every respect, the Barbados flight was a win-win scenario for Cayman that made sense for the airline and the country's passengers. Sadly, though, Mr. Speaker, the service was discontinued prematurely by BTMI due to a number of factors which I will not go over again.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that significant improvements are being made at Cayman Airways' headquarters at 91 Owen Roberts Drive to provide a more comfortable and conducive working environment for the dedicated, amazing, committed staff at Cayman Airways. Extensive air conditioning and roofing work is underway to address the building's historical humidity challenges which, once completed, will significantly help to maintain good humidity levels in the building.

Turning our attention now, Mr. Speaker— and I'm almost there to wrap up— I am pleased to report that in February of this year, Cayman Airways significantly invested in its human capital resources by providing cutting edge leadership training to 70 managers and supervisors. The training, conducted in collaboration with a large multi-national aviation industry partner, covered topics such as unleashing creativity, leading high-performance teams, and creating a coaching culture. These programmes have equipped the airline's leadership teams with the skills necessary to foster more innovation and maintain higher standards of performance across the whole airline.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Cayman Airways' accomplishments are a testament to the effective governance and strategic foresight of the Board and the management; and the staff who are so committed. Their dedication has not only strengthened our tourism industry as I said, but also bolstered our national resilience, our ability to get out when hurricanes are coming.

As we look to the future, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry, in collaboration with the airline, remain committed to furthering its success and ensuring that Cayman Airways continues to soar to new heights, delivering unparalleled service and contributing significantly to our economy and our community— and Mr. Speaker, I dare say we will definitely be doing one new route before the election is here.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I didn't add— if you would give me the leeway to say— that Cayman

Airways was just awarded by a renowned leisure and travel online company for being the seventh [*sic*] [sixth] best airline in the region of tourism and travel; an award that I don't think any Caribbean airline has been awarded. I forgot to put it in my speech but I, again, want to congratulate the staff and the management for such an award.

To be selected means that people across the world are recognising them; but I don't want to undermine the truth. The reason we are doing so well is because of the hard work of the staff, but we also have great planes, which were purchased under your administration, so thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I end there.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Clerk.

OTHER BUSINESS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Private Member's Motion No. 14 of 2023-2024 Motion on a higher standard of bank's duty of fairness to customers

The Speaker: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present Private Member's Motion No. 14 of 2023-2024, entitled Higher Standard of Bank's Duty of Fairness to Customers and it reads:

WHEREAS, during years of historic low interest lending rates, banks increased their banking fees to the public to improve profitability;

AND WHEREAS the Cayman Islands bank's prime lending rate has risen 11 times since March 2022 to levels not seen for about 20 years, significantly improving the banks profitability;

And WHEREAS with increases to lending rates, local banks have drastically raised the loan repayment amounts on borrowers who are already struggling with the current cost-of-living crisis, making their financial situation even more challenging;

AND WHEREAS notwithstanding the agreement by Cayman Islands retail banks to establish a temporary 30-day notice period before increasing mortgage interest rates, this commitment was only for a year, ending in June this year, and did nothing to assist borrowers unable to afford significantly increased mortgage payments, putting family homes at risk of foreclosure;

AND WHEREAS we understand that some borrowers are now seeking assistance from the NAU/Government when they cannot afford mortgage payments;

AND WHEREAS Section 14 of the Cayman Islands Banker's Association's 'Voluntary Banking Code' recognises the need for banks to consider cases of financial difficulty sympathetically and positively, including exploring options for alternative repayment arrangements for those in financial trouble;

AND WHEREAS the United Kingdom Government in 2023 imposed a new 'Consumer Duty' on banks, requiring them to act to deliver good outcomes for retail customer that set higher standards of consumer protection, including for loan foreclosures;

AND WHEREAS the Law Reform Commission had previously initiated a public consultation to consider a new Registered Land (Amendment) Bill, based on work carried out by them regarding the need to reform the foreclosure process;

AND WHEREAS, following their review and consultation the Law Reform Commission produced recommended Amendments to the Registered Land Act which sought to 'streamline the provision impacting the charge of land to provide for a lending and pre-action protocol and for incidental and connected purposes', and so better protect borrowers.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Government consider requiring local banks to implement a mandatory Updated Banking Code of Practice, using the UK's Banking Consumer Duty rules as a guide to ensure bank customers' best interests are adequately considered in banks' decisions.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if the banks are unwilling to enter into such a sufficiently robust 'Updated Banking Code of Practice', the Government should consider preparing legislation to provide for a higher standard of bank's duty to customers using the UK's Banking Consumer Duty rules as a guide.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Government considers urgently reviewing and bringing forward an update to the Draft Amendments to the Registered Land Act proposed by the Law Reform Commission based on their review of useful reforms of the law to deal with the enforcement of mortgage-type security over real estate.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Government consider requesting CIMA to review and report back to the Parliament by the end of this calendar year on the fairness of fees charged by retail banks and the fairness of interest rates paid on savings and other deposit accounts, ensuring that these rates and fees are fair and equitable for all customers.

The Speaker: Is there a seconder?

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North: Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the Motion.

The Speaker: The Motion has been duly moved and seconded. Does the Honourable Leader of the Opposition wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address a pressing issue that is significantly relevant to many of our constituents: the need for higher standards of openness, transparency and fairness in the banking sector. This Motion, seconded by Member of Parliament Joseph Hew, Deputy Opposition Leader, is not just a matter of parliamentary debate, but a crucial concern to the public.

Members may recall that 12 months ago, we were in this House debating a motion brought by the Members for West Bay West and Bodden Town West to provide relief for families financially hurt by the increasing lending interest rates and the resulting significantly increased loan and mortgage payments. The sharp rise in monthly mortgage and other loan repayments was adding significant hardship to families already facing rapidly-rising prices for groceries, gas and utilities. As we in the Progressives' Opposition argued, banks needed to recognise that hardship and respond positively to the need, to try to soften the impact that higher interest rates were having on their customers.

Mr. Speaker, the Motion last year on interest rates passed unanimously as we collectively agreed with its aim, though perhaps not with all of its substance. Indeed, the basis of the Motion now before the House, was included in my debate last year. The points I made then were significant enough that I wrote to the then Premier reminding him of the points I raised during that debate, and asked him to consider them as he looked to implement this Parliament's will as expressed in the unanimous support given to the interest rates Motion— Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would like to lay a copy of this letter on the Table.

The Speaker: May I see it, sir?

[Pause]

The Speaker: Please lay it.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Also, Mr. Speaker, I shall beg your indulgence and ask you, sir, if you would allow me to read it into the record.

The Speaker: That's fine.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Speaker, the letter was addressed to Premier Wayne Panton; it read:

"One month ago, Members of Parliament debated and passed a Private Member's Motion that sought various protections for borrowers who are customers of our commercial banks. While the Motion was unanimously agreed, it was evident from the debate that some Members, including those on the Opposition benches, accepted the spirit of the Motion but had concerns regarding some aspects of it.

In summary, the Motion called for the Government to consider meeting with the local banks concerning recent interest rate increases and the negative impact on the public; creating an interest-rate-setting-body and increasing the role of the Cayman Islands Development Bank in accepting deposits from, and lending to the public.

It was good to learn that the local banks have now agreed, as you indicated at the Chamber of Commerce legislative luncheon, to delay increases to interest rates by 30 days following any future increases in interest rates by the United States Federal Reserve. This is certainly a good start.

I ask that you publish the letter from the banks confirming this change, so that the public and all Members of Parliament can be fully aware of its contents at the time, as I requested in Parliament, I again ask that you publish all earlier correspondence with the banks on this matter, and their responses. This issue is important and deserves full transparency. In addition, I do hope that the offer by the banks to delay interest rate increases has not stopped the necessary ongoing discussions on a range of other matters that Members mentioned during their debate. I would appreciate your advising where your discussions with the banks currently stand.

