



PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



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OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

Second Meeting of the 2024/2025 Session
Second Sitting

Wednesday
11 December, 2024
(Pages 1-44)

Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin
Speaker

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PRESENT WERE:

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

MINISTERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP	<i>Premier</i> , Minister of Finance & Economic Development, Education, District Administration & Lands, Financial Services & Commerce, <i>and</i> Health
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, MP	<i>Deputy Premier</i> , Minister of Tourism & Ports <i>and</i> Social Development & Innovation
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, MP	Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure and Transport & Development
Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, JP, MP	Minister of Youth, Sports, & Heritage <i>and</i> Home Affairs
Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, OCL, JP, MP	Minister of Border Control, Labour, Culture, Sustainability & Climate Resiliency <i>and</i> Wellness

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

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

ELECTED MEMBERS

GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, JP, MP	Elected Member for West Bay West, Parliamentary Secretary to Border Control & Culture <i>and</i> Planning, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport & Development
Mr. Bernie A. Bush, MP	Elected Member for West Bay North, Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Sports and Heritage

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

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

INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Hon. Heather D. Bodden, OCL, Cert. Hon., JP, MP	<i>Deputy Speaker</i> , Elected Member for Savannah
Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP	Elected Member for Newlands
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP	Elected Member for West Bay Central
Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town West
Mr. André M. Ebanks, MP	Elected Member for West Bay South
Mrs. Sabrina T. Turner, MP	Elected Member for Prospect

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
SECOND MEETING OF THE 2024/2025 SESSION
WEDNESDAY
11 DECEMBER, 2024
10:54 A.M.
Second Sitting

[Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin, Speaker, Presiding]

The Speaker: Good morning. Parliament is resumed. I would invite the honourable Member for Bodden Town West to greet us with prayers.

PRAYERS

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West: Good 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: 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**

**Cayman Islands Central Planning Authority &
Development Control Board – 2023 Annual Report**

The Speaker: I'll invite the Honourable Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport, and Development.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport and Development, Elected Member for North Side: Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable House the Cayman Islands Central Planning Authority Development Control Board - 2023 Annual Report.

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

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: No, sir. It's self-explanatory.

The Speaker: Very well.

**The Cayman Islands Government – The Future of
Public Transport in the Cayman Islands –
Preliminary Policy Framework - (A Green Paper)**

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport and Development.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable House, the Cayman Islands Government - Future of Public Transport in the Cayman Islands - Permanent Policy Framework (A Green Paper).

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

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Briefly, sir.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, the Cayman Islands is at a crossroads, our population is growing, our economy is thriving and our communities are evolving; yet, these achievements come with pressing challenges. [There is a] need to modernise the transportation system; traffic congestion and long commute times [with] limited alternatives affect us all, whether we're heading to work, school or simply trying to enjoy the beautiful island. It is time for change.

Honourable Members, you may recall that [I] previously referenced a green paper in this honourable House as a work in progress. Today, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to lay [on] the Table [for] the first time, the preliminary policy framework, the Green Paper on the future of public transport.

This document represents the work and sets out the clear vision [which] transforms how we move across Grand Cayman and the three key routes— from West Bay to George Town, from George Town to the Eastern districts and a convenient George Town circular. This is more than a transport plan, it's a bold and transformative vision for a connected, modern and accessible Cayman Islands where public transport becomes the first choice for residents and visitors alike.

This is an ambitious plan, Mr. Speaker, and ambition is exactly what the moment demands. We are committed to building a system that delivers a new bus depot; equipment, maintenance, storage, and charging facilities, along [with] state-of-the-art control centres in modern and safe bus terminals [which] reflect the needs of all users; and dedicated bus priority lanes to ensure that buses avoid traffic congestions and provide swift, reliable service.

Infrastructure is only a part of the story, Mr. Speaker, to deliver the vision, we need people— skilled professionals ready to serve. That's why we are investing in the workforce; this includes:

- training and employing professional drivers;
- hiring skilled technicians and maintaining the fleet;

- recruiting expert planners and dispatchers to keep operations running smoothly; and
- creating commercial and management opportunities for Caymanians to lead and drive this initiative forward.

While building this expertise may require some technical assistance abroad in the short term, we are fully committed to creating sustainable long-term career opportunities for our people.

Mr. Speaker, this is an innovative and inclusive approach, we are not stopping at the basics. We're leveraging the technology to revolutionise the way we experience public transport. Imagine buses with cashless payment, real-time tracking and Wi-Fi making them not just convenient but a reliable, everyday solution.

We are also committed to affordability. Our goal is to ensure that fares remain accessible to everyone, especially our most vulnerable groups. While we work with these big picture changes, we are [also] delivering immediate improvements to the current omnibus services because our people deserve the relief now, not just in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning and the Ministry is actively developing detailed business cases for those proposals. In this sitting of Parliament we will introduce the Public Transport Bill and the Traffic (Amendment) Bill and we aim to bring the formal investment proposal forward. This framework reflects the input from stakeholders across our Islands, and I encourage my fellow honourable Members and the wider public to share their feedback together. We will refine and strengthen this plan.

Mr. Speaker, this is the call for action. This is more than a policy, it's an opportunity to transform our Islands for generations to come. A modern, efficient public transportation system will not only reduce traffic but also improve quality of life, create jobs and position the Cayman Islands as a leader of sustainable development.

I want to express my gratitude to my colleagues, the Ministry and everyone who has contributed to this vision and journey. It will take hard work and collaborations, but I am confident that we are up for the task. Let's move forward boldly with purpose and unity. Let us build a transportation system that connects our people and strengthens our economy and ensures a brighter and more sustainable future for the Cayman Islands. Together, let's get moving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anti-Corruption Commission Cayman Islands – Annual Report - 1 July 2023 - 30 June 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General, Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this House the Annual Report of the Anti-Corruption Commission covering the period 1st July 2023 to 30th June, 2024.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Attorney General wish to speak thereto?

The Attorney General, Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin: Mr. Speaker, no. The report itself is relatively short and self-explanatory. I just wish to thank, on behalf of the Government, the members of the Anti-Corruption Commission, including the former Chairman, Mr. Gus Pope, who demitted office, and the incumbent Chair, Mr. Charles Jennings, who has assumed that role.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Very well.

Cabinet Office - Cayman Islands Government - Annual Report – 2019 Financial Year

Cabinet Office - Cayman Islands Government – Annual Report 2020 (January – December 2020)

Cabinet Office - Cayman Islands Government – Annual Report 2021 (January – December 2021)

Cabinet Office - Cayman Islands Government – 2022 Annual Report (June 2022)

Cabinet Office – Cayman Islands Government – 2023 Annual Report (February 2023)

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, Minister of Finance & Economic Development, Education, District Administration & Lands, Financial Services & Commerce, Health, Elected Member for Cayman Brac East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and good morning.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable Parliament the Annual Reports for the Cabinet Office for the years 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

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

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments to highlight the work of the Cabinet Office as I Table their consecutive annual reports from 2019 to 2023. With your kind permission, I wish to speak to them collectively, as opposed to individually, in the interest of time.

Mr. Speaker, as you would know, the Cabinet Office works to support and design the implementation of key government policies to communicate the priorities of the government to the public and to provide leadership during times of both national crisis and celebration.

As you're also keenly aware, Mr. Speaker, given your central role in the authorship of the Constitution, the Cabinet Office is led by the Cabinet Secretary and falls within the Portfolio of the Premier. Given that the Office of the Premier is an entity within the Cabinet Office, these annual reports speak to accomplishments and initiatives during your time as Premier, as well as those of my immediate predecessor, the honourable Member for Newlands.

If you will oblige me, Mr. Speaker, I will speak briefly to some of their achievements over the past five years.

The year 2019 was exceptionally productive for the Cabinet Office, beginning with a number of high-level diplomatic engagements such as the hosting of the inaugural UK/OT International Trade Summit, the Pre-Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) meetings held here in Cayman, and the Royal visit of our now-reigning Sovereign, His Majesty King and Queen Camilla.

Relief efforts, Mr. Speaker, were also coordinated to our friends within Bahamas who were displaced, as you would vividly recall, by Hurricane Dorian during September of that year.

Mr. Speaker, I'm certain that you will also proudly recall that one of the most significant achievements of that year was the approval of the advancement of our Constitution by the United Kingdom Government, which led to a number of amendments and to the 2009 Constitution being updated with your assiduous work and the team that assisted thereon.

In 2020, Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the Cabinet Office and all its entities, along with the wider public sector and the community, worked tirelessly through the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver timely, accurate, and lifesaving communications to the Caymanian people and all residents.

Dare I say, Mr. Speaker, this country owes you a tremendous debt of gratitude for your visionary foresight and leadership during those perilous and most uncertain times. With support from the then Minister of Health, the honourable Member for Bodden Town East; the other Cabinet Ministers and associated Parliamentary Secretaries; our Deputy Governor; and the wider civil service, this was a movement of national unity with the undergirded support coming from the unseen work of the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Speaker, from the coordination of Cabinet meetings and the rapid gazettal of regulations that changed almost weekly, to the streamlining of the daily press conferences through which the Government could address our nation; to the designing of engaging content that could inform the public, the Cabinet Office, via what was known as the Government Information

Services (GIS) and Radio Cayman solidified their standing as the Cayman Islands' most trusted sources of information. Our people listened, Mr. Speaker, and countless lives were saved as a result.

In 2021, Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet Office continued to support the government, as the country safely transitioned out of the pandemic. During what was an election year, they worked assiduously to assist in the smooth transition from one political administration to another and—without any unrest in the streets such as we've seen in other jurisdictions, regional and international—the work of implementing the new government's policies commenced.

The Cabinet Office was also able to offer additional focus to the work of the Gender Affairs Unit, the Older Persons Council and the Disabilities Council, Mr. Speaker, all of which marked significant developmental milestones during the said year. During that year as well, Dr. Tasha Ebanks-Garcia took up her post as our representative in the Cayman Islands Government Office in the United Kingdom, where she continues to advocate for the needs of our Islands with the UK Government and amplify the status of our country across the pond, through tactical diplomatic efforts. I can say, from the two visits that I have been privileged to make, that she's doing an excellent job.

Mr. Speaker, in 2022, the Cabinet Office continued with its high standard of cross-government coordination work while leading a new development, such as the implementation of the Russian sanctions task force, known as Operation Hektor. The Cabinet Office, as the task force coordinator, facilitated and indeed coordinated inter-agency cooperation policy and communications.

The Cabinet Office also effectively supported the delivery of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations through cross-governmental collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture; there was also a critical intra-collaboration by the Protocol Office, Celebrate Cayman, and the Department of Communications.

Mr. Speaker in 2022, our joy turned to sorrow as we joined the Commonwealth and the realm in bidding farewell to our most beloved monarch, her late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. Once again, our Cabinet Office ensured that the Cayman Islands appropriately commemorated this solemn moment in the world's history, which included but was not limited to the coordination of a ceremony for the proclamation of the new monarch, King Charles III.

Mr. Speaker, notable achievements for 2023 include the work of the Information Rights Unit which effectively delivered 46 training sessions to ensure that government agencies were compliant with the Freedom of Information and the data protection guidelines. This strategic innovation unit was also formed within the Cabinet Office to lead digital transformation with the Portfolio and the wider government and was

instrumental in the support of the Minister of Finance during the development of the SPS (Strategic Policy Statement).

Mr. Speaker, further enhancements and development of the Department of Communications continued during 2023 growing our audience, especially in the digital space, and giving the Premier greater capacity and modernity to articulate and put in place the policies and positions of the elected Government.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this time to applaud the work of the Cabinet Office team under the leadership of the astute and devoted Cabinet Secretary, Mr. Samuel Rose, supported by a cast of committed and professional Heads of Departments and Deputy Chief Officers, all of whom, I am deeply proud to say, are Caymanian.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, from the perspective of stewardship and management of their resources, each of these reports is accompanied by financial statements which contain unqualified audit opinions from the Office of the Auditor General. I therefore now wish to congratulate the finance team in the Cabinet Office, for their continued dedicated work.

We should all, in my respected view, be proud of the achievements that I have mentioned here today. The reports being Tabled highlight many more, outstanding, accomplishments; and I would invite Members to read them in their entirety. I do hope, Mr. Speaker, that what I have shared demonstrates the growth and progression of these critical years of our development.

Long may the success of unity within the government, and smooth transitions as governments change, continue.

I thank you.

**Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands –
The Efficiency and Effectiveness of
Cayman Airways Limited (March 2024)**

**Report of the Standing Public Accounts
Committee on the Report of the Office of the
Auditor General: The Efficiency and Effectiveness
of Cayman Airways Limited (March 2024)**

The Speaker: I recognise the honourable Member for George Town East.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart, Elected Member for George Town East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence to lay on the Table of this honourable House, as well, the report of the Public Accounts Committee that accompanies this Auditor General's report.

The Speaker: So ordered.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence to lay on the Table of this honourable House, the report from the Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands, entitled *'The Efficiency and Effectiveness of Cayman Airways Limited' (March 2024)*, together with the report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee on the report of the Office of the Auditor General, *'The Efficiency and Effectiveness of Cayman Airways Limited'*.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the honourable Member wish to speak thereto?

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General prepared this report examining the efficiency and effectiveness of Cayman Airways Limited issued in March, 2024. For anyone with an interest in the operations of Cayman Airways, it makes for a very interesting read. The Public Accounts Committee held a hearing on the content of this report and interviewed several members of management.

In her report, the Auditor General made, I think it was about 14 recommendations, all of which were accepted by management and the Public Accounts Committee is looking forward to receiving an update from her in due course with regard to their success in implementing them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands –
Improving employment prospects for Caymanians
(May 2024)**

**Report of the Standing Public Accounts
Committee on the Report of the Office of the
Auditor General: Improving employment
prospects for Caymanians (May 2024)**

The Speaker: I recognise the honourable Member for George Town East.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to lay on the Table of this honourable Parliament the report of the Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands, entitled *'Improving employment prospects for Caymanians (May 2024)*', together with the report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee on the report of the Office of the Auditor General, *'Improving employment prospects for Caymanians' (May 2024)*.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the honourable Member wish to speak to the reports?

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Once again, very briefly, Mr. Speaker.

The Public Accounts Committee held a public hearing on this report, and we questioned a number of

civil servants from the Ministry of Labour with regards to the employment situation that exists in the Cayman Islands. The report also made a number of recommendations that were all accepted by the Government.

I commend the report to people who are interested in getting a really good snapshot of what the employment situation is with regard to Caymanians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

NO. 11

**Timeline for commencement of the initial
launch phase of the National E-ID**

The Speaker: Before we proceed, I note that time has moved beyond 11 o'clock. Madam Premier, would you move the suspension of the necessary Standing Order?

Suspension of Standing Order 23(7) and (8)

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the suspension of Standing Order 23(7) and (8) to allow questions to commence beyond the hour of 11 am.

The Speaker: The question is that the relevant Standing Orders be suspended in order that questions may be asked of Ministers after the hour of 11 o'clock. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Standing Order 23(7) and (8) suspended.

The Speaker: I recognise the honourable Member for West Bay South.

Mr. André M. Ebanks, Elected Member for West Bay South: Morning Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the Honourable Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism, Imports and Social Development and Innovation question No. 11, standing in my name.

Question: Given that the primary legislation has been passed, the relevant technology aspects are in place, and the operating regulations in final stages of drafting, can the Honourable Minister provide a timeline for commencement of the initial launch phase of the national E-ID?

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Deputy Premier and Minister of Tourism and Ports and Social Development and Innovation.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism & Ports and Social Development & Innovation, Elected Member for George Town Central: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the answer: I want to thank the honourable Member for the question. In terms of the commencement timeline, it is envisioned that the Department of E-government and the Ministry will officially launch the initiative on the 13th January, 2025.

A pilot programme is scheduled to commence on the 24th February, 2025. This pilot will include key individuals in order to allow for feedback with adjustments and refinements made as needed; the goal is for the pilot phase to run for no more than three months. Final security testing is planned for late February to ensure the system meets the highest standard of reliability and protection.

Initially, applications will be opened exclusively to civil servants. This phased approach allows for a controlled rollout, ensuring any technical and procedural issues can be addressed before expanding access. Civil servants will serve as the initial user group due to their familiarity with government processes, and to ensure the system is thoroughly tested under real world conditions. Applications for other residents are expected to open in the beginning of third quarter (Q3) of 2025, following the successful completion of the pilot and any necessary adjustments.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to provide a brief update on the rollout of the ID programme. As the honourable Member has alluded to, the Registrar of the Identification Register has been established as the Director of E-government and the Office of the Registrar has been appointed with a Deputy Registrar, an Information Manager, and two digital identity and e-service specialists.

As mentioned, the identity register, and the capability to produce Cayman Islands identification cards are now complete and are going through the final quality assurance checks and balances in preparation for the launch. The draft regulations for both Acts, namely the Identification Register Regulations, 2024 and the Cayman Islands Identification Card Regulations, 2024 are complete. Subject to Cabinet approval this month, both the regulations, the remaining sections of the Identification Register Act, 2022, and the entirety of the Cayman Islands Identification Card Act, 2022, will be commenced on the 13th January, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, the regulations strategically include a provision empowering the Registrar to implement a policy to manage the volume of applications. This policy will clearly inform the public about which categories of applications will be considered and processed. We would like to remind the public though, that participation in this programme is entirely voluntary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Supplementaries

The Speaker: The honourable Member for West Bay South.

Mr. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you to the Minister and Deputy Premier for that answer. I have two brief supplementaries:

1. Is the plan still to have not only the physical card but also the card as an app on your phone, (an electronic card)?
2. Is the Office for the Registrar of the E-ID going to be located in E-government's current premises, or elsewhere?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer, if he is able.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you would just give me 30 seconds.

The Speaker: Sure.

[Pause]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you Mr. Speaker for your indulgence.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to answer the first part of the Member's question— whether the app will be launched at the same time as the physical card, the answer is yes.

The second part of the question, where will the cards be launched from. In the initial stages, they will be launched from the Government Administration building because we're focusing on the civil servants as a core group first; once it becomes public, it will be launched from the Elections Office.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Deputy Premier. Any further supplementaries? The honourable Member for Newlands.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton, Elected Member for Newlands: Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: I remind everyone that Standing Order says to please stand in your place.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just have a quick follow-up question. I appreciate the very clear answer provided to both the initial and supplementary questions, but I wonder

whether the government would consider expanding it to all Members of Parliament initially, and not just civil servants, because we all have significant relevant experience. I think it would be very helpful to get the feedback of Members of Parliament as well in this initial rollout process.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism & Ports and Social Development & Innovation, Elected Member for George Town Central: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you would indulge me with two seconds, please.

[Pause]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, the answer to the honourable Member: The request has already been considered. The pilot programme that is expected to be launched on the 24th February envisions about a hundred persons, and all Members of Parliament are allowed, if they so wish, because their feedback is anticipated in respect of the pilot programme. The individuals in that pilot programme will also include some key influencers within our community who would use such a card to get the initial feedback before moving to the next phase for the civil servants, later on in the month.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Deputy Premier. Madam Clerk.

NO. 12

Extension of notice of termination with respect to the ReGen Project

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Member for West Bay Central.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, Elected Member for West Bay Central: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the Honourable Minister of Border Control, Labour & Culture, Sustainability & Climate Resiliency *and* Wellness question No. 12, standing in my name.

Question: Can the Honourable Minister say why the Notice of Termination with respect to the ReGen Project was extended from 31st October, 2024 to 31st December, 2024?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Border Control, Labour & Culture, Sustainability & Climate Resiliency *and* Wellness to answer.

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, Minister of Border Control, Labour, Culture, Sustainability & Climate

Resiliency and Wellness, Elected Member for Bodden Town East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question. The answer: The direction to terminate, issued by the Cabinet to the Minister responsible for the project in early June 2024, was to find a mutually agreeable way to exit the project agreement. No progress had been made towards this, so it was extended to remedy the situation.

Supplementaries

The Speaker: Supplementaries?

The Honourable Member for West Bay Central.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Honourable Minister can advise whether, since extending the termination, the Government has entered into discussions to defray the \$38 million with land swaps and concessions.

The Speaker: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand the question. I would prefer it be rephrased and, if at that point I still don't get it, I will provide the answer for the Member.

The Speaker: Member for West Bay Central would you try again?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to make it a little clearer.

The question is, whether the arrangement to find a "mutually agreeable way to exit the project agreement" still looks like a cash payment on termination; or does it now look different in relation to land swaps and concessions?

The Speaker: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Speaker, these discussions are ongoing and I will not be able to comment on it at this time.

The Speaker: Further Supplementaries?

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you: I hate to put the Minister in this position because he certainly didn't ask for it and he wasn't the Minister when the decision was made but, based on the former Minister's question, am I to understand that the cost to terminate the contract is \$38 million?

The Speaker: This is a rather awkward situation, and I'm not sure how best to deal with it.

The original question is to the Honourable Minister who has responsibility for the project now, and the question came from the former Minister; but the question now is from the Leader of the Opposition relating to the former Minister's Supplementary question. I'm not sure how we address that in the context of parliamentary questions (PQs).

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I'll withdraw my question, sir.

The Speaker: Very well. That got me out of the problem.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Next question, Madam Clerk.

NO. 13

Update on Government's plan to address 7-Mile Beach erosion

The Speaker: I recognise the honourable Member for West Bay Central.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the honourable Minister of Border Control, Labour and Culture, Sustainability & Climate Resiliency *and* Wellness, question No.13, standing in my name.

Question: Can the Honourable Minister provide an update on the Government's plan to address the 7 Mile Beach erosion.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Border Control, Labour and Culture, Sustainability & Climate Resiliency *and* Wellness.

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question. The answer: the Government continues to engage with key stakeholders to address the issue of the erosion affecting the southern end of Seven Mile Beach and has taken the necessary steps to develop a holistic sustainable solution. Cabinet recently approved the necessary funding to procure consultancy and coastal engineering services to develop a technical design solution to restore and stabilise approximately 4,500 linear feet of the southern end of Seven Mile Beach. The Request for Quotes (RFQ) was issued in BONFIRE on 27th November with a deadline for responses, as you see, on the 13th December; this week.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister. Supplementaries? *[Pause]*

No Supplementaries, that concludes question time.

STATEMENTS BY HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier.

Honourable Premier One-time \$500 ex-gratia payment

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I am announcing today that the Government has approved the one-time ex-gratia payment of \$500 which will be paid to each public service pensioner during the month of December. This special payment, Mr. Speaker, is made in recognition of the significant contributions retired public servants have made to the building of these beloved Cayman Islands.

As has occurred in past years, this payment will be made to pensioners via the Public Service Pensions Board. This programme is fully funded by savings realised elsewhere within the government's existing human resources (HR) budget. The HR savings were realised as a result of prudent financial management by the Deputy Governor and his team of Chief Officers. This expense, Mr. Speaker is therefore budget-neutral in the 2024 year while providing much needed relief for retired public servants.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that last Christmas, the Government provided a payment of \$250 for each pensioner. This year, the Government has been able to double that amount, taking into account increasing pressures on pensioners' purchasing power.

As we enter the holiday season, Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that we remember the past sacrifices of this group of older persons, most of whom have devoted lengthy careers in the Civil Service for the people of these Islands. As the Cayman Islands are glistening with holiday lights and families prepare to gather, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the sterling contributions of past civil servants who devoted themselves to building these beloved Cayman Islands that we all cherish today. The recipients of this said stipend contributed to the advancement of the Cayman Islands in ways too numerous to list exhaustively.

As a former educator myself, and the proud Minister of Education, it would be remiss of me, Mr. Speaker, not to cite the contributions of former teachers from our primary schools to the Truman Bodden Law School. The contributions of our past teachers continue to bear fruit for this country, even today. They equip successive generations of Caymanians with the knowledge necessary to lift themselves and their families out of poverty and to participate in Cayman's

thriving economy as employees or even being employers. They equip Cayman's leaders with the knowledge and character to take this country forward, including myself, your good selves and all honourable Members here today.

These men and women, Mr. Speaker, retired firemen [and] police officers who, throughout their service, ran into the face of danger when called upon by the community to keep it safe. It represents men and women, Mr. Speaker, ranging from those who have fought valiantly to protect our borders, to those who have worked collaboratively with elected officials in order to realise their visions for taking the country forward by delivering policies, programmes and services which make lives better across the entire Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, it is hoped that this small token of financial assistance as the holidays approach will give these former stewards, who are now contending with fixed incomes, some degree of comfort in knowing that their contributions are not forgotten. The Government is, therefore, extremely happy to offer this one-off payment of CI\$500 to retired public servants participating in the Public Service Pensions Plan in order to lessen their financial concerns during the Christmas season, and to ably demonstrate the country's gratitude for their past service.

Mr. Speaker, I should also note, that the public service pensioners receive inflationary protection automatically in their annual pensions in accordance to the Public Service Pension Act. Since 2022, pensioners have also received a cumulative total increase of 15.5 per cent, through annual inflation adjustments, which has partially offset the total inflation experienced in the Cayman Islands over the three-year period, as mentioned in the Consumer Price Index by the Economics and Statistics Office.

Retirees, Mr. Speaker, rely upon a mere portion of the salaries they earned during their active careers. Regrettably, while all face a reduced income, their expenses do not always decrease proportionately. For many pensioners, this means that every month comes with its own set of difficult financial decisions, Mr. Speaker. It is hoped that inbuilt inflation adjustments funded within the plan, and the Government's one-off Christmas payment will allow our public service pensioners to live with modest dignity and the knowledge that their contributions are remembered, and indeed, cherished by all. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, this one-time ex-gratia payment, which is expected to benefit some 2,500 existing pensioners within the Public Service Pension Plan, will hopefully create some added capacity for our valued pensioners to enjoy the Christmas holidays.

I would like to use this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to thank the Members of my Government, for the unanimous support of this one-time payment; and the management and staff of the Public Service Pensions Board for facilitating this much-needed support for our pensioners at Christmas. I can confidently say,

that all Members of the House will also embrace this initiative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may God continue to bless our beloved Cayman Islands and those who have served it faithfully during their active careers' tenure.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: I also have a statement to be delivered by the Honourable Deputy Governor.

**Honourable Deputy Governor
Section 11(6) appropriation
for the \$500 ex-gratia payment**

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson:

Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement under section 11(6) [appropriation] which is directly related to the announcement that the Premier just made and it makes it very clear that these funds are coming from within the budget and are cost-neutral.

Mr. Speaker, as required by section 11(6) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) (PMFA), I make this statement to Members of this honourable Parliament with respect to the exceptional circumstance transactions that were approved by the Cabinet for the Portfolio of the Civil Service, enabling the one-off payment to public service pensioners in December. Such transactions were approved pursuant to section 11(5) of the PMFA, and are being funded by HR savings realised within the Civil Service.

Accordingly, in December 2024, the Government extended a one-time special payment of \$500 for all persons receiving any form of public service pension. This one-off Christmas payment is being processed with urgency in order to ensure that it is available ahead of Christmas for more than 2,500 existing public service pensioners. Therefore, in accordance with section 11(5) of the PMFA, the Cabinet authorised the increase of \$1,282,000 for OE 19 – Ex-Gratia Recipients Plan Payments.

Mr. Speaker, the aforementioned exceptional circumstance transactions enable the Government to lend much-needed support to public service pensioners during the holidays. The Portfolio of the Civil Service and the Public Service Pensions Board are working collaboratively to deliver these payments this month. Even with the inclusion of this expense, the Government has maintained compliance with the principles of responsible financial management. Such an act underscores the Government's unwavering commitment to demonstrate both passion and wise financial management.

On behalf of our former public servants who served valiantly, I extend my deepest gratitude to the Government for its support of public servants both past and present.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: I have given permission to the Honourable Deputy Premier and Minister of Tourism & Ports to make two statements.

**Deputy Premier
Cayman Airways' Twin Otter Aircraft**

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the honour of joining Cayman Airways in celebrating the christening of the third Twin Otter aircraft to join the Cayman Airways fleet; a milestone moment for our national airline and our Islands. This aircraft represents a significant investment in Cayman Airways and underscores the Government's commitment to ensuring that there is reliable air bridge between Grand Cayman and our Sister Islands.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, it fulfils the commitment that I made to the honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman that my colleagues and I would do everything possible, to provide an additional aircraft to address the several longstanding challenges. I am pleased to have kept my word in that regard. The decision to purchase this particular type of aircraft was driven by several critical factors that made the Twin Otter, the best choice for our Islands' unique aviation needs, and will enable Cayman Airways to enhance its operations across the Cayman Islands.

With one aircraft always undergoing annual maintenance, the fleet previously relied on a single plane to service Little Cayman, risking service disruptions. The addition of the Twin Otter ensures consistent connectivity and reliability, Mr. Speaker. The Twin Otter's Short Takeoff and Landing (STOL), better known as STOL performance is perfectly suited for short and unpaved runways like Little Cayman's, allowing it to operate where other aircraft cannot. The aircraft can seamlessly switch between passenger and cargo configurations (with its fold-up seats), making it uniquely suited for transporting both passengers and supplies to Little Cayman, (including when barge services are disrupted by weather. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, its certified medevac setup supports vital emergency medical evacuations when needed.

Despite the hull being 48 years old, Mr. Speaker, the Twin Otter has under undergone extensive refurbishment, including new engines, wings, and other critical upgrades, ensuring it remains operational until at least 2040. It is essentially a new aircraft, Mr. Speaker. Moreover, this aircraft retains long-term value making it far more cost-effective than purchasing a newly produced plane.

The replacement of 35 outdated instruments with a streamlined "glass cockpit" featuring three advanced screens, reduces maintenance complexity, improves operational efficiency and reduces instances of parts being obsolete or unavailable. Competing models

like the Cessna 406 were considered prior to purchasing the Twin Otter but they did not meet the same operational requirements. The Twin Otter's unique combination of STOL performance, cargo versatility, and durability made it the only viable choice for the unique needs of Little Cayman. The Twin Otter can operate on grass, dirt, and other non-improved surfaces making it indispensable for maintaining reliable connectivity to remote islands like Little Cayman.

Beyond its technical features, the aircraft plays an essential role in supporting the Cayman Islands' economic and healthcare system by ensuring the smooth transport of passengers, goods and medical patients. Mr. Speaker, by acquiring the Twin Otter, Cayman Airways has invested in a robust, adaptable, and long-lasting solution tailored to the unique demands of the Cayman Islands, ensuring continued service and operational efficiency well into the future.

What makes this aircraft even more special, Mr. Speaker, is its registration, VP-CAW, which honours the late First Officer, Mr. Adrian West; a beloved member of staff within the Cayman Airways family who tragically passed away last year. I'm pleased that his memory will live on and he will always be remembered through this aircraft.

Mr. Speaker, the Twin Otter is the perfect gift from Government to our national airline and by extension to the residents of our Sister Islands who depend on this service to travel between our Islands.

May VP-CAW carry its passengers safely and proudly, continuing Cayman Airways' proud tradition of service excellence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, just so that you don't get confused by what I said. I said I have given you permission to deliver two, but it's actually three. I've just been handed the third one, so you can go ahead with all three of them.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Mr. Speaker, may I crave your indulgence to ask a question to the Minister on the statement that he has made?

The Speaker: Yes, I don't have the precise Standing Order reference at hand, but I know what it says.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 30(2).

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: [Section] 30 subsection (2) of the Standing Orders.

The Speaker: I do remember what it says. It says, you may ask permission to ask brief questions on the statement.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Just one question I have.

The Speaker: Yes, sir.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Okay?

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Through you to the Member: the Minister mentioned that this aircraft had been completely retrofitted with modern instruments in the glass cockpit, we call it. Is the intention to re-equip the remaining two Twin Otters so that they're all consistent in terms of their instrumentation?

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, are you in a position to answer that? Please proceed.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the honourable Member for the question.

I can't say that it is envisioned, because I have not had that discussion with the company, but your practical question makes logical sense from a maintenance and replacement perspective. I will examine that with the board of directors, if it's something they're considering, but it does sound plausible. I'm assuming that the only restrictions would be the finances necessary for the replacements. [As soon as I have the answer, I'll provide it to you in writing or for an announcement at the next sitting of the honourable House.](#)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the ability to present two more statements to this honourable House.

Department of Financial Assistance Policy Directives

Mr. Speaker, I rise to announce three urgent changes that I, in my capacity as the Minister for Social Development, with support from the Cabinet, have directed with immediate effect for the Department of Financial Assistance (DFA). The changes are aimed at improving the standard, responsiveness, compassion and safety of the most vulnerable who come to government seeking financial assistance for one reason or another.

As policy makers and stewards of our social development framework, we have a moral obligation to ensure that our policies and programmes meet the real world needs of our people.

The first directive mandates that when families and single parents with children approach the Department of Financial Assistance, formerly known as Needs Assessment Unit (NAU) seeking assistance and indicate that they have no place to live or that they are homeless, the Department must act without delay. Effectively, what this means, Mr. Speaker, is that families must be assisted and supported in securing accommodations immediately and as a matter of urgency, even if it means having to pay for a hotel for a short period of time until a longer-term solution accommodation is found.

Mr. Speaker, I do recognise that this Directive may increase the cost of the department's budget, but Mr. Speaker, the urgency of these situations where children are involved means that the safety and the dignity of those we are here to protect must override the other concerns, including cost.

I'm sure every Member of this honourable House has seen the headline in the *Cayman Compass* on the 10th October telling the story of a mother of two who was sleeping on the beach with her children because she had nowhere else to go. I'm sad to report that although the Department of Financial Assistance were aware of the seriousness of the issue and had done all that they could within their remit, the policies of the department were inadequate to comprehensively assist the family. Until this directive was approved on Tuesday of last week, the practice and the policy of the department was limited to approving financial assistance for accommodation and no more. Finding accommodation was the responsibility of the client.

Mr. Speaker, the combination of limited housing available on the island, the limited number of landlords willing to accept tenants who rely on government assistance, and the lack of government-owned and controlled transitional housing, created the perfect storm for the nightmare that, I'm sure, those children had to endure. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, sleeping on a beach in a tent, no electricity, no bathroom and exposed to the elements of weather? This is not what we want for our children.

Mr. Speaker, I will not go into what the possibilities could have been because it would be a horrific thought, but rather I will focus on how this directive will prevent the scenario from happening again.

I want to thank Mr. James Whittaker of *Cayman Compass* for writing this story and shedding light on the realities of what some Caymanians are facing today. More importantly, I want to congratulate the mother in the story, for having the bravery to share her story, not being concerned about the perceived shame by the public. That takes courage in today's world of instant media.

This new policy ensures that no Caymanian children who need help and whose families go to the department for assistance will face the trauma or the dangers of homelessness, because through this directive, we will now be prioritising safety, dignity, and

stability above all. Mr. Speaker, like the article rightfully highlighted, the gap in the social assistance safety net is significantly aggravated by the lack of availability of government transitional social housing.

I remember speaking about this issue when I was in Opposition last term. In fact, I brought a Motion to Parliament requesting that the government builds fifty, two-bedroom apartments that they would have in their control to assist in circumstances like the one I referred to earlier. Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, at that time, the former Minister and Member for West Bay South, was the Deputy Chief Officer for the Ministry responsible for these kinds of issues.

Mr. Speaker, I say this to demonstrate that this issue is not new. What is new though is this directive, which will ensure that no Caymanian children will have to be homeless, until we, the government, find a solution to fill the void of transitional housing. As Minister, I'm working closely with my amazing new Ministry team in Social Development to identify a solution before the term of this administration comes to an end.