I offer the following points raised during my debate on behalf of the Members of the Opposition. Please include these in the Government's conversations with representatives of the local banks. Our recommendations are:

Firstly, in addition to 30 days' notice on rate increases, banks should also provide a minimum of 60 days' notice before increasing banking fees— if customers are unhappy with an increase in fees, it would take at least this long to open an account at another bank. This notice period and a 30-day notice for an interest rate increase should be made mandatory in legislation.

Secondly, during the years when interest rates were at historic lows, banks were challenged to make adequate profits from lending to satisfy their stakeholders, so they increased fees to the public to improve profitability. We understand this, but as we have returned to a period of higher interest rates and normalised spreads, banks should now remove those added fees.

[Thirdly,] you mentioned in your debate that banks confirm that deposit rates are being suitably increased as the prime rate increased, however, the government should have assessed this independently. This assessment should not be complex, but is important. We must ensure as far as possible that the value of people's savings is not further eroded at a time of high inflation.

Fourth: In your debate you also indicated your wish for the Law Reform Commission's work regarding mortgages, especially foreclosures, to be brought forward quickly. I agree with you and would welcome your thoughts on when you expect this to come to Parliament. Both of us acknowledged in Parliament that whilst banks are saying they are not seeing many foreclosures now, the time between a borrower defaulting and the bank foreclosing usually takes many months and sometimes years, thus, it takes time for foreclosure trends to emerge.

The fact that there have been some 10 interest rate increases over the past 18 months has caused loan repayments, particularly for mortgages, to skyrocket, and in many cases to become unaffordable; add to that the increases in house insurance, and the issue worsens. The impact on mortgage holders is why I ask that you also request that during these challenging times, banks do not automatically increase mortgage payments for existing loans when interest rates occur.

I do not believe that banks typically reduce loan payments when interest rates decline, I appreciate that not increasing payments could mean banks may have to increase the loan term but also, as you indicated in your debate, interest rates rise and they eventually fall so, there could be little significant change in the loan term, in the long run. At the very least, banks should be asked to commit to offering an extended term to customers, instead of raising repayments as a matter of course. The point is, that it serves neither the bank nor the mortgage holder to have a mortgage default. Banks must work with their clients early on, and develop suitable programmes to assist them in these challenging times.

As an aside, the government also needs to consider what it has control over to assist our people with a high cost of living. I have previously written to you about ensuring that the Cayman Islands Water Authority keeps its core rates the same, and working with other utility providers to request that they do the same. I have also written regarding removing, even temporarily, the duty on fuel paid by CUC, and by the petrol importers of automotive fuel— every little bit helps, Premier Panton; and of course, a topic that I will continue to mention is for the government to implement the Private Member's Motion brought by the Members for George Town West and George Town South, to reduce the stamp duty for all Caymanians buying property, particularly first time Caymanian property buyers. Parliamentarians passed this Motion unanimously, yet it has languished with no action taken for over a year.

Lastly, I again ask that the government increase the $950 Ex-Gratia payment to $1,500. The majority of those receiving this assistance are elderly and rely on it to help them survive each month but in recent times, the value of this assistance has been eroded by the cost of living crisis."

Point of Order

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a very brief Point of Order.

The Speaker: What's your Point of Order, Honourable acting Premier?

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: If I heard correctly— but help me if I misunderstood; I believe you said $950. I think you might have meant to say $1,250 because it's $1,250.

The Speaker: That's really not a point of order.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: I didn't know if it was.

The Speaker: Clarity. You're looking for clarity.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Yes.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I'm reading a letter that was written over a year ago.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Just checking. You throw these numbers out, the public can get confused. Thank you.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I recognise some of these things have been dealt with. I pick up with that paragraph.

"The majority of those receiving this assistance are elderly and rely on it to help them survive each month, but in recent times, the value of this assistance has been eroded by the cost of living crisis. Yes, let's talk to the banks, but also government should do what it can to reduce costs, and to provide help directly for our people now struggling to make ends meet. I look forward to hearing from you on these matters," and it was signed by me.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a year and it appears to us that there is no progress in advancing the conversation with our banks that began before last year's debate. I, therefore, bring this Motion today, to urge the Government to take decisive action to ensure our financial institutions recognise the need to consider the best interests of their customers as part of their commercial decision-making, especially during these challenging economic times. I want to make it clear that I am not here to vilify our banks or accuse them or their employees of not caring for our people. Our local banks play a vital role in society and our economy. They are an integral part.

The arrival of international banks, starting with Barclays Bank in 1953, helped jumpstart the modern Cayman Islands that we all know now. I am proud of the development the local banking sector has gone through over the last 70 years and their contributions, so I recognise the importance of the role our banks continue to play in our development.

Our local retail banks provide loans and mortgages that help us achieve financial milestones. Like many, I needed a loan to buy my first car, buy my first piece of land, and, eventually, my first home. Banks keep our money safe, pay interest on our savings, and support local and international commerce, which is crucial to our financial services industry, however, the structure of banking continues to evolve and is ever-changing.

Mr. Speaker, the days when local banks mainly had full autonomy are behind us. Increasingly, the major decisions are controlled by overseas head offices; by people who know little about the country, and by people who know even less about the bank's customers in that country, therefore reducing the local discretion. This applies to maintaining jobs here as well. While banks employ our people, banking jobs have decreased as banks reduce branch banking and outsource some of their jobs overseas. Despite this, every government must ensure the banking sector thrives. Equally important for the Government, is ensuring banks recognise the need to consider their customers' best interests, especially during tough economic times.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that banks themselves have experienced challenging times. As I said in my letter to then Premier Panton, during the years of low interest rates, banks were challenged to make profits from lending, and so increased fees to sustain and bolster their profitability. This strategy was understandable, as it allowed banks to sustain their profitability. Customers benefited through low loan rates when they borrowed, though they paid for banking services through higher banking fees; however, with the rise in interest rates, banks' profitability has improved. It is time for banks to review and remove fees added when loan rates were low to those introduced during the pandemic, such as fees for purchasing or withdrawing US dollar cash, and handling local currency cash— US dollar cash is no longer a scarce commodity, and in my view, no reasonable banker can charge this fee with a clear conscience.

Mr. Speaker in my view, charging a one per cent fee for handling local currency, or accessing US dollar currency is unacceptable. Retail banks are deposit-taking institutions. It is their role to accept cash and cheques from customers making deposits into their accounts. We still live in a society where local currency cash is legal tender, and many people use cash, therefore, businesses accept cash. Businesses in tourism also receive US-dollar cash for their goods and services.

Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, banks accumulate all their deposits and lay them off overnight to earn money. I have no issue whatsoever with banks making a profit, but we must ensure they do not exchange their customers for account deposits and withdrawals. Thus, yes, Mr. Speaker, as I said to the then Premier over a year ago, bank fees also need to be reviewed— and I have to say, in today's world, it feels like every interaction that you have with the bank, there is some fee attached to it.

Returning to the steep rise in lending rates: As I noted, banks' drastic increases in loan repayment amounts further strained borrowers already struggling with the current cost of living crisis. As we know, these increases made the financial lives of many Caymanians even more challenging. The response by banks after public pressure, including the Motion on interest rates in this House, a year ago, was to offer a 30-day notice period before increasing mortgage interest rates. This 12-month commitment ended in June, and did little to assist borrowers who could not afford the significantly-increased mortgage payments. It delayed the pain, but the pain came anyway, putting many families' homes at a risk of foreclosure as their mortgage was no longer affordable.

Whilst the banks said last year that they did not see any increased mortgage defaults and they say the same now, we know that defaults and foreclosures take time to materialise. Recently, Mr. Speaker, it has come to our attention that some mortgage holders may have had to seek assistance from the NAU to pay their bills, because through no fault of their own, they could no longer afford the increased mortgage payments and buy groceries and pay for utilities. If the NAU is assisting these families— and the Government can see whether it is true or not, but we have definitely heard it— it indicates that action is required to better protect families with mortgages.