The second directive ensures that no parent applying for financial assistance will be required or asked to seek maintenance from the other parent as a condition of receiving support. Mr. Speaker, we must recognise that requiring parents, particularly women, to seek maintenance from their children's father can sometimes place the mother in a vulnerable, or even dangerous situation. For those who have left abusive relationships, the act of pursuing maintenance may heighten tensions and expose them to further harm or abuse. As a government we cannot allow the pursuit of critical financial support to become a source of risk.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard of cases where mothers feel pressured into unwanted sex acts in order for the father to give financial help to take care of the child. Many times, mothers are subjected to physical, emotional and sexual abuse, or stress from the children's father, and they accept it because they need the money to keep them afloat. No one should be exposed to such abuse and potentially dangerous circumstances. This directive reflects our commitment to that principle, safeguarding lives and ensuring that financial assistance is accessible without fear and danger.

In my research, Mr. Speaker, I could find no developed modern jurisdiction which placed this requirement solely on parents, without state support. Where maintenance has to be sought first, in order to qualify for financial assistance, the state can intervene to support the parent to seek maintenance, which helps to ensure their safety.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is reviewing options for my consideration, which may include adding the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Department of Financial Assistance (DFA) as entities that can support parents applying for financial assistance to seek maintenance, ultimately allowing the government to go after the fathers

who neglect their financial responsibility to their children.

The third directive, Mr. Speaker, is to extend services of those receiving financial assistance by a further six months. The purpose of this directive is to prevent what can be perceived as granting help or refusing assistance to any client of the department for financial assistance during the election sensitivity period. This directive will help to preserve the credibility of the department from any political criticism. Where there are persons who are receiving financial assistance and are no longer in need, or their circumstances have changed as per the Financial Assistance Act, 2022, those persons should notify the department of their changes. In these circumstances the department can assess the household and determine whether they should still be receiving financial assistance.

Mr. Speaker, the overarching goal of these three directives is to remove any unnecessary obstacles for those seeking assistance, especially in moments of immediate crisis or prolonged hardship. By doing so, we are reinforcing the principle that financial assistance is a lifeline and should be available quickly, especially in dire circumstances. These measures also reflect our government's broader commitment to ensuring that our social safety net is not only robust but adaptable to the diverse needs of our people.

As we implement these directives, I have instructed the Department of Financial Assistance to monitor their effectiveness and to identify further opportunities for improving how we serve our people and the public. Mr. Speaker, the government's commitment is clear, and we will do whatever it takes to ensure that the most vulnerable among us are treated with care, respect and humanity. These three directives mark another step forward in creating a society where Caymanians can live with dignity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: I recognise the honourable Member for West Bay South.

Mr. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I crave your indulgence under Standing Order 30(2) to ask a few short questions for clarification. There are three directives, and I have a question on each of them.

The Speaker: Very well.

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

In relation to the first directive, as far as I can see from what's in the statement, this isn't new. This was already the practice of the department. The brick wall that would be run into every time you try to extend financial assistance on an emergency basis for a homeless situation was identifying housing, which the department has no remit over so my question is—

The Speaker: Remember you need to quickly turn that into a question.

Mr. André M. Ebanks: My question is, the statement closes identifying the solution before the term ends; but homes might not be built by then so, have any hotels now changed their mind that would be available to provide housing in that circumstance where there's homelessness?

In relation to the second—

The Speaker: Let's take them one at a time, so we don't get confused.

Mr. André M. Ebanks: Sure.

The Speaker: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, through you to the Member, though I think the question wasn't quite clear as to suggest that the practice was already in place, as I have been reliably informed it has not been the practice up until last year. It used to be a practice, but then, as the Member rightfully highlighted, there were some problems with hotels having conflicts with offering this service.

Mr. Speaker, what I would respond to that is by saying that simply because the hotels are not prepared, for one reason or another, to help persons in dire circumstances such as children who are homeless, is not an excuse for us not to solve the problem. Now, to answer his anticipated question, which is how we can build homes between now and the administration ending—

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, his question. Much of what he said was a statement, but his question is, *'Have the hotels changed their policy recently?'*

I'm trying to avoid back and forth, back and forth.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The simple answer is we have been able to assist a person with a hotel as recently as when I became Minister, so I'm assuming the answer must be yes. It would be unfair for me to say that all hotels are taking that policy, but there are some that are willing to work under dire circumstances.

The Speaker: Member for West Bay South, your second question.

Mr. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you for reiterating the question on the first directive.

On the second proposed directive, this practice is also not new. My question is: Is it not available to the Minister in the second directive to use TP 57 from the Department of Children and Family Services that helps

families in the exact circumstance that the proposed new directive seeks to assist with?

The Speaker: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Through you, Mr. Speaker. To answer the question, no, it is not in practice. Currently, the department obligates the parent to seek financial assistance. It is part of their obligation to have the parents file the necessary proceedings to seek maintenance; and yes, there are different ways that we can assist through the relevant TPs [Transfer Payments] under social development. Where we get the money from is a financial component which we will satisfy.

This directive is to take away the risk of a mother, or even a father, presenting court proceedings and the former partner being violent— either emotionally, physically or mentally— in response.

Mr. André M. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, just to clarify that answer, I think the Minister may be blending two different departments. The department that requires the information for filing is the Department of Financial Assistance. What I'm talking about is TP 57 under DCFS, Department of Children and Family Services, which has a wider remit to assist with exactly this type of situation.

The Speaker: Do you wish to respond, Honourable Minister? Third question.

Mr. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In relation to the third directive, if I followed this correctly, it is implemented only during the election sensitivity period. I wonder why that's the case? If it's urgent and it's something that's needed, why not extend it for all time?

The second thing, is that it's putting the onus on the client to step forward in the period to notify the department. Does that mean that there would be no reassessment and, regardless of whether or not the person still needs the money, which could go on to help other people who are in need, [the money] would still be given?

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, you may answer, but much of this questioning is now about operational issues, not policy matters, which is very difficult for a Minister to respond to. If you are able to, please go ahead.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker; you have rightfully highlighted the operational component.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Yes, you were once that Minister—and a very strong one, I dare say; and created the foundation upon which much social care is given today.

With that being said, the directive is pretty straightforward and we will leave it to the capable staff within both the Department of Financial Assistance and the Department of Children and Family services to deliver the policy directives as per the law.

The Speaker: Honourable Member for West Bay South, are you satisfied?

Mr. André M. Ebanks: I'm satisfied. You've given me the time to ask pertinent questions, thank you.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: You have one more statement, Honourable Deputy Premier.

Update - Cayman Islands tourism industry performance for the first three quarters of 2024

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide Members of this honourable House, and the listening public, with an update on the Cayman Islands tourism industry performance for the first three quarters of 2024. I thank you for affording me this privilege, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that stay over visitation has increased despite significant disruptions from an active hurricane season such as flight cancellations during the typically busy period—in early July due to Hurricane Beryl; and in September and October due to tropical storms, as well as in November for Hurricane Rafael.

Even so Mr. Speaker, the Cayman Islands tourism industry registered growth in stay over visitation, welcoming 351,248 tourists between January and October of this year, representing an increase of 2.2 per cent from last year. Looking at where our visitors are coming from, the United States accounted for 82.9 per cent of total visitation, Canada was the second largest source market at 6.5 per cent, and Europe followed at 4.7 per cent, reflecting a marginal increase from 4.5 per cent in 2023.

Projections for quarter four indicate a strong end to the year with close to 440,000 stay over arrivals marking an increase of 2 per cent over 2023. Inbound airline seat capacity from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom increased by a good percentage of 10.3 percent, rising from 570,308 seats in 2023 to 627,286 in 2024. The addition of 398 flights than in 2023 is a result of the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism Aviation Strategy which saw representatives from the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism

(DOT) attending a number of crucial aviation conferences worldwide to engage directly with airlines to attract new services to our destination.

While inbound service has increased to our Islands, we are mindful that the aviation industry continues to face challenges with equipment which is impacting global capacity. This could result in a reduction in services to the Cayman Islands from JetBlue during the summer of 2025.

The accommodation sector has shown significant growth in 2024 and currently includes 8,111 rooms, which is an increase of 487 rooms over last year. Apartments and condos accounted for 48 per cent of the industry's room stock; hotels [make up] 35 per cent; and guest homes are 17 per cent. Between January and September of 2024, the average daily rate (ADR) of a hotel room in the Cayman Islands was \$682, which is an increase of 11.2 per cent over last year. In the home-sharing sector, more commonly known as AirBnB and Vacation Rentals by Owners (VRBO), the ADR was \$632, reflecting an increase of 1.2 per cent over the same period in 2023.

Revenue collected from tourism accommodation charges has also increased, bolstered by the 11.2 per cent rise in our daily room rates. For 2024 government revenue collected for the accommodation sector is projected to be \$44.1 million, which is \$3.9 million more than budgeted, Mr. Speaker. This key performance indicator, as well as highlighting the strength of the industry, reflects the Ministry's return on investment for marketing spend. Funds spent on marketing the island attract a high-quality audience who pays accommodation taxes, and fees which are returned to government through revenue collection. Growth in ADR translates into revenue collection growth, delivering an additional boost to the local economy.

Mr. Speaker, the success of the tourism industry depends not only on the numbers but also on people, and therefore developing Caymanians to play a meaningful role in the industry remains a priority. I'm, therefore, pleased to share, that the Ministry and the Department of Tourism has invested over \$1.2 million in 2024 to support the professional development of Caymanians through scholarship and degree programmes, the School of Hospitality Studies, and other training activities. This is an increase of \$100,000 from 2023, and the breakdown per year is:

- in 2023 we spent \$1.1 million; and
- in 2024 we spent \$1.2 million.

By offering access to scholarships and training courses we're empowering Caymanians to pursue opportunities in hospitality, management and other tourism-related fields, creating a pipeline of talent to sustain and grow the industry in the years to come.

In September of this year, the Visitor Experience Development Grant Programme (or VEDG Programme) was launched by the Ministry of Tourism to help entrepreneurs and micro and small businesses

bring new products to market, to diversify our tourism offerings. The grant provides funding of up to \$50,000 per successful applicant, and following the launch we've had 110 applicants thus far. After careful review by the staff from the Ministry and from the Cayman Islands Centre for Business Development (CICBD), 44 semi-finalists have been selected. I am pleased that the first disbursement of funds is due to be issued this month, in December, to the successful applicants. Importantly, all applications will receive constructive feedback on their proposals, and those who were not successful are encouraged to refine their business plans or ideas with assistance from CICBD and reapply for the grant next year.

Mr. Speaker, while all the results from the stay over sector are showing encouraging growth, results from the cruise sector are not as positive. Passenger arrivals between January and October of 2024 are down by 14.6 per cent compared to the same period in 2023; 848,872 passengers arrived in the first ten months of the year, which is 145,047 fewer passengers than 2023; and 41.3 per cent or 596,705 less passengers compared to 2019. Over the 10-month period in 2024 there were 264 cruise calls—down 43 calls from 2023.

The current projections forecast that we will end the year with 1.1 million passengers which are 100,000 passengers less than last year. Other than a minor bump in 2025 to 1.3 million, this downward trend is expected to continue at a rate of 5.2 per cent annually moving forward. Until the question of the cruise pier has been definitively settled by referendum, there is very little the Ministry can do to increase passenger numbers other than lobby the cruise lines, which we continue to do at every opportunity possible.

As Members are aware, the Motion for the Referendum was duly passed at the last Sitting of Parliament in October, after having been gazetted for 28 days, in compliance with the constitutional provisions. We, therefore, intend to bring the Referendum Bill to Parliament at the next Meeting in 2025. I would like to note, Mr. Speaker, that the public education campaign is scheduled to begin once the Bill has successfully passed, and the Referendum is confirmed. It would be premature to start public education initiatives, which may be costly, prior to the Bill being passed.

Mr. Speaker, sustainably growing the Cayman Islands tourism industry cannot be achieved without marketing the destination effectively in the right places, at the right time, and to the right audiences. I have to say, that the Department of Tourism continues to excel in this regard, scoring a number of firsts for our Islands by leveraging outstanding creative thinking and partnerships. I will highlight two examples of that Mr. Speaker.

First, I'm pleased to advise that the Cayman Islands has become the first Caribbean destination to launch an omni-channel advertising campaign with United Airlines, whereby the Cayman Islands will be

featured in dynamic and interactive ways across United Airlines' media channels including:

- in-flight entertainment,
- airport out of home advertising,
- digital media, and
- on a dedicated page on the United.com website.

This allows the Cayman Islands to reach travellers before, during and after their trips, and is something no Caribbean destination has been able to do with United Airlines before, in such an integrated way. Mr. Speaker, this is unprecedented and highlights the creativity, expertise, and exceptional talent we are fortunate to have within DoT, under the leadership of Director Rosa Harris.

In another first, the Cayman Islands have been accepted as a destination member to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), which is the global authority on the economic and social contributions of travel and tourism. Membership includes more than 200 CEOs, Chairpersons and Presidents of the world's leading travel and tourism companies across all global industries. Being a destination member in the WTTC gives the Cayman Islands a global profile in the tourism arena along with access to regional forums and exclusive member events for networking and partnering with top executives from luxury hotel brands, credit card companies, tour operators and more; all of which present business development opportunities for our destination.

Mr. Speaker, the examples I have cited are just two of many such accomplishments, which not only increase the visibility of the Cayman Islands globally, but enhance our ability to reach and influence our target markets more effectively. I wish to publicly applaud the Department of Tourism for their stellar achievements.

Mr. Speaker, all of the key performance indicators for the Cayman Islands tourism industry tell a story of strategic success in repositioning the industry in the post-pandemic tourism landscape. With stay-over visitor numbers continuing to increase, the growth trends indicate strong market confidence supported by increased airlift and effective destination marketing, particularly in high value segments.

To recap, Mr. Speaker, the key takeaways of the tourism industry performance in 2024 are:

- (1) Steady growth in core markets — year-end visitation is up 2.2 per cent over last year
- (2) Growth in accommodation — room stock is up by 487 rooms over last year
- (3) The average daily rate is up by 11.1 per cent over last year
- (4) Increased airline capacity with total seats up by 10.3 per cent over last year
- (5) Increased airline connectivity with 398 more flights than 2023

- (6) Growth in revenue collection: Tourism accommodation charges are up \$3.9 million over budget

All of this growth is supported by:

- (1) Effective, targeted marketing initiatives, delivering strong performance, particularly in the luxury market
- (2) Successful marketing diversification, delivering growth in multiple regions
- (3) Strengthened international presence through major trade shows and participation
- (4) Ground-breaking partnerships, including the first ever Caribbean marketing partnership with United Airlines
- (5) Acceptance to the World Travel and Tourism Council
- (6) Enhanced visitor experience initiatives
- (7) The launch of the Visitor Experience Development Grant Programme offering up to \$50,000 per application to support young Caymanian entrepreneurs

Mr. Speaker, these achievements would not be possible without the hard work, diligence and expertise of the staff of the Ministry and Department of Tourism. The strategic planning, innovative thinking and tireless execution has been instrumental in delivering these impressive results so, as we look ahead to 2025, I am very optimistic about the future of tourism in the Cayman Islands.

On that note, I'm pleased to reveal that for the coming season, the Department of Tourism has invested an additional \$2 million in marketing spend to provide an additional boost to the industry, reinforcing the Government's ongoing commitment and support for the tourism industry.

On that very happy note, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of our partners and stakeholders in the industry, for their perseverance and willingness to pivot at a moment's notice, as they have done several times this year, and for their dedication to the sustainable growth and prosperity of our tourism industry. I look forward to accomplishing future growth, innovation, partnership and collaboration as we continue to grow and strengthen this vital pillar of our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have given permission to the Honourable Minister of Border Control, Labour and Culture to make a short statement.

Minister of Border Control, Labour, Culture, Sustainability & Climate Resiliency and Wellness

**Section 11(5) Allocations to
TP 119 - Community Development Initiatives**

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the main reason that I requested to be the Minister responsible for culture as a subject matter was to ensure that the Government continued to make investments to support events, exhibitions and programmes that enrich our cultural landscape and yield significant social and economic benefits, fostering a sense of optimism for the future. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, during 2024 it was made evident that there would be a shortfall of funding for the cultural community.

As such, Cabinet approved, pursuant to section 11(5) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision), for additional monies to be moved from TP 119 - Community Development Initiatives for culture-related expenditures from savings found within the Cayman Islands budget 2024/25. Mr. Speaker, because Cabinet approved the additional moneys to move from TP 119, pursuant to section 11(6) of the PMFA, I am rising to make a statement outlining the exceptional circumstances of the executive financial transaction authorised by Cabinet, and the effect on the compliance with the principles of responsible financial management.

Mr. Speaker, exceptional circumstance is defined as: **"an event which occurs during the financial year which—**

- (a) Is beyond the control of Cabinet;**
- (b) Could not have been reasonably anticipated at the time of enactment of the *Appropriation Law* for that financial year;**
- (c) Has an economic or social impact that is significant enough to necessitate executive financial transactions different from those planned for that financial year; and**
- (d) Requires the executive financial transactions to be entered into in a timescale that makes compliance with the procedure established by section 12, impractical".**

Mr. Speaker, based on the above definition, I can confirm that \$150,000 have been reallocated to TP 119 and meet the following conditions outlined in the definition:

- (a) Is beyond the control of Cabinet;
- (b) Could not have been reasonably anticipated at the time of enactment of the *Appropriation Law* for that financial year; and
- (c) Has an economic or social impact that is significant enough to necessitate executive financial transactions different from those plans for that financial year.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, please allow me to reiterate my commitment to the cultural community by confirming my continued support for cultural initiatives that empower and foster unity, thereby creating opportunities for citizens to connect with our rich heritage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That concludes the statements for today.

Mr. Bernie A. Bush, Elected Member for West Bay North: I beg your indulgence, sir, to let this honourable House and the country know that Mr. Jordan Crooks just made the finals in Budapest in the 100-metre, and he's broken some records; again, doing very well. Tomorrow at 11:30 the Cayman Islands could get a world record in the 100-metre in a long pool.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: I am most happy for that intervention. Wonderful news!

Madam Clerk.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: I have given permission to the Member for West Bay West to make a personal explanation with respect to comments in Committee on Monday.

Hon. W. McKeever Bush

Hon. W. McKeever Bush, Elected Member for West Bay West: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer to the remarks made by the Member for West Bay South on Monday when he cast a negative comment about my extensive history of promoting beneficial legislation and regulation for the benefit of the Cayman Islands financial services industry.

I am not surprised at his comments because for most of the time that I was promoting the foundation legislation and regulation in these Islands, my learned friend, my cousin, was still in high school and may not be aware of the facts of the matter. He obviously needs something of a further education and certainly, on the question of the persons with whom he should consult—and by consult, I mean, proper and effective consultation with the right members of the financial services industry.

Let me start by saying, Mr. Speaker, that in the 1990s, I was part of the government that consulted with the leading experts in the private sector who produced for these Islands, the Mutual Funds Law and the Exempted Limited Partnership Law, which formed the very foundation of the 48,000-plus open and closed-ended funds that we have in the Cayman Islands today, not the 30,000 number he refers to as “regulated”. It is perhaps regrettable, that the clarity of this initial

legislation has been clouded, and not improved by subsequent regulation and unnecessary Amendment, but that follows from the blind adherence to the suggestion that all Amendments and increased regulation are necessarily beneficial or are designed, in fact, to solve an actual problem. This arises because there is insufficient understanding, demonstrated by far too many, of the real fundamentals of the financial services industry because the right people are not being consulted with or listened to.

If my learned friend, the Member for West South, had read my very lengthy presentation—I'm sure he remembers it, he heard it—in this House in November last year, which is available still in the *Hansards* on the subject of the serious error made with regard to public access to beneficial ownership registers, he would know that we are on the point of making yet another mistake. The 2024 UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council communiqué, with which our Premier has just returned from London, notes: “**the UK Government's ambition is that Publicly Accessible Registers of Beneficial Ownership (PARBOs) become a global norm...**”

As I pointed out in my November presentation, there's nothing of that sort currently as a global standard, and not even in the United States, where the Texas Court has now enjoined non-public access filings of the beneficial ownership with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN). It is not the standard in the European Union, notwithstanding the sixth anti-money laundering directive. It is not the standard anywhere else in the world, yet we are told that the Cayman Islands is meeting a global standard, when it should be doing nothing of the sort, as far as I am concerned.

Implementation of public access, whether through journalists or whosoever, will be a serious detriment to the Cayman Islands financial services industry, which is already labouring under the double burdens of excessive and unnecessary hyper regulation and increased costs. That legislation, as far as I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, is playing with fire.

The position here has been badly misrepresented to the Cayman Islands people. Furthermore, as I said in my November address to the House and on my Facebook, no good reason for public access has been established, and there are experts in the private sector who will tell my learned friend exactly why that is the case, and why this Government's regulatory initiative is wholly misplaced. More so, as the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer has now made it clear that such legislation cannot be extended to the Cayman Islands by way of Order in Council. He has, no doubt, finally had the benefit of legal advice to which I referred in my November address; thus, it seems Mr. Speaker, as this unfolds, I am right to-date and have been proven right all along.

On the subject of being right, let me now turn to the Member's Virtual Asset (Service Providers) Act.

I do not know with whom he consulted with regard to his Amendment, but his Amendment misses the entire point. The Act is a shambles, and has resulted in hundreds and hundreds of token issuers being incorporated not in the Cayman Islands, but in the British Virgin Islands—and I will tell you why the threat is worse now. Simply, it is at the feet of a former Minister of Financial Services that we can lay the blame; and I am going to be very specific about this so that there can be no doubt, and no more confusion on this in the House, on who undertakes proper consultation and who understands the issues that face the financial industry.

In the definition of “virtual asset service”, the words, “the issue of virtual assets” were inexplicably inserted on the Floor of the House without reason or consultation; we now know that. The result of this has been, as I mentioned, that whilst the foundation company may be formed in the Cayman Islands, the underlying token issue has to be formed in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) where no such regulation restriction exists, because therein, the BVI licensing is not necessary, so the market has spoken.

This has already cost the Cayman Islands money—hundreds of incorporations; but if this is not remedied immediately, (be the subject of my learned friend’s Amendment), and we know this will take some time, still I say immediately, the position is about to get worse, as the BVI are about to introduce a foundation law, modelled on our own, which will result in the entire Fintech industry moving to the BVI and the Cayman Islands losing its place in financial innovation and indeed losing significant revenues. This is of critical importance because my learned colleague would know, if he is undertaking proper consultation, that the number of hedge funds formed is dropping dramatically, as is the number of private equity vehicles—not saying so publicly, but it’s happening.

Perhaps, my learned friend could enlighten the House sometime, when he gets the opportunity, as to the results of his consultations on the subject of the prospects of the financial services industry which, I believe, if we continue along the current path, looks less than we would want it to be.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to be able to stop him from the kind of chastising wrongly that he attempted to do the other day; but you know, they are good at making wrong assumptions. They just made a big one when they walked away and thought they were *gonna* call elections; *ha!*

I have had the portfolio of finance, Mr. Speaker, which included everything that several Members have today. I have had the duty to put in place regulations to protect the financial services with agreements, nearly thirty of them, with nearly every major country in the world, and I travelled by plane and train to do so. That is only one example of putting regulations in place, that really protects and whitens our regulatory regime.

The only thing that I didn’t do, was to do everything the United Kingdom wanted me to do, because I always felt it was not good for Cayman.

Thank you very much, Mr.—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. W. McKeever Bush: I left my pen home, yes.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I think this would be a good moment for the luncheon suspension. Shall we endeavour to be back at 2:15 p.m.?

Proceedings suspended at 12:48 p.m.

Proceedings resumed at 2:52 pm

The Speaker: Parliament is resumed. Please be seated.

OBITUARY AND OTHER CEREMONIAL SPEECHES

The Speaker: None today, but I gather there are quite a few persons that we have lost, so I’ll advise all Members to prepare; that we will have a session tomorrow to deal with obituaries and the loss of so many Caymanians.

RAISING OF MATTERS OF PRIVILEGES

The Speaker: None.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS

THIRD READINGS

BANKS AND TRUST COMPANIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O’Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Banks and Trust Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Banks and Trust Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

Parliament of the Cayman Islands

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Banks and Trust Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

COMPANIES (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Companies (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Companies (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Companies (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

COMPANIES MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Companies Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Companies Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agree: The Companies Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 has been given a third reading and passed.

EXEMPTED LIMITED PARTNERSHIP (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Exempted Limited Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Exempted Limited Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Exempted Limited Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

INSURANCE (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill shortly entitled the insurance (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Insurance (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Insurance (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANIES (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Limited Liability Companies (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Limited Liability Companies (Amendment and

Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Limited Liabilities Companies (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly:
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Limited Liability Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled, the Limited Liability Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Limited Liability Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

MONETARY AUTHORITY (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly:
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Monetary Authority (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Monetary Authority (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Monetary Authority (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 has been given a third reading and passed.

MUTUAL FUNDS (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly:
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Mutual Funds (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled Mutual Funds (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Mutual Funds (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

PARTNERSHIP (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly:
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Partnership (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

PRIVATE FUNDS (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly:
Once again, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move the Bill shortly entitled the Private Funds (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Private Funds (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Private Funds (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

SECURITIES INVESTMENT BUSINESS (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Securities Investment Business (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Securities Investment Business (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Securities Investment Business (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

VIRTUAL ASSET (SERVICE PROVIDERS) (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Premier and Minister of Financial Services.

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled the Virtual Asset (Service Providers) (Amendment) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled Virtual Asset (Service Providers) (Amendment) Bill,

2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Virtual Asset (Service Providers) (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (VALIDATION) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport and Development.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that a Bill shortly entitled Information and Communications Technology (Validation) Bill, 2024 be read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Information and Communications Technology (Validation) Bill, 2024 be given a third reading and passed. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Information and Communications Technology (Validation) Bill, 2024 was given a third reading and passed.

FIRST READINGS

MISUSE OF DRUGS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is deemed to have been read a first time and is set down for a second reading.

TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: The Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is deemed to have been read a first time and is set down for a second reading.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT BILL, 2024

The Speaker: The Public Transport Bill, 2024 is deemed to have been read a first time and is set down for a second reading.

OLDER PERSONS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: The Older Persons (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is deemed to have been read a first time and is set down for a second reading.

CHILDREN (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: The Children (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is deemed to have been read a first time and is set down for a second reading.

MAINTENANCE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: The Maintenance (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is deemed to have been read a first time and is set down for a second reading.

ADOPTION BILL, 2024

The Speaker: The Adoption Bill, 2024 is deemed to have been read a first time and is set down for a second reading.

SECOND READINGS

MISUSE OF DRUGS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General, Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the Second Reading of a Bill, the long title of which is A Bill for an Act to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act (2017 Revision) to enhance the legislative framework for combatting illicit trafficking activities conducted by air; to provide for reciprocal enforcement powers in relation to aircraft suspected of being involved in illicit trafficking activities; to designate officers of the Cayman Islands Coast Guard as enforcement officers under the Act; and for incidental and connected purposes.

The Speaker: A Bill shortly entitled the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, 2024 has been duly moved.

Does the Honourable Attorney General wish to speak thereto?

The Attorney General, Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, briefly sir.

Mr. Speaker, I move the Bill on behalf of the Government, and as the title suggests, it is a proposed Amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act (2017 Revision). The general purpose of the Bill as outlined, is to deal with the suppressing of illicit maritime and air trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances primarily in the Caribbean area. In doing so, Mr. Speaker, if passed, the Bill would also facilitate greater cooperation between neighbouring countries as it

relates to trafficking by air or by sea of these narcotic substances.

Mr. Speaker, the cooperation would probably be underpinned by an arrangement that is being worked out between the UK and other Caribbean countries including Overseas Territories called the San Jose Accord or Aruba Agreement. If it ever comes to fruition, Mr. Speaker, that agreement or treaty, would help to facilitate the cooperation between countries in the Caribbean region as it relates to interdiction of narco-trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill itself seeks to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act (2017 Revision) to enhance the legislative framework and for combating the trafficking activities conducted by air. Among other things, it provides for reciprocal enforcement powers in relation to aircraft suspected of being involved in illicit trafficking activities and designating officers of the Cayman Islands Coast Guard as enforcement officers under the Act for such purposes as well.

Clause 1 of the Bill, as usual, provides for the short title.

Clause 2 seeks to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act (2017 Revision), the principal Act, to update references to certain words used throughout the Act. For example, the words "customs officer", are to be deleted wherever they appear, and would be replaced by the words "customs and border control officer".

Clause 3 amends section 2 of the Act to provide for the insertion of definitions for certain words used throughout the Bill. These include definition for the words "Cayman aircraft", "Cayman Islands waters", "customs and border control officer", "enforcement officer", among other things.

Clause 5 of the Bill amends section 18 of the Act to provide that anything which would constitute a drug trafficking offence if done on land in the Islands constitutes that offence if done on a Cayman registered aircraft. Currently, Mr. Speaker, the section stipulates that anything which would constitute a drug trafficking offence if done on land in the Islands would constitute that offence if done on a Cayman registered ship. We are extending that principle to cover aircraft as well, Mr. Speaker. The reference to acts done on Cayman aircraft seeks to enhance the framework for combating illicit trafficking activities conducted by air.

Clause 6 amends section 19(1) of the Act to extend the application of this section to Cayman aircraft and to aircraft registered in a state, other than the Islands, which is a party to the Vienna Convention or the Treaty of San José. The Vienna Convention, Mr. Speaker, is the one that deals with illicit drugs.

The clause also amends section 19(2) of the Act to provide that a person on a ship or an aircraft to which section 19(1) applies, wherever it may be, commits an offence if the person

- (a) Has a controlled drug in the person's possession; or

- (b) Is knowingly concerned in the carrying or concealing of a controlled drug on the ship or on the aircraft, and

Knowing or having reasonable grounds to suspect that a drug is intended to be imported or has been exported contrary to section 3(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act or a law of any state other than the Cayman Islands.

Clause 7 of the Bill amends the Act by repealing and substituting a new section 20 in order to extend the application of this section to provide for enforcement powers in respect of both ships and aircraft. Under the proposed section 20, it is the Governor or, where so delegated, the relevant competent authority, who is responsible for authorising the use of the powers conferred on an enforcement officer which are exercisable in relation to certain ships or aircraft for detecting and taking appropriate action in respect of prescribed offences.

The Relevant competent authority is defined as—

- (a) In relation to aircraft, the Director General of Civil Aviation Authority or his designate; and
- (b) In relation to ships, the Commandant of the Coast Guard or the designate of the Commandant.

The proposed section 20 also provides, Mr. Speaker, that the Governor or the relevant competent authority shall not grant this authority unless the relevant convention state has, in relation to the ship or to the aircraft of that convention state, requested the assistance of the Cayman Islands for the purpose of detecting or taking appropriate action in respect of these offenses. The proposed section provides that the Governor or the relevant competent authority shall impose conditions or limitations on the exercise of the powers as may be necessary. Furthermore, the proposed section 20 provides that the powers which are conferred on enforcement officers are not to be exercised in or over the territory or the territorial waters of a state other than the Cayman Islands without the authority of the Governor or the relevant competent authority.

Clause 8 of the Bill amends section 21 of the Act to deal with jurisdictional matters on prosecutions in respect of both ships and aircraft.

Clause 9 amends the Act by repealing and substituting section 22 to provide for matters related to the entry into territorial waters by law enforcement officials on board law enforcement vessels of convention states.

The proposed section 22 also expands the definition of the word “law enforcement vessel” to expressly include an aircraft of a convention state which is authorised to be in the government’s service of that state for the purpose of enforcement under the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, finally, Clause 10 amends Schedule 4 of the Act to provide for the extension of the application of enforcement powers in relation to aircraft

and not just ships. Clause 10 also amends Schedule 4 to provide that the enforcement officer may monitor an aircraft and where the aircraft lands in the Islands, the enforcement officer may detain the aircraft if the enforcement officer thinks it necessary for the exercise of the functions of the enforcement officer. If an enforcement officer detains an aircraft, he or she shall serve on the pilot, a written notice stating that the aircraft is to be detained until the notice is withdrawn by the service on the pilot of a further written notice by that enforcement officer to that effect.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, the Bill, if passed, will enhance the legislative framework for combating illicit trafficking activities conducted by air and by sea and ensure that the Cayman Islands have the necessary domestic legislation in place to deal with those things, and in the event of the Treaty of San José, we could also give effect to that Treaty if extended to us by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Speaker, a very short Bill, but quite understandably, very important, so I commend it to honourable Members of this House. I thank you.

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

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Official Opposition just to lend our support to this Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, 2024. It’s good to see that it’s expanding and giving more powers to our Coast Guard as we realise that the security of our borders, especially our coastlines, are critical to law enforcement and to controlling the flow of illicit drugs and firearms— of course, we had our first case of human trafficking tried in the Courts this year.

We have heard from the Attorney General on this, and we are in full support of this Amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the Bill, but also to extend my thanks to all those involved in law enforcement with regards to dealing with this issue. Looking at the Compendium of Statistics, in terms of drug crime, so far 2023 has actually been reported as one of the lowest on record. Just to put that in context for Members of this honourable House and the listening public:

Year	Crime by Offence
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	(Drugs)
2016	200
2017	179
2018	205
2019	167
2020	182
2021	165
2022	154
2023	150

Thus, you can see that there was a gradual decline over the last number of years, and I think all of us, not just inside this House but outside of it, owe all of our residents, our public service and those in the private sector who work to bring these numbers down because I think that's actually a good trend; it says that at least, something is working.

One of the things I was curious [about], Mr. Speaker, as I was reading the Bill and looking at the Treaty of San José and the different signatories, I noticed that this started around 2003 with many of the countries ratifying it around 2008. Something I could not find any documentation on is that there were four countries that were yet to sign on to the Treaty of San José and those four were: Jamaica, Haiti, Panama and the United Kingdom. I'm open, when the Honourable Attorney General goes to wrap up, if he can actually speak to whether the UK has already signed on to it or if they have not, then what timeline they're looking at to directly make sure it's there— at least, if they did, I just couldn't find it.

Another thing I want to touch on briefly, Mr. Speaker, is that while we are looking at enhancing our security feature, we need to also be mindful of the actual sentences and so forth. We have seen in many media reports that there seems to be a different sentencing guideline for people who show up at the airport with drugs or gummies, for example, and those who are Caymanian. It is causing concern— at least among some of the people who have spoken to me about it.

I know there were recent reports where some children ingested ganja gummies and ended up being hospitalised. I think it's important for the public to recognise why these efforts are necessary, because when our children are getting access to these kinds of drugs and being hospitalised for it at such a young age, this is why we need legislation such as this to protect our borders a bit more. I think that is something that we should never forget. While to some extent, over the years we have culturally relaxed our approach to dealing with cannabis, where we know some people can have it for medicinal purposes and, in some cases, we do recognise that small quantities should be decriminalised, nonetheless, it is still a drug that can damage people's health, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things I would like to touch on with the Attorney General is the issue of sentences, and we need to look at it. There seems to be some disproportion in the way in which some

Caymanians are treated and it is something that needs to be looked into.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on amnesty bins. This is something that some countries have—and I know local attorney Richard Barton has spoken about it also. We do recognise that some countries have gummies, et cetera, that people can have [and] casually walk through the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) [screening] in the US with it, and when they arrive here, realise, *oops*, this is not something that's legal in Cayman. If we could have some amnesty bins at the airport, so when people come in and recognise that this is an issue, or Cayman is not a place where these things are legal, at least they can dump them willingly before ending up in court unnecessarily, because sometimes it may be second nature to people who are doing it. I think that is also something we need to look at while we're looking at this legislation.

I commend this legislation. Anything to strengthen our borders, I support. I just want to go on record, again, to thank all those involved in law enforcement for the job that they have done; the numbers speak for themselves and we have seen a decline in the number of crimes being reported.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Honourable Member for Newlands.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton, Elected Member for Newlands: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to similarly support the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, 2024. Mr. Speaker, prior to reading the Bill, I was under the impression that Cayman Islands registered aircraft were similarly treated as is the case with Cayman Islands ships, so I am very grateful in the context. I think we have much anecdotal evidence of aircraft being used, particularly small aircraft, to smuggle a variety of drugs across areas of the Caribbean. We've certainly had issues with aircraft that were suspected of doing that; landing and perhaps in unsuccessful ways in the country, so I am particularly happy that the Bill seeks to include aircraft and treat them as an extension of the territory in the same way as we treat Cayman Islands registered vessels or ships. Similarly, Mr. Speaker, recognising and empowering the Coast Guard and the Commandant is a very useful addition in that respect.