Perhaps defaults and foreclosures are less evident because of government assistance, but if it is taking place, how long can such assistance reasonably last? That cannot be acceptable nor is it sustainable. It may also be possible, Mr. Speaker, as the banks have also said, that borrowers are being assisted by having fixed-rate loans. Customers having the option of fixed-rate mortgages is undoubtedly a good thing, especially in a rising interest rate environment, and I commend banks for offering this option.

However, these customers' mortgage payments will likely increase when the fixed rate facility expires, then the financial pain will bite them. It will start, and I have to say Mr. Speaker, while the banks are giving fixed-rate mortgages, those fixed rates only last for a few number of years. I've seen anywhere from two to five years. I haven't seen it over five years.

Banks also state that they work closely with customers in good times and bad. If good customers are having financial difficulty, they will work individually with them to explore possible solutions and loan restructuring to provide support during challenging times. That may be the case, but why then are we hearing about customers needing NAU assistance? Why are we still hearing about people struggling with mortgages they can barely afford? There remains an issue that needs attention. All the efforts that banks have told us they undertake to work with borrowers facing financial challenges are admirable, but these efforts are the norm for all banks. If these efforts are the norm for all banks, then this Motion, seeking a higher duty of care to banks' customers should not be something that banks object to.

Mr. Speaker, section 14 of the Cayman Islands Bankers Association voluntary Banking Code calls for banks to sympathetically and positively consider cases of financial difficulty, however, this is a *voluntary* code. I question whether customers are even aware of their rights. When opening an account, are customers provided with a summary or a copy of the bank's Code of Conduct? It was not evident when I last checked the banks' websites or online social media pages, indicating that more needs to be done by banks. Indeed, more must be done to ensure customers can rely on fair treatment from banks, especially during challenging economic times.

Mr. Speaker, last year, the United Kingdom government came to the same realisation and imposed a new customer duty for banks to ensure fair treatment for customers. The objectives include:

1. Delivering good outcomes for customers—banks must act in their customers' best interests, designing products that meet customers' needs and provide value;
2. High standards of consumer protection; provide oversight to ensure banks avoid harmful practices like unfair banking fees or inappropriate product recommendations;
3. Proactive support for vulnerable customers— identifying and supporting vulnerable customers with tailored assistance;
4. Transparency and clear communication—providing clear, transparent and timely information to help consumers make informed decisions;
5. Responsibility and accountability— ensuring banks and their third parties comply with customer duty requirements;
6. Fair treatment and avoidance of foreclosures; considering all reasonable options to support customers facing financial difficulties before proceeding with foreclosures; and
7. Product governance and oversight, that is, ensuring financial products are designed, distributed and managed in the customer's best interests.

Mr. Speaker, I think we in Cayman should aspire to these goals. Creating an environment where customers are better protected, more informed and fairly treated. Banks already understand their duty of care codified in their voluntary code of conduct, however, more than a minimal voluntary code is needed. For me, it is time for a modern, mandatory banking code of conduct based on the UK's new customer duty for banks.

Not everything done in the UK applies to us, nor do we want to create an unworkable and overcomplicated regime to monitor the implementation and ongoing operation of the code, so I propose creating a banking standards review committee comprising representatives from the Bankers Association and CIMA, working alongside a suitable UK resource, to review the new customer duty of care and the Bankers Association's voluntary code, to determine what improvements are needed and work best for us. The committee's findings and reports should be presented directly to Parliament for consideration.

Mr. Speaker, if the banks don't wish to work with the Government, we should move ahead without them but I do not expect that that will be the case. Banks will be on board if this House votes positively and the Government moves swiftly to act on the Motion.

The Motion also calls for CIMA to review the fairness of banking fees and interest rates. This review could be part of the proposed banking standards review committee's work, allowing banks to justify the fees while CIMA and the UK consultant assess their validity— but Mr. Speaker, more is needed.

The Law Reform Commission had previously initiated public consultation on a new Registered Land (Amendment) Bill which included necessary foreclosure process reforms. Following their review and consultation, the Commission recommended amendments to the Registered Land Act aiming to streamline the provisions impacting the charge of land, and establish a lending and pre-action protocol to better protect borrowers. The report was likely put aside as we fought COVID-19, but the time is now to dust it off and look at it again; update it, if needed, and bring the Amendments to this Parliament to debate and pass.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I again put forward what the Opposition is asking the Government to consider on behalf of the people of the Cayman Islands:

1. I urge the Government to consider requiring local banks to implement a mandatory updated banking code of practice using the UK's Banking Consumer Duty Rules as a guide;
2. If banks are unwilling to adopt a sufficiently robust updated banking code of practice, the Government should proceed without them;

3. The Government should urgently review and bring forward an update to the draft Amendments to the Registered Land Act proposed by the Law Reform Commission. These Amendments are based on their review of valuable reforms to the law dealing with enforcing mortgage-type security over real estate; and finally,
4. I call on the Government to request CIMA to review, and report back to Parliament by the end of this calendar year, on the fairness of fees charged by retail banks and the interest rates paid on savings and other deposit accounts.

Honourable Members, the time to act is now. We must ensure that our financial institutions uphold the highest standards of fairness and responsibility; by supporting this Motion, we are taking an important step towards safeguarding our people's economic and financial well-being and reinforcing the trust between banks and their customers.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the Motion to the honourable House, and hope that the Government will find favour and accept the recommendations therein.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* If not, I'll ask…

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will make this brief.

I have had discussions with the substantive Premier with respect to the Registered Land Act reforms, and she confirmed that they are underway. They're on the Caucus' legislative timetable and she looks forward to bringing an update before the end of the year; thus, on behalf of the Government, the Motion is accepted because we understand that the legislation needs to move forward and action needs to be taken.

Last week, I conferred with the Managing Director of the Monetary Authority (CIMA), who confirmed that the review can and will be done, and would be very informative for both the Government and the House so that, too, will be completed.

In relation to the question of mortgage payments via the Needs Assessment Unit, I wonder whether— and I'm happy to give way for elucidation— it is the landlord who is receiving rent from a tenant, who is utilising the NAU's rental distribution to pay their mortgage. That might be occurring; so, the landlord may offer rental accommodation to an NAU client, then NAU's rental distribution goes to the landlord and the landlord may be utilising that sum to pay their mortgage.

However, at the moment, in respect of providing clients themselves for a mortgage, that has not commenced. It was part of a discussion when we were updating the Financial Assistance Act because it was a question that came out of the consultation— whether it is something the Government should consider and put into Regulations in the future, but the result of the consultation at the time, and it still holds, is that it is not something easy to facilitate because it would have major implications. It requires discussions with the banks because not all mortgages are the same. There are different time periods, different rates, it would fluctuate, it would be very difficult to budget…

It was an interesting and valid question, but not necessarily one to tackle when we were introducing this new legislation. To the extent, and this has probably been happening for years, that a landlord who has an NAU client as a tenant is utilising those funds to pay the bank, (their mortgage), it is probably so, and is ongoing.

With that in mind, I don't want to belabour the point because as far as the Government can see we're working on some of the matters and undertakes others, so there's no point to drag out the debate. We accept the Motion and are happy to consider his proposal. Thank you, Mr. Leader— and apologies for standing late; I just needed to double check that point with the NAU Director.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? The Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Repetition? Oh, no. There will be no repetition here today.

Serjeant, give this copy to the Speaker for me, please.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to lend my voice in support of this Motion, though I will admit that, *the more things change, the more they remain the same.*

Mr. Speaker, I asked the Serjeant-at-Arms to give you a copy of something I'm about to read. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, a motion on banking reform that was filed in August 2017, roughly seven years ago, which reads as follows:

The Speaker: Honourable Member.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: There is no indication on this [as to] when it was filed, when it was made.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I can ask the Clerk because I did get it from the…

The Speaker: What I mean is [that] you are representing this as something that was filed and dealt with but there is no evidence here, so I am left to take your word for it, as is the wider public. I would suggest that we try to find the origin of this, so that it can be properly laid.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I don't need to lay it. I'm just going to refer to it, really.