I would also join my colleague, the Member for Bodden Town West in commending the excellent work of all of our law enforcement authorities, and the really amazing development of the Coast Guard. The equipment, effectiveness and professionalism that they bring to keeping this country safe and utilising the new powers they'll have in respect of this to keep our children and our families away from the effects of illicit drugs.

Mr. Speaker, with those few comments, again, I support the Bill. Thank you.

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 Honourable Attorney General to exercise his right of reply.

The Attorney General, Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin: I do thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank the honourable Members who spoke, and those who have expressed their support otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, just in response to the honourable Member for Bodden Town West, the Treaty in fact entered into force in 2008 as he correctly pointed out. Just for what it's worth, it is a treaty that is intended—well, it says among other things— that, **“The Parties shall co-operate to the fullest extent possible in combating illicit maritime and air traffic in and over the waters of the Caribbean area, consistent with available law enforcement resources of the Parties and related priorities, in conformity with the international law of the sea and applicable agreements, with a view to ensuring that suspect vessels and suspect aircraft are detected, identified, continuously monitored, and where evidence of involvement in illicit traffic is found, suspect vessels are detained for appropriate law enforcement action by the responsible law enforcement authorities”**.

Mr. Speaker, the Treaty itself seeks to build upon the work already undertaken by signatories to the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances or the 1988 Vienna Convention.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Member is correct in that, while the United Kingdom is one of the state parties which has signed the Treaty of San José, it has not yet ratified the Treaty. Mr. Speaker, the United States [sic] has taken the position that they would like to have it extended to the Overseas Territories (OTs) at the appropriate stage and at the time of ratification, and so, what they have invited the Caribbean Overseas Territories to do, is to ensure that they have the appropriate domestic legislation in place in order to be able to comply with the provision of the Treaty. In this regard, I think the Turks and Caicos Islands might be ahead of us in terms of some of the Amendments. We are certainly moving in that direction, and as far as I'm aware, some of the other OTs in the region are working on theirs so, to answer the honourable Member's question, it is not yet ratified, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in respect of his other observations, I've always heard this discussion about disparity in terms of sentencing. I strongly suggest, Mr. Speaker— maybe the best way for me to do that is to probably have a word with the Chief Justice and see whether they could sort of— commission a review and

provide empirical data to see whether or not there is any evidence to that effect. Usually, when the court is dealing with sentencing, some of the issues they look at are the nature and seriousness of the offence and whether or not the person has a previous conviction. They would also be guided by a social inquiry report. Based on the outcome of that exercise, they would then look at the sentencing guidelines that have been crafted by the Chief Justice, and see what range a particular person falls into.

I am not in any position to say that I am aware of any sort of deliberate effort, or otherwise, in terms of how sentences are handed out based on one's nationality, status or anything. I think the best way for me to help and have the matter properly ventilated is to speak to the Chief Justice to see if we can look back at five years of data or something, and assist us with that empirical evidence so that we can have an informed position on the issue. *I undertake to do so, Mr. Speaker; I'll be seeing her tomorrow and I certainly will suggest that it would be very helpful to do.*

Mr. Speaker, of course I also join Members in commending the effort of our law enforcement agencies. It is true, as was pointed out, that our borders tend to be somewhat porous and that has brought about certain vulnerabilities, as we are aware, [like] contraband pouring into the jurisdiction. The police, the Coast Guard, the National Security Council and the Cabinet are always looking at ways to enhance the security of the borders—looking at drones, looking at other measures [and] Government continues to provide financing to the Coast Guard and the police to try and enhance the security of the border.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, as the honourable Member pointed out, the numbers seem to be trending in the right direction when it comes on to interdiction and long may that continue; but Mr. Speaker, once passed by this Parliament, this piece of legislation will also help to enhance the security of the borders and hopefully will help to drive down the numbers even more.

I really thank honourable Members for their support. and look forward to safe passage.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, 2024 be given a second reading. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was given a second reading.

TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Attorney General.

[Inaudible interjection]

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Okay. Honourable Minister, can you save me the embarrassment the next time around; do you also have carriage of the Public Transport Bill?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Okay. I recognise the Honourable Minister for Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport and Development.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of a Bill entitled the Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

The Speaker: The Bill has been duly moved. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Yes, sir.

[Pause]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, honourable Members, today I arise to speak about the upcoming amendments to our Traffic Act (2023 Revision) through the Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024. The Bill is a cornerstone in our efforts to create a safer, more efficient and more inclusive system for the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, one of the key provisions in the Bill is the ability to register a vehicle on behalf of disabled persons. This change is vital for ensuring that members of our disabled community have the same access to mobility as everyone else, reinforcing our commitment to inclusivity and equality.

The Bill supports a crucial enhancement to our emergency response framework by classifying the [vehicles and vessels of the] regiment and the Coast Guard as emergency vehicles. The designations will ensure that these essential services can operate with necessary priorities, allowing them to respond swiftly and effectively in emergencies.

In our pursuit of road safety, amendments also facilitate an increase in ticketable offences. This includes penalties for the improper display of registration plates and the misuse of a Jake brakes by heavy trucks.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: By addressing these issues we aim to promote regulatory compliance and responsible driving.

Another fundamental aspect of the amendments is the provision for establishing regulations related to the demerit point system. Such a system will

serve as an effective tool for promoting responsible driving habits and ensuring accountability, ultimately contributing to the reduction of traffic violations. Additionally, the amendment supports clarifying the wording concerning the restrictions on using and holding mobile phones and other handheld devices while driving. Clear and precise language in this area is essential to combat distracted driving, which remains a significant contributor to the road accidents in the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker and honourable Members, as part of ongoing efforts to [support] these important changes to come, we have laid a solid foundation. We have been taking a cross-sectional approach to bring the general public on board [and] in-line with the vision of safer roads. For example, you would recall us rolling out the collaborative efforts of the 'Road to Zero' campaign through the National Road Safety Committee to ensure that the general public understands the importance of road safety.

This was also supported by the road safety improvements, such as work done on Spotts Straight, the site of six of the eight road fatalities that occurred this year. Progress has also been made on our work to introduce vehicle safety standards for the Cayman Islands. Furthermore, we will be updating relevant traffic regulations and public passenger vehicle regulations following the changes to the preliminary legislation, fostering a more *[inaudible]* transportation framework.

To ensure [that] we are best positioned for these changes, we are also conducting an organisation review, to improve governance and transportation as a whole; this includes a thorough evaluation of the Department of Vehicles and Drivers' Licensing (DVDL), the Public Transport Unit (TPU), and National Roads Authority (NRA). As part of the comprehensive overhaul, we will also be laying the Green Paper of the public transport in this sitting (which we did this morning) reinforcing the commitment to a transformative approach to our transport system in the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, honourable Members, the changes in the Traffic (Amendment) Bill and our groundwork are all designed to provide a strong foundation and important proposals made to the Public Transport Bill. Together, they represent a comprehensive approach to improve our transportation system, prioritising accessibility, safety and efficiency for all citizens.

I urge the esteemed House to support the amendments, as they will solidify the work that we have been doing in the last few years. Thank you for your attention and your commitments.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak?
[Pause] The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask for a few clarifications on the Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for bringing these amendments and I think you heard the cheering from the halls when he spoke about the Jake brakes which rattle everybody's windows and homes at all hours of the morning and night.

Mr. Speaker, as I went through the Bill, there were a couple of things. I think in clause 4, it speaks to **“amend the section 14(2)(a) of the Principal Act in order to provide, among other things, that a licence may be issued for five years where a vehicle is a new vehicle which is being registered in the Cayman Islands for the first time.”**

Fundamentally, I have no issues with that, Mr. Speaker; what I want to inquire about is—I don't know if the Minister can find this out—if a car is written off by the insurance company, does the insurance company turn in the plates or is it registered at the licensing department that the car has been written off? My concern is because five years is a long time, so if a vehicle is purchased brand new, gets written off by the insurance company, a garage buys it, they patch it back with two or three other wrecked vehicles they had, next thing you know, you have a vehicle that has the potential to malfunction.

We have all seen the vehicles on the side of the road with their lights flashing and windshield wipers going off and the poor driver standing outside wondering what's happening, or we've seen vehicles just catching fire. One can only assume that without any evidence of massive recalls, that these were vehicles that were repaired and those malfunctions happened.

Five years is a long time if a vehicle has been written off or in a major accident and has been rebuilt or repaired and put back on the road. I don't know if it is... It's possible that it is law, but I don't know if it's mandatory or a practice for insurance companies to notify the licensing department or to turn in the plates. If the insurance company pays the person off for the vehicle, do they receive the plates and turn them in? I don't have the answers for this, but I think it's a genuine concern.

In clause 5, I just want to confirm two things. Clause 5 speaks to section 25 that deals with the new residents and visitors to Cayman **“of the prescribed age”**; I assume that assumption is to ensure that the person is 17 years or older. The second thing is, how did we arrive to the United Kingdom, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Isle of Man and Jersey? I can guess, but perhaps you could shine some light on that for us.

With those few clarifications, the official Opposition have no issues with the Bill and support it otherwise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak?
[Pause] Does any other Member wish to speak?
[Pause] The honourable Member for Prospect.

Mrs. Sabrina T. Turner, Elected Member for Prospect: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In regards to the Traffic (Amendment) Bill, looking at definitions, I would like to ask a question as it pertains to emergency vehicles that my honourable friend and colleague defined. I know that it was discussed and received consent but why was the decision made to not include the vehicles operated by the cadets, understanding that in the event of a national emergency the cadets are also a part of NEOC [National Emergency Operations Committee]? They actually play a key role tying into the broader vision for emergency response.

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: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the Bill and to thank the honourable Minister for bringing this Bill with these amendments to the Traffic Act. I know that the committee had been established—Jeez, it must be more than two years ago now—to propose these amendments and I certainly welcome them and join everyone else in welcoming anything that will improve the safety of our roads for our people.

I was reminded recently driving home, and listening to a lowboy driving in front of me, that this issue of the compression breaks has been raised often as well. We hear it so often in our various communities and constituencies, people complaining about the use of compression brakes. I know they are described as Jake brakes here, but to be frank, sir, there are many other nationalities that use it, so I sort of feel it's a little bit unfair to refer to it just as that; although I know colloquially that's how it's described.

I have heard these and, as I said recently, I [also] heard drivers double-clutching. Obviously, it's not as annoying as when they flip the switch and use the compression brakes. I would appeal to operators of vehicles that, while they may do it on the main roads and think that it doesn't impact anyone beyond other road users, it really does impact all of our communities because the sound travels; particularly when it's downwind, it travels over extended distances. That particular issue is one which—while not a safety issue—is absolutely an issue relating to the quiet enjoyment of homes in our communities.

One question that I would like the Minister to clarify on his winding up is in relation to clause 12, which was the new section 78 I think. There's a reference in the proposed subsection (5)(a) it says, **“using a mobile telephone or other hand-held device includes the following—”**. There are a number of things listed which I agree with, but one says **“illuminating the screen”** which sounds a little vague, and I would ask the Minister if he could possibly clarify exactly what that's intended to cover.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like if the Minister could clarify where we are with proposals on speed cameras and these types of things that will help to address some of the awful rates of traffic accidents that we have in this country. It seems that every month we are recording higher and higher rates of traffic accidents. Recently, I think it was clarified that we had reached some astronomical level of rates of accidents. I don't remember the exact number, but I want to say it was something like 94 accidents in one week or something like that.

Mr. Speaker, we know that these things arise from people speeding and people driving carelessly, getting distracted and I think people who are driving whilst under the influence. In particular, the speeding seems to be in equal measure a big part of the problem. I'd like if the Minister could speak in his winding up on this Bill in relation to the issues of the speed cameras and trying to address those, because I think that would be really helpful.

The country has a good police service. There are times when there are complaints, but the reality is they cannot be everywhere all the time and an effective speed camera system will help to mitigate, if not eliminate, the practice of speeding on our roads, which we know has a very detrimental effect on the rates of accidents and in many, many, cases the outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, I had the awful experience recently, of being parked 100 feet away from a fatal accident in my community. Finding out that a young man, a young person had lost his life, lost his potential; just imagining how the family would feel and his friends and the community in which he lived... It's just an awful thing. We must do everything we can, Mr. Speaker, to prevent these types of things from happening.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the Minister in his winding up if he could outline the approach being taken, particularly in relation to the speed cameras. Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* The honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

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

I rise to also lend my voice supporting this Bill. Before doing so, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the previous Minister who was responsible for public transport, the honourable Member for George Town Central for the Deloitte report that he commissioned. It is a 154-page report—quite lengthy; but I can tell the Members of the House, and the public, that it is actually very informative and gave us a deep, honest look at what the public transport system was like.

I also want to give credit to the current Minister for taking that report into consideration and starting the process of implementing some of the changes that came out of it. Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Hmm? The public transport public transport system.

The Speaker: This is the Traffic Act.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Oh, this is the traffic bill. Hold on, sorry; wrong notes.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I apologise. I was looking at my wrong notes. I was looking at the Public Transport Bill. I apologise. I guess I won't hardly be speaking on that one now.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to lend my voice on the Traffic (Amendment) Bill that we have before the House. One of the things that I want to touch on, first and foremost, as I noticed the Bill spoke about safety, is the Honda Fits. We need to start looking into these cars, and I hate to be singling out the Honda Fit, but for some strange reason it seems not just in Cayman, but elsewhere across the Caribbean, these vehicles are developing a reputation—I don't want to use the word unsafe, but I can't find a better word at this point, so I guess I'll put it out there. Something needs to be done to look into those Honda Fits.

Another thing Mr. Speaker, is that when you look at the actual accident rates, they have actually gone up. Again, looking at the Compendium of Statistics just to put the number of motor vehicle accidents on the road into context:

Year	Number of Motor Vehicle Accidents
2016	1,204
2017	2,739
2018	2,409
2019	2,806
2020	2,167
2021	2,633
2022	2,915
2023	3,169

Now Mr. Speaker, when you look at the culture... The number that jumped out to me the most was 2020, during COVID, when we literally had a lockdown; granted, while it was less than other years, we still had over 2,000 accidents on the road. It says something about the overall culture—I don't know if it's safety or (un)safety, but there's something cultural, when so many people complain about being stuck in bumper to bumper traffic, but they basically still find a way to get those cars to touch.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, something else I want to touch on is the number of fatalities recorded during that same period:

Year	Number of Motor Vehicle Accidents Fatalities
2016	10
2017	3
2018	8
2019	8
2020	9
2021	9
2022	14
2023	9

This year so far, I understand there's been eleven fatalities with two happening recently.

Mr. Speaker, when you consider, just for comparative purposes, the size of Cayman's population and how it compares to other jurisdictions... Just to put it in context, we're doing about nine accidents per 100,000, compared to places in the US. In New York is 5.2 fatalities per 100,000; California is 9.7 fatalities per 100,000; and Florida, for some strange reason, is 15.4 fatalities per 100,000.

Something that also jumped out at me, Mr. Speaker, as we were looking at the analysis is that, while the overall rate in the US was 13 deaths per 100,000, when you look at the Southern States, for whatever reason, Mississippi was 25.4 (the worst one); Louisiana was 17.8; Kentucky was 17.3; North Carolina was 14.7; and South Carolina was 20.7.

It seems that there's also a cultural issue within the southern states as opposed to the northern states or the busier states, but nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Cayman Islands' numbers and compared them to those bigger jurisdictions, it is definitely something that we need to look at where there must be a cultural issue.

Another thing I want to touch on briefly, Mr. Speaker, is the exam and the test itself. For some strange reason, there seems to be many people on the road who just can't drive and it behoves me to some extent. I know this is where road rage comes into context, because some people out there get very ticked off when they come across some of these inconsiderate drivers and some of them, which I'll be touching on in the Public Transport Bill, are bus drivers. They have a tendency to pull off wherever and pull out onto the road whenever they want to and when you're in a 40 miles per hour zone, it sometimes becomes a problem and it has been one of the issues out there in the Spotts Straight, as the Minister identified.

Outside of that, Mr. Speaker, the only thing I would ask the Minister to [answer] during his wrap up is: in terms of the traffic management panel, how many meetings have they had? Have there been any reports? Also, as the Member for Newlands mentioned earlier, is there any update on the speed camera ticketing test system? I understand that was something that was started quite a while back and was being

looked at, and it would be good for the public to have an update on that.

Something I want to touch on Mr. Speaker, on a lighter note, is the National Roads Authority (NRA). They have been doing some really good work, [though] sometimes thankless by some members of the public; but I really want to thank Managing Director Edward and his team. I also I have to single out Mr. Ellison—Minister, is that his name, Ellison? Is it Ellison, from NRA?

An Honourable Member: Ellington.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Ellington, sorry. We have a different nickname for him, but I wanted to put a proper name to record.

An Honourable Member: Ellington Forbes.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Ellington Forbes. He has been doing an outstanding job and has been very, very responsive when we do call about issues that require road work, et cetera, within our community. I just want to go on record to thank the NRA and Director Edward and his team, but also Mr. Ellington, for being really, really very responsive.

With that said Mr. Speaker, I do support the Traffic (Amendment) Bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* The honourable Member for Savannah.

Hon. Heather D. Bodden, Deputy Speaker, Elected Member for Savannah: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to give the Traffic (Amendment) Bill my full support, and to thank the Minister. It's been a long time coming and I'm happy to see the Bill for an Act to amend the Traffic Act, to provide for vehicle safety standards; and to provide for miscellaneous updates of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, there's not a day [when] someone expects to hear of a loved one's loss of life. I'm one who knows that grief. I ask all those who drive recklessly, to consider their lives and those of others. It's the Christmas season, so please drive with caution.

I thank the Minister again, and I fully support the Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* The Honourable Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be rather quick. I want to opine further on the Member from Savannah, to be in concert with her in congratulating the Honourable Minister for his hard work with his team over the past few years to try to address some of the traffic issues that we have from

a comprehensive Public Transport Bill, as well as a Traffic (Amendment) Bill.

He has been working tirelessly with respect to all areas that relate to traffic and vehicle usage on our roads. From the development of new roads, to the behaviour of persons on the road, to the behaviour of persons who are licenced to transport individuals. You can see attested by the many clauses within this Bill, and I know, with respect to the national security concerns, he was a major advocate for that report. You have heard him say in the last year when he presented to this House, the safety mechanisms that are coming into place to make our roads safer.

I must say that, though it may not feel that way, things are progressively changing with respect to how we deal with issues on the road and these changes in the Law will improve them; I think many have been because of our ad hoc approach to development over the many years. As governments continues to develop a national strategic plan of potentially outsourcing different types of development to the different parts of the island, the opportunity for more balanced traffic options and reduction will become more fruitful.

Again, I congratulate the Honourable Minister for his hard work and his commitment, particularly to those persons in North Side and the Eastern districts. I think that's where his passion developed from, with respect to his commitment to reduce the ills of the traffic and on the roads.

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 Honourable Minister to exercise his right of reply.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it almost seems like all of these should have been PQ questions, but I want to thank the House for its support. When we took over traffic, I wanted one of the main things to be trying to see what we can do to improve this Traffic (Amendment) [Bill]. We understand the situation and we—trust me, we get the reports on how many accidents, how many deaths. And yes, we do have a situation where—some people have called them Cayman's national Car, these Honda Fits seem to be the main culprit on the road.

Mr. Speaker, I just *wanna* draw back to the Opposition Leader and his first [question], I think about the age. That was actually signed through an MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] with the UK in 2023 (it was started before that, but I think it was signed in 2023) whereby anyone in the UK could exchange their driver's licence. We had many kids who were overseas, and had the opportunity to get [their] licences, and then came back to Cayman and could get their licence [exchanged]. I think that was started under the Minister at the time.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Yeah, for the MOU.

To run back up on the section where we talked about the speed cameras. Mr. Speaker, the speed cameras have been something that I myself have been waiting on for quite some time and I'm happy to say that the business case has practically been dusted, and it's going to national security in the first part of the coming year. From there on out, we should be able to roll out these speed cameras. It's something that I've been hearing everybody in the eastern side of the island talk about—how they want extra calming measures and hopefully that will help us out. I know the NRA themselves have been looking at different types of calming measures.

I do sympathise with the Member for Newlands when he talked about the tragedy of deaths and how we could actually try to help—Sorry, sir?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: —How we could help out and how do we improve our road safety a lot more.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is a working document, a step forward. I'm not saying it is the best document; we know that every law we bring down here is going to need some other improvement as we continue to move along.

Mr. Speaker, one of the Members asked about the cadets' emergency vehicles. A section of the Traffic Regulations under 13(6)(g) actually gives the Director the power to allow other vehicles to be able to be on the road, but there needs to be some clarity, because I think the cadets actually work with Hazard Management, which is already labelled in that law.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: The Director has a responsibility where he can [authorise] them to add the blue lights onto their vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke about the Jake brakes [which] have been something that I've heard through these halls, through Cabinet, through Caucus, through meetings in the Eastern districts and from West Bay to George Town—everywhere I go I keep hearing people talk about that. I know it's been coming for quite some time and that people have been asking the Government to look at doing something about this and here we are today, looking into that to see how we can get something to improve this.

Mr. Speaker, a main concern of this is to make sure that the emergency vehicles mentioned in the traffic law are allowed to—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: As my Member to my right said here, 'shine bright'. I'll just leave it as that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Sorry— I didn't quite catch what you were talking about with the five years. Sorry if I didn't...

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: We can take it off the record. Okay.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank all the Members who spoke, and those who didn't speak, for their full support. I think all of those who spoke, it was all merited. We've taken note, and any changes that we need to look at, we are happy to make in the regulations— if we can— and take it from there.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024, be given a second reading. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Traffic (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was given a second reading.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT BILL, 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister for Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport, and Development.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the second reading of the Bill entitled Public Transport Bill, 2024.

The Speaker: The Bill has been duly moved. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Yes sir.

Mr. Speaker, as our population and economy have rapidly grown, our transportation system has struggled to keep pace, leading to increased congestion and safety risks. It is essential that we develop a modern public transport alternative that is both efficient and effective.

I address you today with optimism and a commitment to transforming the transportation landscape of the Cayman Islands. Today we introduce the Public Transport Bill, which marks an exciting milestone for further development in the Cayman Islands; by granting public transport its own stand-alone legislation, we are laying a solid foundation for improvements in efficiency

and operations, and notably, for the Public Transport Board. Additionally, by expanding the Cabinet's regulatory powers, we empower the Public Transport Officer with enforcement capabilities, further enhancing safety and order on our roads. This will also provide immense support to the Traffic Act amendments that we just talked about.

Our Green Paper on the future of public transport is a beacon of our evolution. I extend my gratitude to our secondees— who were here from the United Kingdom— for their work on the Green Paper, which will serve as a guiding light for transforming our public transport system into one that is efficient, reliable and environmentally friendly.

The Green Paper sets out, for the first time, the government policy's intention to develop a new bus service initiative for three routes in Grand Cayman: West Bay to George Town, George Town to the Eastern districts, and George Town circular. These services will be modern, affordable, reliable and accessible. They will operate alongside the existing omnibus service, which would evolve into our community bus network that will complement and enhance the new service.

Mr. Speaker, to succeed we will require new infrastructure including bus depots, terminals, and priority lanes. Additionally, we would need qualified staff, drivers and management, while creating sustainable and high-quality employment opportunities for Caymanians. We are exploring various models of new bus systems, including Government-private sector partnerships and leveraging digital technologies for enhancing convenience and accessibility. The Ministry will continue to develop the business case for the new bus service and I welcome feedback from all honourable Members.

Mr. Speaker, while these initiatives take shape, we will continue to do the groundwork. We're also actively updating the relevant traffic regulations and public passenger regulations which will strengthen the Public Transport Bill—all while Tabling the Traffic (Amendment) [Bill], 2024 in this Sitting of the House.

We remain steadfast in our mission to introduce robust vehicle safety standards tailored specifically for the Cayman Islands. These standards are a testament to our dedication to ensuring that every vehicle on our roads is equipped to protect its passengers to the highest degree possible.

We are also conducting an organisation review to enhance the governance of transportation as a whole. This includes a total evaluation of the Department of Vehicles and Drivers' Licencing (DVDL), the Public Transport Unit and the National Roads Authority.

Today's Bill brings about a significant reorganisation of the Public Transport Board, enhancing its flexibility and designating the [Chief Officer of the] Ministry responsible for Transport as the new Chair. As the new Minister responsible for Public Transport, we would like to take this opportunity to express heartfelt gratitude to the current Chair, Ms. Rosa Harris, Director

of Tourism for her outstanding decade of leadership. We also extend our appreciation to all the past members of the Public Transport Board for their unwavering dedication and exemplary service over the years. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to building upon the valuable contributions they have made.

I implore each of you to join us in the collaborative efforts as we strive to develop a transformative transportation system that not only meets, but exceeds, our expectations for safety, efficiency and sustainability. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter future in public transport.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the Members for their consideration and their commitment to this transformative journey that we're all on.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak?
[Pause] The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer some short comments on the Public Transport Bill, 2024. I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement this morning and for the contribution. I understand that this is all a part of advancing our public transport for the needs in the future and obviously, this is a good start.

Previously, public transport was covered under the Traffic Law and made it very difficult to effect change within the public transport sector. I do feel that this has much evolution to go. It has to reach the point where the public transport, in my opinion, would become an authority and where accidents or incident investigations would be handled by public transport authority officers who would also have the ability to issue tickets on the spot for infractions, et cetera.

I have gone through the Bill and it's fairly basic. It doesn't take complete control of the operators and it doesn't overrule the Traffic Law when it comes to licensing of vehicles and infractions and that sort of stuff—but it's a good start. I want to make a couple of recommendations to the Minister, and if I overlooked them in the Bill, then I apologise. Most of these have to do with the regulations, and I know that there's a list of items that the regulations would cover, but one I didn't see which I think is important is a code of conduct. I think if we could develop a code of conduct for the public transport officers, taxi and bus drivers, which they would all sign when receiving their licenses, we could include it.

The other thing that I'm happy to see, because it has been a major issue of contention, is that there will now be clear penalties outside of the Traffic Law for things such as not following your route or rude behaviour, those sorts of things. Perhaps we could follow the new amendment to the Traffic Law by adding into the Bill the opportunity for a demerit system. That way, they'll know that if you're off your route twice, then the third time you would be suspended, et cetera. With a

code of conduct and receiving a handbook of sorts outlining the demerit system and the penalties, they would have no arguments when they face penalties or suspensions, et cetera.

The other item that, perhaps, isn't one for the Bill, is that there has to be some policy or process in place for understanding and appreciating that some routes are much more lucrative than others. [If there are] persons who have done their time in some of the less lucrative routes and [more lucrative] routes open whether [due to] drivers' vehicles breaking down for extended periods of time or other issues... persons can't simply "reserve" that spot. At that point, perhaps in the order of how long they've had their licence, someone can get an opportunity to move into those more lucrative routes.

Something else that we struggled with—and I think they continue to struggle with it, but attention has to be paid to it—is understanding that a public bus must be owned by a Caymanian. There is a wide belief that many of the buses are not owned by Caymanians but, in fact, are purchased by the driver, who may not be Caymanian, and who has worked out a deal to lease the route from the Caymanian bus operator who supposedly owns the bus. These are the concerns we hear out there. It's not something you can write into the Bill, but it's certainly something we should be conscious of.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, this is a good start. I see a much wider vision for public transport, but this is a step in the right direction and we offer our full support.

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

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I have the right Bill this time. That's what happens when you have notes all over the place.

Mr. Speaker, as I intimated earlier, I just want to start off by thanking my good friend from George Town Central, the Honourable Minister, for when he was in charge of public transport where he actually commissioned the report that was done by Deloitte. It's a 154-page report. It's quite detailed and informative, and I would encourage all Members of this House and also members of the public, if they haven't done so already, to read it.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the new Minister for the seamless transition when he took over this portfolio and hit the ground running so that we could start by moving the Public Transport Bill, recognising the seriousness of it. As the Honourable Leader of the Opposition stated earlier, this issue was dealt with under the Traffic Law, and it's time that it has its own bespoke legislation to some extent.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I welcome it; but want to make a few observations. These, again, come from the report, and something that jumped out at me was that there was a total of 104 buses servicing Grand

Cayman, and the distribution of those seats is as follows:

- West Bay had 995 seats (60 per cent of the seats);
- George Town had 48 seats;
- East End to Bodden Town had 232 seats; and
- North Side to Bodden Town had 271 seats

The total amount of seats as per the report, Mr. Speaker, is 1,646. Like I said, West Bay has 60 per cent, but the Eastern districts actually had 37 per cent of the seats. This stands out to me when I also consider that, during the 2021 census, the total population in the Eastern districts of Bodden Town, East End and North Side was 18,593. By the end of 2023, the population increased by 3,387 or 18 per cent to 21,980. When you look at the population number and the number of seats available in the Eastern districts, it is clear now for us to take public transportation seriously. It is something that we need to look at and encourage more people to get into the bus business.

Equally, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the overall population itself, it actually increased by 13,633 since the census. During the same period of time, the number of cars imported increased by 4,570. There is already a mismatch between the growth in population and the number of seats available to transport such population. Nonetheless, I think all of us in here can agree that building more roads—outside of the East West Arterial—will not be the solution, and we need to start taking a more sensible approach in terms of looking at our overall public transport system; thus, the reason why I welcome this initiative. I will also be looking at enhancing it by itself.

I have filed an amendment and I understand you have accepted it, Mr. Speaker, so I want to thank you in advance.

The Speaker: It's not for me to accept the amendment. I simply waived the notice.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yes, sorry. Thank you very much for that correction.

One concern I had with the Bill was the Chief Officer in the Ministry being designated as the Chairperson. I think, for this new unit to have the gravitas and to show some level of seriousness, we need to have, as with other public authority bodies, an independent outside chairperson from the private sector. The amendment we have made will actually reflect that and have those civil servants who are working on the committee as *ex officio* members. Outside of that, I was pretty okay with the Bill.

Another thing I want to touch on, Mr. Speaker, is the culture. I think many people would be willing to use the public transport system if they know exactly when the buses are going to arrive. I think, from a technology standpoint, putting GPS on the buses so people can know exactly, *"Well, this is the time I need to be at*

the bus stop so I can catch a bus"; or if there's an app, so people are not just sitting there, wondering exactly what needs to be done.

From the report, I think there were 185 bus stops across Grand Cayman. I think we also need to look at the distribution of those bus stops to see exactly where we can get more stops or a more central location in a safer area, to start encouraging more people to take the bus. I personally would love to walk out of my house—it takes me less than 100 metres to be at the top of the road—grab a bus and come right down to Parliament, and save myself the gas.

Mr. Speaker, another issue that we have is the late-night bus. For people working in shifts it's very difficult to get a bus after certain hours. From that standpoint, we're forcing people who come here to work, to get a car. These are the kind of things that we need to look at holistically, in terms of what service we can get [from] a bus, and the frequency of the service that we can have, to start encouraging more members of the public to take the bus.

Another thing I would like to touch on, Mr. Speaker, are multi-use licences. I've had people who work at the airport say, after a certain time, once there are no planes, and the airport has closed, or there is little activity, can they use their licence to operate at the airport, to basically, do other work. I don't know if that's something that the Government will look at or consider—maybe those individuals can actually take over the late shift, to some extent. If we can find a way to get that balance, it may encourage more people into it.

Another thing is, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the profile of many people who work at the airport and in this business, many of them are our retirees. I know in a previous role, the honourable Member for West Bay West tried his best to encourage more cooperation between many of the operators, and that is something that I think we need to move forward with. At the end of the day, while businesses do thrive on competition, more can actually be done or achieved through cooperation. Sometimes there's a dog-eat-dog mentality among some of the operators which, in the collective, does not serve their best interests, so it's something that we need to look at.

Outside of that, Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome the Minister's initiative, thank the previous Minister for the work that he started, and encourage everyone to read the report. This is something that is long overdue and I know there is public frustration, but Rome wasn't built in a day. At least this allows us to take a more strategic approach towards public transport and, hopefully, find solutions for the people of our country in this regard.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The honourable Member for West Bay West.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister and one who stayed to do the work, I don't need to say that I support the Minister and the two pieces of legislation he has Tabled today.

Mr. Speaker, as a small island developing state, we come across problems as much as any metropolitan country; traffic, transportation, is one of them. We have to modernise our traffic services and public transport needs to be dependable and safe. Sometimes we witness some of these small buses speeding— 14-seaters and even the 30-seaters. Up until yesterday, coming from East End, we were doing 40 miles per hour and this 30-seater passed us, flying!

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Well, I'm hearing that I drive slowly. That's true, but I'm ahead of them. I don't believe that I need to do more than 40. Sometimes I'll drive 25 and they'll keep blowing because courtesy is practically nil on the road anymore, something that we were once proud of. Now...

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that with improvement and a modern system, people will get used to using it and [there will be] less need for the importation of vehicles. That is one of the hopes that I have for the future of our new system. It will take some education and urging and encouragement for the persons now in the system.

Like you heard earlier, I tried, but no cooperation. Everybody is so independent minded that they want to do their own thing, want to create their own rules, and this can't work. There has to be a system, there have to be rules that people abide by. They think because, "*I can go buy a car; I can go buy a bus! It's me!*" True, they have to pay for it, but they have to be mindful of others; that's something that I see waning in this country. As I said, hopefully, with encouragement and a new system, some of the persons who just like to do their own thing, will understand that new rules will make for a better system, a better quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my Minister on moving so fast. See how big he is, yet in two turns around he's gone out of sight. He moves fast.

[Laughter]

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: I do, indeed, want to thank him for his attitude of getting things done *now!* Let's do it now! No time to drag our feet and wait for this report and the next report and this consultant and the next; you got them, you done it? Let's get it done. I also want to thank our capable committees for their work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, we've reached the hour of interruption. Madam Premier, may I invite

you to move the suspension of Standing Order 10(2) in order that business may continue?

Suspension of Standing Order 10(2)

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move the Suspension of Standing Order 10(2) to allow the business of the honourable Parliament to continue until the hour of 6 pm, today.

The Speaker: Thank you. The question is that Standing Order 10(2) be suspended to allow the business of the house to continue until 6 pm, today. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Standing Order 10(2) suspended.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* The honourable Member for West Bay Central.

Ms. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker. I rise to add my contribution to the Public Transport Bill, 2024. This Bill provides a framework to build a robust public transport unit that will ensure all residents can enjoy reliable public transport.

Mr. Speaker, I have personal experience with our public transport system because I come from a family that didn't have the luxury of a family car and so, growing up on this island, I became very familiar with our public bus system. Instead of driving, both of my parents were like you, Mr. Speaker, they were cyclists. We caught the bus when we needed to go to the supermarket. I can still recall many days catching the bus to go by Kirk Plaza and walking to Kirk Home Centre because there weren't many routes. It was a well-earned treat to walk from Kirk Plaza, to Burger King because, again, there weren't any routes, but you looked forward to the treat at the end of the day. Bringing those experiences from childhood to date, I'm saddened to see that traversing around without having a car still has many challenges for our residents.

I'm pleased to see that this legislation, particularly section 20 of the Bill, will permit the establishment of regulations which will ensure the conditions of buses, fares charged, location and marking of the bus stops, as well as safety provisions, are all enshrined in legislation— assuming the Bill is passed today. I'm wondering if the Minister in his right of reply can indicate a timeline for how long you think it will take before the regulations would be ready, since many of the safety features are set out to be in the regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the Honourable Minister and his policy team, for ensuring that this draft Bill also speaks to duty-time limitations, and they are covered in the regulations, as our bus drivers should also have a legally determined maximum

number of working hours to ensure that accidents caused by driver fatigue can be prevented. As we all know, this duty is very similar to airline Pilots.