The Speaker: You can refer to it— I mean, it is fine; but your representation that it is a Motion which came to this House is something we need to verify if that is what you are asserting because there is no indication on this. This says… I don't even know what it says.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Okay, that's all right. I can pause and ask the Parliamentary Clerk to confirm it was filed in August—

The Speaker: Or you can proceed with other aspects of your speech in the meantime, whichever you prefer.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I will just wait because I chose to open up with it; it actually flows from that. I will just wait a bit.

The Speaker: In that case, I'll take a 10 minute suspension.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We'll be back at ten minutes past three, according to that clock.

Proceedings suspended at 3.02 p.m.

Proceedings resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The Speaker: Please be seated. We will resume.
Honourable Member for Bodden Town West, you wish to lay this on the Table?

[Inaudible]

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks very much, because as I was looking for that Motion, I also found a Motion filed dealing with Lands and Survey and making changes thereto. This refers, Mr. Speaker, to Private Member's Motion No. 7/2017-2018, which was tabled in the Office of the Clerk on the 10th August, 2017.

The Motion called for a Banking Reform Select Committee and the resolve section basically asked—without going into the long Motion— **"…that this Legislative Assembly considers establishing a Select Committee of six members, four from the Government and two from the Opposition, to review the current policies and legislation governing banking, credit, regulatory capital of banks, and to make recommendation to implement and improve legislation and policies that will be fair and balance to banks and their customers before March 31, 2018."**

At the time the Motion was filed, what triggered it was— and this is the point I want to make before I get into the substantive area of my speech—generally speaking, banks operate looking on return on their shareholders' equity and the CIMA Annual Report from 2016 reported a 13.3 [per cent] return on equity for banks, which caught my attention for the simple fact that banks at the time used to operate between 8 to 12 per cent return on equity. When I saw the 13.3 per cent in 2016, it triggered the filing of that Motion.

To put it in context, Mr. Speaker, going back to CIMA's Annual Report, the return on equity within the banking industry was 8.4 per cent in 2013; for 2014, it was 8.1 per cent; and for 2015, it was 11.2 per cent. When I saw it jump to 13.3 per cent in 2016, it triggered my filing of the Motion because I saw how the banking sector in Cayman literally went above the normal 8 to 12 per cent return. Ironically, to put it in context for the listening public so they can understand the numbers we are working with when we say 10, 11, and 12 per cent: If you have $100 million in capital and your net profit is $10 million, that's a 10 per cent return on your shareholders' equity— in other words, the return is what you are giving back to people who have made an investment in your company.

CUC also operates between 11 to 12 per cent return on equity for their shareholders just to, again, put it in context, so people can understand what numbers we're working with when we say 10, 11, 12 per cent—how does it factor in.

Mr. Speaker, when I saw the 13.3 per cent in CIMA's 2016 Annual Report it caught my attention. In 2017, it went to 13 per cent; in 2018 it was 15.3 per cent; in 2019 it was 17.9 per cent; for 2020 it went down to 5.3 per cent, and we all know why; by 2021 it was up to 13.8 per cent; for 2022 it was 18.3 per cent, and for 2023, per the latest report that was Tabled in the House just last week, the return on equity for the banks' shareholders was 25.3 per cent— more than twice CUC's return that people complain about.

To also put Cayman's 2023 25.3 per cent average across the banking sector in context, Mr. Speaker, in the US, the top 100 banks' return on equity was 11.4 per cent. Again, within the 8 to 12 per cent range. In Canada, the number one bank in terms of performance was Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), they had 14.2 per cent and Scotiabank was actually number two at 13 per cent. The largest and most profitable bank in Canada in 2023 was RBC and they had 14.2 per cent, with Scotiabank right behind at about 13 per cent; yet our banking sector [is at] 25.3 per cent. If I look at the United Kingdom, HSBC was the top bank in 2023 in terms of return on equity, 20.8 per cent return, and behind them was NatWest at 18.2 per cent. Yet here, in the Cayman Islands, 25.3 percent returns

As the Honourable Leader of Opposition mentioned, during the low interest environment the banks started charging fees for many things. As interest rates started to go up, rather than reversing and reducing some of those fees, they left them in place, and on top of that, compounded with the interest; thus the performance that we have here today.

This is not to say anything against the banks because I'll be the first to tell you that banks, like any corporation and any company, have a responsibility to the shareholders; but at some point, we do expect people to still be good corporate citizens and 25.3 per cent return in this environment— when globally no one else is hitting those kind of numbers— is something that we, in this House, need to look at carefully. Thus, the timeliness of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's Motion, because if I had known that this was going to come at 25.3 per cent, I would have filed a similar Motion myself, but I only saw the report recently when it was pushed out there.

Mr. Speaker, banks generally offer four services. They do deposits, lending, payment services and currency (foreign) exchange. Some other banks go on to basically do investment services, risk management and in some countries, they work on implementing monetary policy with the central bank and so forth. Here in Cayman, we don't have any of those kinds of major issues. We have a stable currency. It's been stable since 1972 and the exchange rate between CI to US works out to 3.2 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we have reached a point where something needs to be done and the truth is, ladies and gentlemen, the banks aren't going to do it. They have gotten used to a certain pattern, and at the end of the day it's very difficult. Other than maybe having some level of consumer policy or looking for consumer protection in terms of some services, we're not going to get what we want from it.

Here's the biggest challenge that we have with the banks. If you look at CIMA's website, at Q3 2023, the last quarter that they reported, the total for residential loans issued by all of the Class-A retail banks were just under US$3 billion. Equally, if you go to CIMA's website you will see that the total deposit for households for the same time period was just over $3.3 billion.

Mr. Speaker, there's a general rule in banking that if you have $100 million in deposits, you don't lend all of it. You normally would lend a conservative amount like 40, 50 or 60 per cent; it depends on their track record, et cetera— what you refer to as "sticky" deposits. In terms of it being a conservative approach, most banks do not lend anything above 60 per cent. If you just want to talk about pure asset and liability management, we have a domestic market of US$3 billion in loans and US$3.3 billion in deposits.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, our domestic lending is actually driven by commercial deposits and that is where the risk comes in, because as banks start moving from Basel II to Basel III, and they start looking at commercial deposits, they are being treated differently and the reason is that commercial deposits were part of what triggered the banking crisis— and I'll explain to you what I mean by that.

You have money that you refer to as professionally managed money— some Members may understand what that is. When you have $10, $20, $30 million sitting in a bank, if someone offers you half a percentage point more you will probably move your money, because for that volume that's a lot of money. If you've got $100 and someone says, *I'll give 5 per cent more on it*, it's not even worth filling out the paperwork. You generally stay away from professionally managed money because those deposits can literally move overnight.

When you understand the Cayman banking market, and you look at the billions that the banks have, in terms of assets, up to almost 15 billion last time, much of it is corporate money; professional money. It's not money that banks can do much with, and if you just look at our domestic market as is, we are literally fully lent. In terms of domestic assets and domestic liabilities, and in terms of non-commercial assets and non-commercial liabilities, we're literally fully lent— $3 billion to $3.3 billion, there's not much room left to play with. Now you're going into a different kind of money which attracts a different kind of rate, and you start creating liquidity issues.

The real solution in all of this is what I mentioned last night, that 4 per cent. One of the best motions that I've seen arrive in this House in my seven years actually came from the Member for George Town North; that motion that he brought regarding Government helping people to get homes built. Not just taking the Government Guaranteed Home Assisted Mortgage (GGHAM) programme of guaranteeing the mortgage, because it makes no use to guarantee a mortgage if there's no houses being built. You need to step back a little, and that's one of the things I also touched on, when you look at the census information I brought last night.

When the population increased and you looked at the number of homes built, we had way less homes being built as the population grew; so, clearly, we have a housing shortage in Cayman. It goes back to the point, we have the net debt at 4.1 per cent when the federal funds rate (FFR) ratio calls for 80 per cent. Those are the kind of initiatives that we're going to need to do.