Mr. Speaker, having a robust public transport system is one of the most effective methods of addressing traffic and this Bill is a start to accomplishing that. As the Leader of the Opposition raised the matter of the routes, I would also like to reiterate that I'm hoping the whole topic of route allocations will be addressed and fairly allocated. I'm sure the Minister is aware that, currently, the routes are not designed in a way that encourages the average citizen to catch the bus to work and drop the children to school or take a lunch hour and catch a bus to Industrial Park to visit one of the retail stores.

My last point about the Bill is that in section 4, under "Functions of the Board", it seeks to include an enforcement provision to ensure that the operators comply. Going back to routes, I do look forward to having enforcement. As the Leader of the Opposition previously mentioned, there are ongoing concerns that the allocation of routes is not fairly distributed. We have operators who own more than one bus, and all of their buses are on the routes with heavy passenger loads meanwhile, a sole trader with one bus is on one of the least-travelled routes. A West Bay route that takes you on the Harquail Bypass will not give that operator the same earnings as an operator on the route to Seven Mile.

Mr. Speaker, it is good to know that fairness and reliability, along with safety, will all be addressed if this Bill is approved today. With that being said, I am pleased to support this draft Bill, as it would be a benefit to the entire island and I commend the Minister and his team for all of their efforts.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak?
[Pause] The Honourable Minister for Youth.

Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, Minister of Youth, Sports & Heritage, and Home Affairs, Elected Member for East End: Mr. Speaker, thank you sir.

I rise just to give a brief contribution on this Bill before the House, but to also thank my colleague and his team for the hard work they've done on bringing this here.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken briefly in this House before about public transportation to the Eastern districts (East End, North Side) is literally non-existent. They come when they want, stop where they want, drop people off, turn around and head back into town. A Bill like this will certainly help eliminate many of the frustrations that the people of my district, East End, and my colleague's district of North Side, have experienced over the last several years.

I've had many calls, many texts, many WhatsApp messages, and voice notes regarding the type of [bus] service we receive in East End, and I'm glad that this Bill is before the House so that we can get

rid of behaviours as what people going to East End, experience on the road. For example, behaviours at—what's the bar named now?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Isaac D. Rankine: Everglo. Some of the bus drivers turn around at Everglo. They do not tell the people going to East End, who board the bus at the bus depot here, near the Parliament, that they're only going to Everglo; it's when they get to Everglo that they tell them, "Okay, this is as far as we're going." We can no longer tolerate it, sir.

They'll get to the North Side junction and turn around there. They don't complete the route for either East End or North Side—and I'm glad this Bill is before the House, so that the enforcement portion therein will put a stop to it, sir.

Thank you so much.

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 invite the Honourable Minister to exercise his right of reply.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank everybody for their contributions on the Bill, and for the full support of those who didn't speak on it. When I picked this up...

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: I think it was a bit heavier than a baton. When dealing with the traffic amendments for the taxi and bus operators, the first words I was told were, "Boy, you got your hands full with them."

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the first meeting we had with the operators was a full board room, somewhere around fifty to sixty operators showed up. I listened to pretty much every single thing—all of their complaints; and, I want to thank the Premier at the time, the Honourable Wayne Panton, for giving me the opportunity to pick up the baton and run with it, to help fix this serious issue we have in the country.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I found from the operators, was that they wanted a listening ear. They felt they never had anyone who wanted to just listen to them, carry on, and complete. It was always... I don't know what was happening before, nor want to get into it.

Mr. Speaker, something [else] that came out of this, is that a majority of our bus operators have now actually agreed to have the GPS system and a camera system installed in their buses. They all agreed. They all understand the direction that we want to go. They all

understand and are up-to-date on all of the amendments that we are looking at here today. We've met with them several times now, and I must say, every time we meet with them, it is a large turnout of operators.

Mr. Speaker, they all understand that there are some... I would say bad amongst the good, and sometimes everybody gets painted with one brush—such as those who turn around before, or don't do their full route; but, one thing with us being able to put the GPS system into these vehicles, is the real-time ability to tell exactly which vehicles are not doing their routes, which means we can actually enforce it and start to penalise those individuals who are doing it.

Mr. Speaker, at one of the meetings we had, the operators themselves said they were happy to post their phone numbers inside all of the bus shelters on their route, so that if an individual was standing there and hadn't seen a bus at that time, they could look in there, see a number, and call one of the bus operators to say, *"Hey, letting you know that I'm at so-and-so section"*. Taking it further, Mr. Speaker, once the app is developed, everybody will have a real-time app to be able to trace and track where the buses are, so we won't see individuals having to stand alongside the road waiting 10-20 minutes for a bus, and not knowing if it's coming.

Mr. Speaker, I know one lady in my constituency of North Side whom I know catches the bus every single day. I always remember her, and wonder where she's going every day.

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: She would call and tell me if she hadn't seen a bus in the last 20-30 minutes, and let me know which bus came and which bus she was on. She would [also] call me and tell me if that bus didn't do its route, and give me the bus number.

Mr. Speaker, one of the main things that we all knew, which has plagued our people, is some of our bus operators' bad driving—and the enforcement section will now be able to take care of this. They can start to ticket some of these bus operators and penalise them for it.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if it was the Leader of the Opposition, or maybe it was the Member for Bodden Town West, who spoke about Caymanians owning the buses themselves. Caymanians are the ones that are allowed to own the bus, but they can get a work permit for an individual to drive it. Now, it is different for taxi operators. Taxi operators aren't allowed to get a work permit; it has to be a Caymanian who drives their taxi.

Mr. Speaker, something we found was really bothering the taxi operators, is the big yellow sticker that they always had in front of the bus, saying 'taxi operator'; that was something they wanted to fight with the Board, to see how they can take it off. They found that in times when they were headed home or they were off-duty, they had individuals flagging them down when

they were just crossing by them. They thought it was really disrespectful to [have to] just drive past someone. Then you would get a call saying, *"Well, I just tried to stop taxi operator number such, and he just crossed by. He wouldn't stop."*

As a result, Mr. Speaker, some of the changes we have made allow the taxi operators to remove the sticker but they have to get the light, which can be turned on and off, to display that they are taxi operators. They have to display their licence inside the vehicle, as per usual, and still have to put a number on the side of the vehicle so that individuals know what taxi they got into, in case they have forgotten something inside one of the taxis, they can call the hotline number and just tell them, *"I left this, in taxi number one."*

Mr. Speaker, something else the Leader of the Opposition spoke about was a code of conduct. I fully support a code of conduct, [and] I don't find the operators that I know today having a problem supporting one. They understand where we want to get to.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that some of the routes aren't the most profitable—I think the Member for West Bay Central may have spoken about some of the routes coming from the highway. When we talked to the operators, most of them operating on the western side of the island were happy with how their routes are set up.

We found it was mostly the operators who were going to Morritt's all the way up Queen's Highway and all the way to Rum Point, or those taking the South Sound route, who were saying that it's not profitable for them or it's taking up more time and there's nobody on those routes at certain hours. Those were mostly the ones who came forward. I'm not saying that there aren't individuals going West, who would not want to make a change, but nobody from the West Bay side who actually runs buses has come forward saying they would like to make a change to the way that they're running their routes; at least, no one has come to me personally, or mentioned it in any of the meetings that we've had.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Huh?

[Inaudible interjection]

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, as the House may know, my Ministry has an overall analysts' study of the public transport, DVDL and the NRA, in the [hopes] of possibly developing a Department of Transportation. This is the first step and we see, if that comes to fruition then more changes will be needed to facilitate this.

As I mentioned, we have taken on many of the suggestions today; these and other issues can be

placed in the Regulations, which are going to be coming out shortly. As the Member for Bodden Town West and the Green Paper note, we are aiming for a modern transportation system, including development of routes and payment through an app, as well. These are all exciting changes we see, in the future of public transport. I understand that people want late-night shifts to get home; and that early mornings, when individuals need to get from west to east, or north to south, whichever direction they need to go, they have to be there on time—we've taken all of that into consideration.

Something I would love to see done with transport and with our operators down the road, is to actually try to set up some sort of co-op with them—or whatever they would like us to do; but, Mr. Speaker, I want to ensure that our operators, whether taxi or bus operators, have a stake and a say in every change that we make here.

Every one of them who showed up to the last three or four meetings and voiced their opinion, and told us what they would support, what they don't like, we have moved forward with that to where we are today, and I want to thank them for all of the cooperation they have been giving us. It's not as bad as people thought it would have been when they first told me, *"Boy, you are gonna have a rough time dealing with them."* I must say we're like a well-oiled machine, working together now for one common goal. I must applaud them for always being willing to come to the task anytime we call them to meet with us. No matter where it's at; whether at 7:00 at night or at 8:30 in the morning, we seem to have a full house when it comes to that.

Mr. Speaker, I know some Committee Amendments will be coming up shortly, too. I just want to thank everyone for their support and for welcoming this new Public Transport Bill, 2024 to the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Public Transport Bill, 2024 be given a second reading. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Public Transport Bill, 2024 was given a second reading.

The Speaker: I propose to take a short afternoon suspension. We will resume promptly at ten minutes past five, according to the clock in the Chamber. The House is accordingly suspended, until 5:10 p.m.

Proceedings suspended at 5:01 p.m.

Proceedings resumed at 5:12 p.m.

The Speaker: Parliament is resumed.

OLDER PERSONS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Speaker: Before I call on the Minister to move the Bill, I'd like to acknowledge the presence of and to welcome to the Chamber Ms. Lucille Seymour, MBE, BEM, JP; former Member of this House. Ms. Lucille was one of the pivotal individuals behind the Older Persons Act. She was one of the lobbyists for it; Chairperson of the committee that helped create it, and then on to becoming Chairman of the Council for Older Persons.

Thank you very much for all your hard work over many years, Ms. Lucille; we are delighted that you're here to, hopefully, see the passage of even more enhancements to that important piece of legislation. When you're young, you don't think you'll get old; but if you don't die young that will be your fate, so I believe we all have a vested interest in this Bill, and all that it contains.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Deputy Premier and Minister of Social— they change these things so often I can't remember— Social Development and Innovation.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the Second Reading of a Bill entitled the Older Persons (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

The Speaker: The Bill has been duly moved. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you. Before I go into the contribution in respect of this Bill, I want to join you in recognising the honourable lady Ms. Lucille Seymour to these Chambers with which she's familiar.

You are right, Mr. Speaker, on her crucial contributions to the legal framework around older persons and I dare say, social development, as a whole. Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, thinking of her and her contributions we've made further intended amendments since the departure of the previous Minister, which I think she will find very fitting, shortly.

Mr. Speaker, I was to take your instructions earlier but my mind failed me, in taking the opportunity to wish a special happy birthday to Ms. Vernice Myles whose birthday is today; she became the wonderful young age of 82, and before the day was out and my contributions ended, I wanted to take the opportunity to wish her a very special happy birthday.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present, on behalf of the Government, a Bill to amend the Older Persons Act,

2017; a critical step in reaffirming our commitment to the wellbeing of one of the most valued groups in our society. Our older persons are not only the custodians of our heritage, but also the foundation upon which our present and future is built. It is our moral and legal obligation to ensure they are safeguarded, respected and empowered to live with dignity in environments that promote care and support.

Mr. Speaker, when I took over as Minister of Social Development, I was happy to see the work already in progress to support those most at risk in our community. The mountain of work that I have, and will present at this Sitting of the House, was completed by the civil servants within the Ministry, and I have to give credit to the former Minister for his contribution to get us this far. These Amendments are part of a broader effort to modernise our social development legislation ensuring that it reflects the realities and the needs of the Cayman Islands today and into the future.

Mr. Speaker, within this Sitting of this House, I, on behalf of the Government, will also be bringing forward legislative reform for prioritising, safeguarding, and improving the process for children in care to be adopted. Together, these Bills are a part of a cohesive strategy to strengthen protections for our most vulnerable and provide the framework necessary to support a thriving, resilient society.

Mr. Speaker, we recognise that the Department of Children and Family Services is a critical entity and the social safety net of the Cayman Islands. As such, the Ministry will be engaging in exercises to modernise the programmes and services delivered by the Department to make sure that they meet the needs of our community now and well into the future. This modernisation isn't just about updating processes. It's about ensuring that the support we provide is aligned with the realities and the challenges faced by our families today; by addressing these needs, we are creating a stronger foundation for the wellbeing of all people.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking about the programmes to be provided by the Department, there is an alignment between the vision of this legislation and the development of the Central Scranton Park. The park will be a space where older persons can come together in the community for recreational and social activities. Again, an area our honourable guest and former Member, Ms. Lucille Seymour was a key component in developing. The Department will be able to host their programmes for older persons in a dedicated space within the Central Scranton Park. The contract for Phase 2 of the park was signed in November of this year, and we look forward to the partnership between the department and the park, once completed.

Mr. Speaker, safeguarding our older persons is not just about meeting legal obligations, it is about honouring their contributions and ensuring that they continue to thrive in a society that values every stage of their life. This Bill is a testament to our collective duty to foster age-friendly communities.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to address a number of needs as follows:

- To revise the definition of the term 'older person' to ensure that it captures those who are 65 years of age or older;
- To re-name the council of older persons, to clarify that they are a council *for* older persons;
- Increase its functions and change its membership;
- To identify a department with responsibility for the subject of older persons;
- To remove the requirement for the maintenance of the older persons register;
- To increase the protection of the rights of older persons;
- To provide for the notification and investigation of abuse or neglect of older persons;
- To enable the issue of an intervention order in a case where an older person lacks capacity to make certain decisions;
- To establish the older persons tribunal for the purpose of determining complaints relating to access to rights of older persons and requirements imposed on 'mandatory reporters'; and
- For incidental and connected purposes.

Mr. Speaker, data from the Cayman Islands 2021 Census report highlights a substantial demographic shift which confirms that the population in the Cayman Islands is aging. From 2010 to 2021, the numbers of persons aged 65 and over almost doubled, increasing by 97.8 per cent, while those aged 50 to 64 grew by 73 per cent. Given this reality, it is imperative that we prioritise the needs and the wellbeing of our older persons and ensure that we foster an age-friendly community.

Mr. Speaker, you may remember the police officer who was jailed in 2020 for manipulating an older woman into signing her property over to him after he had been called out to a domestic incident at her home. This police officer was in a position of trust; however, he took advantage of his position and her vulnerabilities. The older woman eventually came forward and reported it to the police.

There are other older persons in our community, Mr. Speaker, who are not coming forward for various reasons, and it's due to this that we must take responsibility for safeguarding older persons as a broader community. This is the aim of this Amendment Bill. There should be fewer cases like the one I'm referring to, and when they do occur, there must be adequate justice.

Before I present the details of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, please allow me to outline the Ministry's consultation. Mr. Speaker, the Older Persons Act, 2017 was commenced in July 2017. This Act established the Council of Older Persons and the Older Persons Register. This Act also outlined rights to which older

persons should have access but did not provide any remedial mechanisms for instances where rights are not upheld. It also does not have any supporting regulations.

Mr. Speaker, at present, the Department of Children and Family Services is providing safeguarding support for older persons in the Cayman Islands, however, they do not have any legislative authority to conduct adequate assessments and investigations. In order to ensure this legislation is fit for purpose, the Ministry formed a legal steering committee which included the membership of the Council of Older Persons via their Chair and Deputy Chair; two community representatives who are older persons, as well as representatives from the Department of Children and Family Services; and the Pines Retirement Home. The Ministry conducted further consultation in August and September of this year with the full membership of the Council of Older Persons, staff of the Department of Children and Family Services and other governmental entities such as Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Consultation sessions were also held with non-governmental stakeholders such as the Cayman Islands National Insurance Company (CINICO) and the Health Services Authority (HSA). It is based on this extensive consultation process, Mr. Speaker, that we are able to put forth this Amendment Bill to be considered by this honourable House.

Further, Mr. Speaker, there was advocacy from the community, particularly from Ms. Lucille Seymour, on behalf of the Council of Older Persons for this legislation to go further, Mr. Speaker— and I agree. There are opportunities to take this further and I want to ensure the Council and the public that I have asked the Ministry to begin focusing on this area in early 2025, including developing a framework for the role of a Commissioner of Older Persons. In the meantime, this Act provides much of what a Commissioner would do by ensuring that the rights of older persons are upheld and that there is a body, the Older Persons Tribunal, which can hear complaints where rights are not upheld.

Mr. Speaker, I will touch on three primary aspects, enhancing support for older persons which will be addressed by this Amendment Bill.

Firstly, this Amendment Bill will clarify the roles of the critical entities in relation to support for older persons by enhancing the functions of the Council of Older Persons and ensuring the identification of the department in legislation which will be responsible for the subject of older persons.

Secondly, this legislation will provide for the mandatory reporting of abuse and neglect and will establish provisions to safeguard older persons.

Lastly, it will make provisions for an Older Persons Tribunal.

Mr. Speaker, this Amendment Bill will rename the Council of Older Persons to the Council for Older Persons. With this change, the composition of the Council will include persons who are 55 and older and

this will ensure the Council represents the need of those who are entering older age as well.

The Amendment will also clarify the functions of the Council, which can be broadly described as:

- To focus on being a referral facility;
- To provide information about available services and resources to older persons;
- To act as an advisor and advocate with government entities to influence policy and plan towards healthy aging and an age-friendly community; and
- To promote a better understanding of healthy aging and raise awareness about the issues and concerns of older persons in the Cayman Islands community.

In alignment with the work of the Council for Older Persons, the Amendment Bill will, for the first time, identify a department with responsibility for matters pertaining to older persons. The role of this department will be to identify the changing needs of older persons and make representation to the Ministry to address those needs; to develop and implement programmes aimed at fostering age-friendly communities (like the Central Scranton Park); to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of older persons.

Mr. Speaker, this Amendment Bill will establish a legislative process for reporting abuse and neglect against older persons. This is similar to the provisions in the Children Act (2012 Revision) and accounts for the Amendments which are to be heard in Parliament in relation to that legislation; however, this part of the Amendment Bill makes specific provisions to support older persons.