In the United States, almost 55 per cent of the mortgages are owned by the federal Government between Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Fannie Mae, as it stands, was created back in 1938, almost 86 years ago. Freddie Mac came around in 1970, 54 years ago. These are institutions that have already been built, and here we are now, 86 years since the creation of Fannie Mae and 54 years since the creation of Freddie Mac. These are things that the UK Government and every other progressive country does, and the kind of stuff that we need to start looking at.

Let the bank carry the load for the first 10-15 years of a mortgage. By then most of the risk would have fallen away, the loan-to-value would have been built up; then let the Government step in. Those are secure loans. These are loans where the house is valued at $600,000 and you may balance $200,000 on it. We can take those kinds of risks and give people a lower interest rate at the same time, because they have built up their credit after 10-15 years of payment.

That's how that 80 per cent margin can actually work for us. Us sitting and telling people that we have a 4.1 per cent FFR ratio, when it allows us to go to 80 per cent, while people are struggling, makes no sense. So, rather than looking for the banks to be the saviour, which they are not going to be, we need to actually put it in place for ourselves. That is ultimately what we need to do.

At this point, I would ask the Government to look at getting a bond; go out and see what interest rate we can get with our Aa3 rating. If we can raise $400-$500 million, fine. We turn around, we have our own development bank, and at that point, we can set the criteria. As a Caymanian, if you have 15 years of a mortgage already paid up, you have already proven that you're in good stead. Let us say, well, let us charge an extra half a per cent above what we are paying for it, and give it to those good customers.

We have an aging population. If we look at the election list, the average voter age right now is 53, as per the April 1st list. That is pretty much 12 years from retirement. I have people in their sixties still paying their mortgage and can't afford the new payment; and they can't refinance past the age of 65 for some institutions. These are the kind of things that we need to sit down and start looking at, ladies and gentlemen.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Well, reverse mortgages are definitely one of them too, Honourable Minister, but I will get into that in a different debate. I'm just talking about what we can do as an immediate relief. Good-paying Caymanians, Caymanians who have paid their mortgages for 10, 15, 20 years are struggling right now through no fault of their own, other than the fact that we have imported inflation in this country.

I'm appealing once again: go out, and get that $200-$300 million. It may help 100 or 200 families. We can set the criteria; say at least 15 years paid up, your loan-to-value has to be this, that, or that— and we can offer our people solutions. That's what it is going to take. The banks aren't going to do it, ladies and gentlemen. They are there for their shareholders. I can tell you. I used to work in a bank in a previous life, and I can tell you our first responsibility was to our shareholders, it was not to the public.

We are asking the banks to do something that the United States recognised 86 years ago, coming out of the Great Depression; the banks couldn't do it. The Government had to step in and do it to help people. It is us in here who guarantee that people should have a home, not the banks, and since we are the ones who want people to have a home, then it is our responsibility to ensure that people have a home, not the banks'. We can sit here and go through this. I filed this Motion seven years ago. It is not going to change. We need to take action.

I will say to the Honourable Acting Premier, as the Acting Minister of Finance, look at what we can do. I tried my best when I was there, too. The Caribbean Development Bank was willing to lend us $100 million at 4.75 per cent, and the goal was to turn around and charge people above the age of 60, with equity built in their home, 5.25 per cent. That would have saved them hundreds of dollars per month in mortgage payment that some people can afford. Unfortunately, that went nowhere. These are the kind of solutions that we're going to need. If not, what's the use in telling the people that we have a ratio that is 4.1 per cent when we can take it up to 80 per cent? Let's carry it up to 20 or 30 per cent and help our people.

Honourable Leader of the Opposition, I want to thank you for really and truly highlighting this issue again. I can tell you right now, 25.3 per cent… When you hear people talk about inflation… I'm going to leave you one word before I leave: 'Greedflation'. Google it, and see what it means, because that's what is driving up prices here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

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

The Honourable Member for Newlands.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton, Elected Member for Newlands: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to make a short contribution.

Mr. Speaker, in the past, between 2013 and 2017, as the Minister for Financial Services, Commerce and Environment, I had to deal with issues like those contained in this Motion from the Leader of the Opposition, seconded by his able Deputy. At that time, the issues were driven by the economic conditions and the global financial crisis. Today, we have been challenged by the issues around inflation which obviously took off considerably because of the global political uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, during my first term as that Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was, obviously, a colleague. He was my councillor at the time, and we worked very well together to try to address issues back then, and I'm happy to tell him that I rise to support his Motion again, because clearly, there are continuing issues.

The challenges that we have in being able to address them continue to be difficult to overcome, in the sense that we have a regulatory system that doesn't facilitate it because the Cayman Islands Monetary Authority is not a central bank and doesn't have similar financial conduct, authority, and perhaps tools that the Financial Conduct Authority in the United Kingdom, for example, has available to it. They also have a central bank, the Bank of England, which has rate setting authority.

Mr. Speaker, we have challenges, and we have to do our best to find solutions, some of which involve continuing to engage with the banks and continuing to ask for actions that will help. Based on discussions with the Bankers' Association from mid-2022 into 2023, we have indications that their mortgage portfolios are not suffering.

From their perspective they're not underperforming, meaning there's not a high level of defaults— but what we do know, is that the rapid increases the Leader of the Opposition mentioned in the Motion, eleven increases over a period of less than two years, have significantly ramped up the cost of mortgages and the payments being made. In addition, the same factors that were driving that, have also driven significant increases in other areas of cost of living, so our people have been facing considerable pressures.

Though I agree [with] the Leader of the Opposition, that banks were probably granting more accommodations than they have historically, in terms of setting fixed-rate mortgages for a period of time, I haven't heard of any more than five years either. It is usually somewhere around two, three, maybe four years, somewhere in that range— and it has helped, Mr. Speaker. There's no question about it, it has helped.

We have also had, very helpful for many people, a Credit Union that has taken a position of absorbing some of the rate increases and fixing their rates lower than the prime rates of the commercial banks. Credit Union is not a bank, it's an institution that has helped people for the same reasons, but they can do it for a longer term. They've been able to grant mortgages which cost people less.

These are all things that, while they help, we still are in a high-cost environment for everything else, and we all understand that cost of living is a major issue for Caymanians; so anything we can do to assist, even if it's in small ways, we should consider it. In his recent contribution, the Member for Bodden Town West noted other ways of addressing the issue in terms of supply; that is worthy of consideration as well.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the [Opposition] Leader's proposal of having a review committee. Certainly, as someone who has spent quite a bit of time looking at these issues and trying to find ways to help our people, I would be happy to assist in any way that I might be able to add value.

I also want to thank the acting Premier for his indication relating to the residential mortgage amendments to the Registered Land Act that, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, I had spoken to probably two years ago— I'm happy to hear it may finally be coming forward. I can certainly tell you that probably not a single month went by, that I didn't specifically ask for an update and seek to promote moving it along and trying to get it implemented, because I think it is very, very important.

The recommendations that came from the really good work of the Law Reform Commission are going to be very helpful. It was something that I tried to get done during the 2013 to 2017 period when I was the Minister of Financial Services. I think it will add value and allow much more clarity and fairness in the process, because people are concerned. We've had numerous discussions in this House, [and] we've all had numerous representations made to us that our constituents, our residents, feel there's something not quite right when they're in a situation where they're facing foreclosure.

Mr. Speaker, having these amendments in place would provide a protocol for when you're entering into a mortgage that would provide the necessary clarity— a mechanism through which there can be a certainty that borrowers' rights and obligations have been explained to them, and they can sign-off feeling comfortable that they understand what they are. As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, the intention is that there would be another protocol that comes into effect if and when there is even an indication of a possible default. Some red flags, some signs that a borrower is under stress. Maybe they're missing a payment, maybe they're short paying and asking for forbearance— these types of issues.

Included in that protocol must be obligations on the bank to be proactive, to reach out to their customers, to help them understand and perhaps, remind them what their rights and obligations are. Help them understand how they can help resolve these issues. I think all of that would be very helpful. It will provide much more clarity and much more confidence in the process.

Mr. Speaker, I think historically, and even currently, we perhaps seem to have a much lower level of foreclosures than other major countries, but that is irrelevant when it comes to our people who are going through that process. Those statistics don't matter to them. What matters to them is whether they have something, some mechanism, some kind of leverage, something that's going to help; and I think this will help. I am grateful for the indication from the Acting Premier, and I hope that it is certainly much closer to being brought here as a Bill with amendments to the Registered Land Act.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to spend a couple of minutes saying that discussions with the Bankers' Association have always been cordial, even when we are putting pressure on them. Even when we're looking them in the eye and saying, *Look, as politicians, as a Government, we are under pressure so you have to respond. You need to help where these issues exist.* They have typically responded, to some extent, but I think that there continue to be ways in which they could assist.

In terms of the consultation that has been going on with the Bankers' Association on these amendments, I would hope that is one way in which they would find the space— even within their commercial constraints and demands as outlined by the Member for Bodden Town West— to make some concessions, and agree to put the borrowers of this country in the best position.

Mr. Speaker, one regrettable situation, as well as those people in the country who find it difficult to make mortgage payments while they have all these other escalating costs, is that we have so many younger— and some perhaps not so young people— who have been seeking to buy their homes, many of them for the first time and the increased rates, combined with the levels of general inflation, have conspired against them. We have all met them, we know them; I've certainly talked to many of them directly, so, we not only have people who are finding it difficult to keep their house, we have those who are finding it difficult to get a house and anything we can do to help with that equation is appropriate.

Of course, one of the challenges is, not just being able to afford the mortgage but the escalating operating costs, a large proportion of which is always going to be the energy costs. That's why in the past, Mr. Speaker, certainly through the Ministry of Sustainability, I had a programme in place to help demonstrate what investments could be made, either at the time a house was being built or even as a retrofit, that would significantly reduce the cost of utility bills and help to put people in a position where they could live more comfortably and avoid some of the escalating cost pressures.

Unfortunately, I think that programme doesn't exist anymore, but I think it's necessary to have these types of programmes, Mr. Speaker, because many young people— and I counsel them as often as I can when they come and talk to me— who are looking to build or buy houses, haven't had the experiences that we have and are thinking more in terms of having houses of a certain size— which is fine. It's good to have that aspiration.

I think the older you get, the more you realise that no matter the size of your house, you typically only live in perhaps half of it or three quarters of it; and what tends to happen when they are building houses is that they look to reduce costs and the first thing they do is to mistakenly reduce the efficiency of the home. The efficiency of appliances… Yes, many of those appliances are more expensive but it is better for them to invest there, and end up with lower [operating] costs, than to have a bigger house.

Mr. Speaker, I agree that the Motion is timely. This issue may be mitigated. As we come towards the end of this year, it seems that the rate of inflation may be getting to a point where the US Federal Reserve will start reducing interest rates, but there can be no guarantee of that. We have the situation we have today, and we have costs that our people have to deal with today, so I think we should continue to look for ways to address that situation, to help wherever we can, to help rationalise bank fees and rationalise other costs of mortgages and even operating our homes.

The whole banking industry seems to be evolving and going into areas that perhaps, particularly our older people don't find convenient. The Bankers' Association had indicated that they were making specific provisions for their senior citizens to be able to continue to conduct banking business in the ways that they were accustomed to in the past. Perhaps, that's not with 100 per cent accomplishment. I think we clearly understand that there are constituents who feel that such is not the case, so the more banks can do to address that position, and to redouble their efforts to ensure that our senior citizens do not have to deal with situations which are uncomfortable and highly inconvenient to them, it would be the ideal outcome.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I support the Motion. Even if conditions begin to improve in terms of interest rates, it probably is not going to go down as quickly as it went up. If that happens, we'll be lucky, but the reality in terms of costs is that what goes up usually doesn't come down, and if it does, it's at a much slower rate, so everything we can do to help.

I think this Motion has the potential to put us in a position to specifically address some of the issues through dialogue and discussion and if we can get the amendments to the Registered Land Act in terms of the mortgage protocols, both for people entering into a mortgage and where they may be getting into difficulties that would be very helpful as well, Mr. Speaker, so let's hope that can come as quickly as possible.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

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

The Honourable Deputy Leader.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as the seconder of this Motion, I would like to rise and provide some brief comments on it. I want to thank the Leader and the Members for Newlands and Bodden Town West who delved in and covered the main thrust of the Motion. I also want to thank the Acting Premier for providing an update on where the Government is on legislation pertaining to this, and also for confirming the Government's support for the Motion— we should all thank him, Mr. Speaker, because that allows me to put aside the first two pages of my speech.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Newlands rightfully said that perhaps interest rates may be coming down, but I think it is important that we continue with this as we know that everything that comes down usually goes back up. We want to ensure that we are in a position in the future that our people will not have to go through the level of stress and frustration that they do currently.

Mr. Speaker, I join my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition, in confirming that we are not here to criticise the banks. Historically, Mr. Speaker, the banks played a crucial role in our economy and have been an important institution in the growth of our Islands; there is no doubt about that. However, while I acknowledge the value of our banks, I also understand that we must ensure that customers are treated fairly.

Mr. Speaker, the banking landscape has changed and continues to change, and we all see it. Branches are closing, some services are being reduced, banking fees have increased, and as the Leader of the Opposition noted, the banks' head offices have reduced local decision-making. Some have even moved jobs overseas, and given the complaints I hear from the public, reduced local staff and services have led to a decline in banks' customer service and these are jobs that were generally enjoyed by our Caymanian people.

Mr. Speaker, banks are no longer just convenience or optional. You can't live without them, now. Whether you're a businessman [or not], you can't do anything. You can't apply for anything without a bank account. You can't even receive cash or pay anybody without proof of funding or proof of revenue, so we're all faced with the challenges in the banks. They sell you cheques, then they charge you for using them.

The very people who we are trying to help, those the NAU is helping, have all had to open bank accounts because you could no longer cash your cheque. You pay their fees, you pay your taxes and then when you take your cheque in and you go get your money out, they charge you for that too. If you cash your cheque to take it home, they charge you for that too. It's a tax. It's a tax that not even the Government is getting the benefit from. It's a tax that the bank is taking. It's a bank state.

Mr. Speaker, they started to charge you exorbitant fees, they said, in an attempt to encourage you to go online and to use the ATM so they could save on real estate and save on labour, but then they charge you every time you use a debit card too. They charge you [to] put in money, charge you [to] take out money and charge you every time you buy something with it. They have realised their efficiencies. They have forced us all to become technology people. Thank goodness [with] my phone now I can just use my thumb, I don't have to remember the passwords.

[Laughter]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: My wife has a very good memory, so she remembers them all for me, otherwise I would be lost.

Mr. Speaker, there was a time when, if you got in trouble or you wanted to start a business, you'd go into the bank and you could sit down with someone you knew and talk about it. This is a personal experience of mine: today, unfortunately, you go in to see someone and they may lead you— not all banks, but this one I went to did it. You think you have an appointment with someone, they take you into a room, the person sits down and does their nails or watches reels and they dial somebody in Trinidad or Barbados. That's your bank appointment with your local bank, talking to somebody over speakerphone in another country on the other side of the Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, they are becoming like, I think the Member for Bodden Town West [said it], a utility company.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Who is monitoring that? They scrutinise utility companies, they hold them to licences, but who's doing so with the banks? Mr. Speaker, the banking landscape has changed, [and] notably, the need for banks to ensure that they treat customers fairly, our people fairly, including borrowing customers.

Over the past two or so years, we have seen that banks have no hesitation or compunction in raising loan and mortgage repayments as swiftly as interest rates in the US may increase. It is understood that in times of rising interest rates in the USA, banks have no option but to follow suit; but this practice must be addressed to ensure that there is fair treatment for all customers.

Mr. Speaker, banks should question what they are doing to customers financially by increasing mortgage or loan payments to amounts that customers cannot afford. Couple that with insurance rates going up another 40 per cent this year, and those customers have to have insurance to cover their mortgages.

It's interesting as well, Mr. Speaker, what I find, is that if a couple gets a mortgage for $500,000, both couples have to get insurance for $500,000.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Sorry, both persons— well, we are in 2024, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Both persons have to have life insurance to cover the mortgage.

Mr. Speaker, in granting a mortgage or a loan, the banks assess the customer's ability to afford the loan payment. They are aware of what the customer earns. The first reaction in times of rapidly rising interest rates should not be to drive up payment amounts over and over again, and then leave it up to the customer to come pleading for relief. This is where the responsibility comes in. Given the banks' vital role in society, Mr. Speaker, we cannot ignore all of these concerns. We must examine these issues closely, and we must determine how to ensure a fairer balance between the best interests of the banks and their customers, our people. Banks should be encouraged to be involved in that process.

As the Opposition Leader noted earlier, we strongly advocate for the establishment of a Banking Standards Review Committee. This committee comprised of the Bankers' Association, the Cayman Islands Monetary Authority and an expert from the UK, will review the UK's customer duty of care for banks and recommend suitable rules for our own updated Banking Code of practice. The committee's findings and the report should be presented directly to the Parliament for consideration. This underscores the importance of this proposal.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition Leader has made the case for the main thrust of our Motion today, so I will dive deeper into what any bank review committee should consider. First and foremost, the consumer education and financial literacy. We must develop financial education programmes in collaboration with banks and the Government. Workshops, seminars and online resources can help customers understand the benefits of general financial products, manage debt and make informed decisions about their economic lives. It would be fantastic to see a version that could be used for our high school and university students; I heard one Member across the aisle say Primary School. These won't happen overnight, but if this House wants them to happen, they will.

In the spirit of balance, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to note that this week I learned that one local bank offers a financial management course to university students. This could be a valuable starting point for developing public education on financial management, and I encourage the Government and the Bankers' Association to consider including the topic in their future discussions, and how we can expand it into our schools.

Mr. Speaker, in other areas, enhanced customer service standards. Banks could establish dedicated support teams providing personalised advice and solutions for customers facing financial difficulties. Regular customer feedback surveys can gather insight on services and identify areas of improvement, ensuring banks better meet customer needs.

As much as we would like for persons to go in right away, as soon as they're starting to have difficulties, our people are proud. They often will fight and pray and believe that they will resolve the issue and will continue to do so until the last moment, at which time, desperation has pushed them to seek help. However, Mr. Speaker, banks should also be required to maintain a suitable level of in-branch banking for older customers who are uncomfortable with online banking or need to transact face to face.

Mr. Speaker, now I've noticed some banks don't even have dedicated parking for senior citizens anymore.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: This isn't new— well you can't get parking at all, but they used to have some [parking spaces] for senior citizens. I see some are converting for electric cars, but there are others that have no parking for senior citizens. Mr. Speaker, most of these are retired, with non-complex banking needs, and have likely been bank customers for their entire lives.

Next, Mr. Speaker, is support for small businesses. A subject near and dear to me. Banks should work with the Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Association to develop financial mentorship and advisory services for small businesses. I've seen recently that the Centre for Business Development held some seminars on financing, et cetera. When we developed that programme under your leadership, Mr. Speaker, we anticipated that there would be a much-closer working relationship between the banks and that centre providing financial support for our entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, the next area is regulatory support. In developing legislation to underpin an updated banking code of practice, suitable but solid regulatory oversight will be necessary to ensure compliance with the fair banking practices contained within the code. I will refer to it again later, but a process for approving new or increased bank fees should be considered. Regular audits, penalties for non-compliance and public reporting of banking practices can ensure fair treatment for all. I recognise and support the regulations being the right size for our needs, but we must also ensure it works to protect consumers and promote a fair banking environment.

Another area to be covered, Mr. Speaker, is the emergency relief measures. Given what we have all collectively experienced during and after the pandemic, banks should develop agreed crisis response mechanisms for economic downturns, natural disasters or other emergencies. I recall Mr. Speaker, how before the COVID lockdown, you led our Government in preparing for what would be or could be coming.

That included conversations with banks and utilities about how to support their customers. There was no pushback, and I commend the banks and utilities for acting in the common good. Thus, it seems sensible to me, Mr. Speaker that the experience learned during the COVID-19 pandemic can be used as a template for developing what a response to disaster could look like. Temporary relief measures such as loan forbearance or fee waivers, can all support customers during crises and should be a part of the tools used. Of course, Mr. Speaker, just as we did during the lockdown, the Government should also provide relief programmes to ensure that financial support reaches those in need, streamlining aid distribution and supporting affected individuals and businesses.

Mr. Speaker, before closing, I echo what the Opposition Leader mentioned in his debate regarding banking fees. I will highlight one recommendation, in the letter the Opposition Leader read that should be considered for inclusion in any banks' code of practice: *That banks should provide a minimum of 60 days' notice to customers before increasing banking fees*.

Customers should receive adequate notice of bank fee increases to allow them time to change to another bank if they wish to. As I mentioned earlier, it seems sensible that these increases should be vetted for fairness and approved by CIMA, because when they all put an ad together on social media, or in the newspapers, saying that they're all increasing the fees at one time, it leaves you no choices to move banks.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Collusion.

The process for doing this would be worked out and agreed upon by the review committee, putting in place an updated banking code of practice. As stated before, if customers are unhappy with an increase in fees, opening an account at another bank could take at least this long. This notice period should be made mandatory in legislation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we heard from the Acting Premier that they will support the Motion; once passed, I urge the Government to act quickly, and to start the process immediately to move this forward.

To all of my colleagues in this House, I say that by supporting this Motion, we will be taking an essential step towards safeguarding our people's economic and financial well-being and reinforcing the trust between banks and their customers that we enjoyed during our generation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may God bless you all.

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

The Honourable Member for West Bay North.

Mr. Bernie A. Bush, Elected Member for West Bay North: Mr. Speaker, two beautiful days. Yesterday, Motions to see us save our grandchildren and to see the special interests— people suffered yesterday in the stoppage of that dump deal— was one good one. Today, I got back here late because one of my constituents broke both hands and I had to go and help the situation; so I don't know who spoke on what, but since I've gotten here I've heard this Motion that the Opposition has put forward and I just heard the Deputy Leader of the Opposition say that there's been signal that we are going to support it. I know I intended to.

What is amazing is that I remember the Member for Bodden Town West and Arden McLean bringing some motion and the people who were in power for eight years didn't seem to want to take on the banks. I've listened for the last three years to all the things that we on this side should do. They had eight years and had money. We were coming out the pandemic and trying to keep the country afloat. It is so beautiful to hear this Kumbaya movement; to hear us singing from the same Sankey book, and to show the country that this side is not doing what was done to us the last eight years, when we were in Opposition, because everything that the Deputy Leader said is true!

I stood in line in the bank, and I saw a cleaning lady with a Cayman Airways cheque, and heard the bank people tell her, *"Ma'am, we cannot cash your cheque because… and CIMA says so."* I happen to know one person at CIMA, so I picked up the phone and called that individual and said, *what kind of stupidness is this*? And the individual said, *"That is not so, that's a bank decision,"* and right there in the bank, I said loudly, *Excuse me, I just spoke to CIMA and it's the bank's [decision]."* You could see the bank people start to hold their head down, because everyone wants to put the blame on Government— it is "blame the Government" time! And especially now, that it's the silly season, it's gotten worse.

Yesterday, we got the story of a young Caymanian woman who, from the time she was in high school— and she's not from West Bay — wanted to be a certain thing at the hospital. [She] studied, got the job, [was] working on the job, got hurt, got all the paperwork from the relevant doctors and in the middle of her probation, they fired her. Now she's fired—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: —so she can't go to get help. I have just been told that it has changed, but you know who looks bad in that? Us!

Everything at CIMA or any of the banks, people are blaming us. How can you tell me— I put my money in bank A and I make a cheque to John Brown; bank A knows how much money I've got in there, so if John Brown comes to cash that cheque in my bank where my money is, the bank knows I have $500, so if you have a check for $100, you can pay it. This is nothing but *foolishness.*

When he said about how they are discouraging foot movement into the banks, the Deputy Leader said it one hundred per cent right, there are many old people who are complaining. They can't do online banking, they don't want to do it online. All they want is to go and take out— some of them wish they could still get a little bank book they could write in.

I am happy to see that we on this side are not playing the game like I've seen played before. There's one thing, all of the great concessions that were going on, they've tightened up. Under the former Premier sitting over there, there were no big concessions, if there were any; and sitting over here this time with the present Premier, there are no big concessions. We have done everything to try to make things better for our people, and Mr. Speaker, this is one way we can do it.

Our people are under pressure and I'm so happy to hear… when you hear people who've got money complain, you know it's bad. Can you imagine what the poor people are going through? When people have got a mortgage and all of a sudden it *doubles*. I save [messages] on my phone. A young lady sent me something, a mother with a child, for the first time in her life she's having a problem [affording] food, because of the electricity bill— *the only thing that hasn't killed us is the water bill*; and the individual isn't running her air conditioning all the time. Then with the bank mortgage doubling she said, *"This is my salary. Mr. Bernie, what can I do?"* Our people are suffering and if all of us in here don't play politics with this, we can bring people into line, because none of those banks are losing money in this country. They are making good money.

Mr. Speaker, I too will be supporting this and I'm happy to hear that our side is not [doing] what I saw happen the last time when, if I remember correctly it was either Mr. McLean or Mr. Saunders who was told to, *"Go and meet one of my compatriots from West Bay."* I remember saying to the member, *you think that meeting will happen?* Then during lunchtime I heard one of the members of the Government say, *"You think we want to take on those banks at this time?"*

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Yes, but they expect us to— but we will. We will work with them.

It is time for us to stop putting everyone and everything else before our people, so I'm so happy to see this and to hear that everyone is supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

If not, then I'll invite the Leader of the Opposition to exercise his right of reply.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to wind up the debate on this important Motion.

I won't be long, Mr. Speaker. Not very much that I can add, but I'm feeling good. Notwithstanding the fact that it's been a long week and we're down to the very end of it. I feel very happy that the Acting Premier has indicated he accepts the Motion. I am pleased beyond measure to hear that everyone who has spoken, both from the Government bench and the Opposition bench, are supporting the Motion.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the Member for West Bay North was here when I was making my presentation, but just to remind him that I made these requests over a year ago. I'm glad to see that they have gained traction and the situation is now that we can find a way forward and find that it is accepted by the Government. What remains for us now is to put these things into motion.

I want to thank everyone, including the two independent Members of the Opposition bench who spoke very strongly in favour of it, and a number of people on the Government bench, as well as my Deputy who ably supported my Motion and highlighted other issues.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude my wind up here reading two small paragraphs from the document that I referred to, the new consumer policy that the British Government introduced in 2023. It reads, **"Setting higher standards and putting consumers' needs first is central to our strategy – and the cornerstone of this is the Duty. We want to see a higher level of consumer protection in retail financial markets, where firms compete vigorously in consumers' interests. Firms need to understand their customers' needs and to have the flexibility to support them with certainty of our expectations, so they get good outcomes.**

This is particularly important as consumers face increasing pressures, including those relating to the cost of living. Even before cost of living pressures emerged, consumers were being asked to make an increasing number of complex and important decisions in a faster and increasingly complex environment. This makes it even more important that consumers can make informed, effective decisions, act in their interests and pursue their financial objectives."

Those are all noble goals, and ones that we should seek to embrace. We all, I believe, want to achieve and to see that we have a higher level of consumer protection in the retail financial markets. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that by accepting this Motion, we can achieve that and we can hold banks to account and have them act more in the interest of their customers in seeing that they are protected as best as they can be.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to wind up and I look forward to the vote on this important Motion.

The Speaker: Honourable Member—

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted, through you, to ask him if this includes the insurance companies as well.

The Speaker: No, the Motion doesn't cover insurance companies.

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Okay, thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The question is **BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Government consider requiring local banks to implement a mandatory Updated Banking Code of Practice using the UK's Banking Consumer Duty rules as a guide to ensure bank customers' best interests are adequately considered in banks' decisions;**

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if the banks are unwilling to enter into such a sufficiently robust 'Updated Banking Code of Practice', the Government should consider preparing legislation to provide for a higher standard of bank's duty to customers using the UK's Banking Consumer Duty rules as a guide;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Government considers urgently reviewing and bringing forward an update to the Draft Amendments to the Registered Land Act proposed by the Law Reform Commission based on their review of useful reforms of the law to deal with the enforcement of mortgage-type security over real estate;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Government consider requesting CIMA to review and report back to the Parliament by the end of this calendar year on the fairness of fees charged by retail banks and the fairness of interest rates paid on savings and other deposit accounts, ensuring that these rates and fees are fair and equitable for all customers.

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

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Private Member's Motion No. 14 of 2023-2024 passed.

The Speaker: Honourable Members that brings us to the end of not just this Order Paper, but of all business submitted to the Parliament for consideration during this Meeting.

I thank you all for your able contributions and your unfailing courtesy to the Chair, and invite the Acting Premier to move the Motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping we would be able to conclude before the hour of interruption, and we are there.

I would ask Members to indulge me just a few closing comments to thank all Members for a compact, eventful week. I believe we put in solid work for the country this week. We grappled with thorny issues, but I think, overall, aside from a few energetic moments, it was a collegial and collaborative effort.

Mr. Speaker, though it's still my first term, one of the best experiences I've had thus far, was retreating to the committee room in a recess to go over the Firearms Bill line by line, with all interested Members working on the Committee Stage Amendments— What are the red lines? What are the issues? What are the confusions with the Attorney General? I do hope we do more of it. It was highly productive.

Aside from the agreed in-writing PQs from the Honourable Premier, who was ill, only one remains outstanding from the Minister of Planning, who has to fact-check a few more stats.

The senior litigation partner I referred to last night about fair agreements, also taught me you never stop the judge when the judge is in full flow, so I have no cause at all to push against your admonishment on PQs except to say, that there was a global cyber event that wreaked havoc through the government's systems and PCs were down— some of us who had PQs really had a struggle trying to get them here Monday morning, but we resolved it as quickly as we could during this week.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to wish our 2024 Olympic team all the best in Paris. Let's give them a nod.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Minister Rankine left here around midday to accompany the squad, their family and friends. I know some of us can't wait to go and watch the opening ceremony; from the glimpse I saw in a brief lunch, it looked to be spectacular. God bless you all. Represent us well. We love you.

Mr. Speaker, I hope Madam Premier is back to full strength. I'll check on her on the drive home. I just hope that we did her proud and we navigated her ship as best as we could in her absence.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we look forward to the visit from Speaker Hoyle. I've met him in my capacity as a representative of the Cayman Islands Government in the UK. He's a fantastic human being whom I believe most of us have met. He is a genuine person who cares about the OTs. He's always promised he would visit the Cayman Islands, and he's come through.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I move the Motion for this honourable House to stand adjourned until Wednesday coming, 1st August, at 10.30 a.m.—

The Speaker: Thursday, 1st August.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thursday coming, 1st August at 10.30 a.m., when we will meet Speaker Hoyle. Let this House stand adjourned until then.

The Speaker: The question is that this House do now adjourn until Thursday, 1st August at 10.30 a.m. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

At 4.29 p.m. the House stood adjourned until 10.30 a.m. Thursday, 1st August, 2024.