Firstly, the Amendment Bill has considered, with input from consultation, a proposed list of professions which should be mandatory reporters. This list considers the professions which are more likely to interact with older persons, as well as be in a position where they may be privy to information, or suspect abuse or neglect, such as administrative staff for medical facilities and those employed by financial institutions or insurance companies. Mr. Speaker, if you recall that lovely lady who was taken advantage of by that police officer, if certain institutions were obligated to do this mandatory reporting, maybe that matter would not have happened.

Further, all of us as Members of Parliament have been identified as mandatory reporters to solidify the moral responsibility that we already have to report suspicious abuse or neglect against older persons. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, there would be restrictions on employing mandatory reporters if they have been convicted of prescribed offences against those who are at risk. There are also requirements on mandatory reporters to undergo training regarding safeguarding and for entities to have policies in line with this legislation regarding their safeguarding procedures.

In order to ensure that those who abuse or neglect older persons can be adequately held

accountable, this Amendment Bill establishes an offence, where someone who is in a position of trust such as someone in the family relationship or a mandatory reporter engages in abuse or neglect against an older person, they may be liable to a summary conviction in prison for up to twelve years.

Mr. Speaker, cases have come to my attention of older persons being severely neglected. I know of a man who was left locked in his room for days with just a bottle of water. The persons responsible for his care were derelict in their duties. If it was not for members of the community bringing it to the attention of the family, this man would have been left longer and the outcome could have been much worse; thank God they were not. We need to make sure that those who interact with our older persons and come across such cases, report these to the department so that the proper safeguarding measures can be put in place to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, the final safeguarding provision I would like to highlight in this Amendment Bill is the provision for any person or identified department to make an application to the Grand Court for an intervention order regarding the property, financial affairs or personal well-being of an older person, where that older person lacks the capacity to take action or make a decision. This provision will, for the first time, enable the department to effectively support an older person who does not have family support, whether they do not have children or do not have people who are willing or stable to take on that role. The department will be able to seek an Intervention Order in relation to a specific matter. In these proceedings, the Amendment Bill also provides for the older person to be assigned to a guardian *ad litem*—you know those French words.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: *Ad litem*. I know you would correct me. If there's anyone in this House who is going to correct me it would be the Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: ...Guardian *ad litem* in the court process to advocate on their behalf. For those who don't know French it's basically a person who is selected to act on their legal behalf—

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, it's Latin.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Premier: I think we all learned something today.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, the Bill establishes, for the first time, an Older Persons Tribunal. Mr. Speaker, in the Older Persons Act, 2017 there were identified rights to which older persons should have access. However, there was no mechanism by which they could seek reparation if those rights were not upheld. In this Amendment Bill, we have established further rights of access to goods, services and programmes as well as for decision making. The Older Persons Tribunal will be able to hear complaints in relation to the rights established in Part 4 of the Act and the amended Bill, as well as in relation to the requirements from mandatory reporters.

Following the hearing, the Tribunal is empowered to require remedial action or make an award for costs. The Older Persons Tribunal will consist of a Caymanian chairperson who was an attorney-at-law for at least five years; a deputy chairperson who was an attorney-at-law for at least three years; a person with at least three years' experience in finance; a person who is a member of the Council of Older Persons; and a person who shall have at least three years' experience in counselling, psychiatry, psychology, social work or therapy. The members will be appointed by Cabinet and published in the Gazette.

Mr. Speaker, the Amendment Bill is arranged in 16 clauses.

Clause 1 provides the short title and commencement of the legislation.

Clause 2 provides for general amendments to the principal Act in order to replace references to the "Council of Older Persons" with references to the "Council for Older Persons."

Clause 3 amends section 2 of the principal Act to insert a number of definitions of terms used in the amending legislation such as "economic abuse". The definition has been added to this legislation based on consultation, and understanding the legislative and societal factors in our community. For instance, Mr. Speaker, cases of fraud are not adequately captured by our legislative framework, but will now be better captured by the definition in relation to older persons. In addition, the term "older persons" is changed from 'a person over the age of 65 years' to 'a person who is 65 years of age or older'.

Clause 4 amends section 3 of the principal Act to re-number the Schedule since a second schedule is being inserted in the principal Act.

Clause 5 amends section 4 of the principal Act to increase the functions of the Council to include acting as an advisor and advocate with Government agencies to influence policy and promotion towards healthy aging and age-friendly communities.

Clause 6 amends section five of the principal Act to expand the duties of the Chairperson of the Council to include ensuring their work is compliant with the Act and relevant policies and legislation as well as developing an annual strategic plan.

Clause 7 amends section 6 of the principal Act to enable the appointment of a secretary to the Council who would conduct administrative duties.

Clause 8 inserts into the principal Act, a proposed new section 7A to impose on the members and the secretary of the Council, a duty of confidentiality in respect of matters that are before the Council.

Clause 9 inserts into the principal Act, a proposed new Part 2A containing new sections 9A to sections 9G. The proposed new sections provide for the following matters—

- A Department of Government with responsibility for the subject of Older Persons;
- The functions of the Department;
- The duties and the powers of the Department to investigate
- That the department may charge fees in providing care and support for older persons;
- The Department's power to request assistance in the exercise of its duties from any person, public authority, non-profit organisation or private entity;
- The duty of confidentiality by the Department; and
- The duty of disclosure of interest by officers of the Department.

Clause 10 repeals Part 3 of the principal Act to remove the statutory requirement for the maintenance of the Older Persons Register.

Clause 11 inserts into the principal Act proposed new sections 17A and 17B. The new section 17A makes provisions to ensure that older persons have access to goods, services and programmes on an equal basis with a person who is not an older person. Section 17B sets out the right of an older person to make decisions unless they lack the capacity in relation to a matter.

Clause 12 inserts three Parts into the principal Act. The first is Part 4A – notification and investigation of abuse or neglect. This Part contains proposed new clauses 17C to 17K which provide for the following matters:

- Saving of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (2021 Revision), so that persons are not exempted from any duty or obligation imposed by that Act
- The prohibition of abuse or neglect of older persons as an offence with added penalties
- A restriction of the employment of mandatory reporters where a mandatory reporter has been convicted of certain prescribed offences
- A requirement for a mandatory reporter to notify the Department of suspicions of

abuse, neglect, or self-neglect of an older person

- Protection from liability for voluntary or mandatory notification of suspicions of abuse of an older person
- Confidentiality in relation to notifications of abuse or neglect of an older person
- Provisions indicating that the Department is not obliged to take action in relation to a notification of suspected abuse or neglect of an older person, if the Department is of the view that the information received is insufficient to constitute reasonable grounds for the suspicion
- Assessment and investigation of notifications by the Department; and lastly
- Sharing by the Department of information relating to abuse or neglect of older persons.

Part 4B is the second part inserted into clause 12 which inserts clause 17L to provide for an intervention order for the protection of property, financial affairs or personal wellbeing, (other than health care) of an older person. It also authorises the Department to take such action or make such decisions in relation to these matters as specified in the intervention order.

Part 4C is the final part inserted into clause 12, Mr. Speaker. This part establishes the Older Persons Tribunal and inserts clauses 17M to 17S which makes provisions for the function and the powers of the Tribunal; the complaints which the Tribunal can hear, as well as their actions based on the outcome of the hearing; the duties of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Tribunal; the duties of the Secretary of the Tribunal; the remuneration of the members of the Tribunal; and the protection of the members of the Tribunal from liability and damages for anything done in the discharge of their functions.

Clause 13 increases the penalty imposed by section 18 of the principal Act for obstructing persons carrying out lawful functions under the principal Act

Clause 14 inserts into the principal Act proposed new sections 18A and 18B. The new section 18A makes provision for the Rules Committee of the Grand Court to make rules for giving effect to the principal Act. The new section 18B makes provision for appeals of court decisions.

Clause 15 rennumbers the Schedule as Schedule 1 and varies the composition of the Council. The primary changes in the composition of the Council are: to add the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson as two additional persons into legislation, as well as to ensure that the district representatives can be appointed at age 55 years or older whereas currently, it is restricted to older persons 65 years or older.

Clause 16, inserts into the principal Act the proposed new Schedule 2 which deals with the Older Persons Tribunal. Schedule 2 makes provisions for the

following matters: the membership of the Tribunal; the term of the appointment of members of the Tribunal; the quorum of the Tribunal at meetings; the disclosure of interests; termination of membership; vacation of membership; and a duty of confidentiality by the members of the Tribunal.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to present this Bill on behalf of the Members of this honourable House and proud to be making the necessary steps to improve our quality of care and responsibility, morally and legally, on behalf of the good people who have steered this country to what it is today.

With that being said, I look forward to the Members' full support of these Amendments to the Older Persons (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

[Pause] The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise to make brief comments on the Older Persons (Amendment) Bill, 2024. I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister and Deputy Premier for such a thorough presentation on the Bill and for the recognition given to Ms. Lucille, recognising the lobbying that she did for parts of this Bill, in particular, that of creating a separate department for our older persons.

Mr. Speaker, as we go forward with this, I just hope that the department is, first of all, not just a counter somewhere with a plexiglass and you have to pull a number and sit and wait; but that it actually has officers who go out into the community. I think it has to be kicked off with a bit of a widely publicised campaign drawing attention to the services and to the office. I say this, Mr. Speaker, because I recognise many of the issues that my—our constituents—go through, even just dealing with the Department of Financial Assistance.

You've heard me before, call on that Department to have case officers who actually go out into the community because, as recently as last week, when the Department calls a 90-plus year-old person to carry out certain compliance questions, tasks, or being asked to come in to present certain information, once that person hangs up the phone, they have no idea what they were asked. If they don't have a friend, a child or a constituency office to call to say, *I got a call, I don't know what they were talking about, but I got a call*. If they don't have someone to make that call to, what will happen is that they won't provide the information.

They'll get someone to take them to the bank and help them operate their automated teller machine (ATM) card because most of them still feel uncomfortable doing it, and that is a risk in its own. I know elderly people who are charged \$100 to be driven to the bank for the person to operate the ATM for them because they're illiterate. They can't read what the ATM says, so

they pay a person \$100 every month to drive them to the bank. That person takes the older person's debit card and withdraws the money, gives it to them and gets \$100 out of it— that's if they're not stealing more from them.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition:

What will happen is, if they don't provide that information their services are cut off, so they'll go there one day, they pay their \$100, the guy will still charge them \$100, and they get to the ATM, and there's no money.

Another issue, Mr. Speaker, similar to that, you've heard me talk about homeless people. New addicts who we see in our communities, who we see right around George Town. If you can't find a beat officer, you don't know who to call. You don't know how to get help for that person, and it is something that we're seeing more and more. You call several departments, and you hear, *okay, if a child is not involved, it's not us. Are they Caymanian?* We don't know. *Well, you got to find out if they're Caymanian first.*

You call a beat officer, they come and they're willing to help, if you can get them; if they're not on vacation or pulled off because there are too many burglaries or they're doing night operations or a boat came in or something like that. You have to sit with them and try to figure out how to criminalise the person so they can arrest them to try and help them. Unless they're a child, no matter what their age is, and if you care and if you're a representative who drives through your constituency and knows everyone and checks and you see a new lost individual— and I won't label them with anything else because you don't know what the situation is— you don't know who to call to get help. Even if you do run into a senior, which... You know, the Lord works in mysterious ways. I told you this story last night, Mr. Speaker.

I was walking my dog, and someone a few weeks ago had made a mess near my house with coconut husks and things. I saw the bicycle and I saw the person in the bush who I mistook for another one of my constituents with whom I felt comfortable making a joke. I waited with my dog and my dog got anticipated because the dog saw that I was focusing, and this elderly gentleman came out with this bag of coconuts and as he turned the corner, I almost gave the poor gentleman a heart attack with the dog, then I realised it wasn't the person I thought it was.

I spoke to him, and got part of his story— he said to me, he can't work right now because he had an operation and he gets the coconuts to make a few dollars. I said to him, did you husk these ones here? He said, yeah. I said, when you husk them just throw the husk in the bush, throw it off the road. I said, nothing wrong with an earnest dollar. I got his name and so I went about my business.

On Tuesday morning, I had a meeting down at the Neil Godfrey Park with [the] Recreation, Parks and Cemeteries Unit (RPCU), and I saw the gentleman coming on his bicycle. He sat under the cabana, threw his head back and he just went limp. I said, oh my goodness; that's that gentleman. The RPCU staff member told me his name and said that he worked for the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) for decades; *"I know him as Mr. So and so"*, so, as soon as we finished talking, I went over to check on him. He had laid down by that time, and he was crying. This is an older gentleman and he was crying.

I said to him, are you okay? He said, *I haven't been able to sleep all night, my stomach is hurting*. I said, well, let me call the ambulance. Can you go to the hospital? He said, *no, I don't have any insurance*. Do you have Status? *No, I have Permanent Residency (PR)*. I said, where do you live? Do you have a place to stay? He said, yes, in West Bay. I said, well, how come I always see you here in Town; this is twice in one week. He said, *well, some nights I clean up a restaurant and it doesn't make any sense to go back to West Bay*.

Anyway, after speaking to him more, and trying to reach a couple of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) who I know— unfortunately, I couldn't reach them, because they'd be willing to help. Reluctant to call 911, couldn't reach any of my beat officers, or a safety officer. I began to question him some more, and I looked at his bicycle, I saw no water bottle or anything. I said, when last did you eat or have water? He said, *yesterday, I think*. I quickly went to the little shop in the area and got him some ginger ale, crackers, a bottle of water and some other food which I took back for him and said, take your time and have the crackers and the water. He did so, and I could see him brightening up as he did. I don't know what has happened to the gentleman. I had no one to report it to.

I could sit all day on the phone and you will get no action on it because there's no specific person. There's this unknown entity when you find these things in your community and no one knows who that person is, and the only way to help someone is to get them to commit a crime. That's the only way to get them help if they need to be rehabilitated, if they need mental health help, if they're just homeless; the only way to get them to get help, and the only way the police— who are willing most of the time— can help, is if they commit a crime.

I have another story of a senior. I said to him, you're entitled to get help from government. He said, *oh?* I said, you want help with filling out the forms? He said, *no, I can do it*. We got him the forms; checked back with him [and] he said he had been denied after back and forth. I said, how could you be denied? He said, *well, they said I didn't have any bills*. I said, well, did you tell them that you don't have any electricity because your weather head is down from a storm, your roof is leaking and your water got cut off over 10 years ago and that's why you don't have any bills. He said,

well, no, I didn't tell them that. They wanted my water bill, my electricity bill, and I told them I didn't have any. Then, they asked me about my work and I said, *well, sometimes I do a little work*. They asked me how much I get paid and I said \$300. I said, well, when last did you do that? He said, about seven months ago. The person is calling and getting this information from them, why doesn't someone get up? Why isn't there an officer who goes and physically sees what the situation is with this person?

Then I signed him up for the home repair. We haven't heard a word about that. Unfortunately, his mother put some gentleman in the land papers some forty years ago. I assume it is one of the hurdles for him to get the house repairs. The young man was from Jamaica, he remembers the gentleman as a kid [but] he knows nothing else about him; no one on the island seems to know anything about him either.

I'm sharing all of these stories to say that all of this sounds good. It's a step forward. It's a step in the right direction to have the department. However, if we just look at the department as an office, as a building and someone getting a nice job and they got a nice car to drive around with the big signage on it, it's not helping; it's not helping. We have to ensure that the people who need these services are sought out. We have to ensure that those who are most vulnerable, the ones who fall through the gap, they are the ones we really need to focus on.

Those who have kids who can help them or neighbours or friends who fill out their forms take care of them, but there are forgotten people out there— and Deputy Governor don't take offence to this, it was even before your time—but many of them are former civil servants. DEH in particular, because I understand that thirty years ago it was one-year contracts, one-year contracts, one-year contracts; then they stay here, work at DEH for twenty-five years, get PR, and then they get released, meanwhile they were on [multiple] one-year contracts. No insurance, nothing— doing the job that none of us will go out and do.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Right.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition:

These are the people, these are the seniors who we really need to make sure we reach. The ones who have children who could take care of them but are not doing so, we can't hold that elderly person responsible for that.

We can't make them continue to suffer— listen, you give them enough money to cover water, electricity and food, et cetera. Every one of us knows, no matter how much we budget, if you're living in a house something will go wrong. Every month you think you *go in* put money in the bank, your air-conditioning gone; you got a water leak, and the poor elderly people don't find out until one month later, when it is \$700 or \$800. Then

they don't have anyone to come and help, and it goes two months and it's \$1,600.

They don't include [for] if something falls on the house or the window breaks, they don't get it fixed. They go further and further into poverty because they're only given enough money to cover their basic needs, and every one of us in here knows that just enough to cover your basic needs cannot keep a house. You cannot upkeep your house with just basic needs, and you don't want to be put in a position where you fix the window or pay your utility bill; or fix the toilet so your water bill isn't so high, but skip your meal. These people can't be helped [from] behind a desk and further, they do not do online!

For all of us out there, when you are dealing with these folks, you can't put everything online.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Exactly. Preach it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: If you're going to put everything online, you have to have dedicated people to pick up a laptop or a tablet and go out and help these folks.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. W. McKeever Bush: True, true.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: I am all for it. Anyone who knows me, knows that I'm all for going digital and advancements and the sorts, but when we are dealing with elderly people, we got to ensure that we don't make anyone fall through the cracks. We've got to ensure that everyone, every single person is covered.

Mr. Speaker, going back to those who have children who could care for them but don't— take the house. Give them something similar to a reverse mortgage. Take care of the elderly person; take care of them, but put a charge over the house so that when the time comes, and the kids come running to fight and take over the land, Government has to be paid back.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Government has to be paid back. Don't make the person suffer because their kids don't care for them; I don't care what the law says. Don't make our people suffer because their children don't care for them.

Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that the elderly population would triple in the next thirty years and if some of us in here are fortunate enough, it will be us. In closing, it is critical that we now create the environment and put the infrastructure in place to ensure that

we prioritise the needs *and preserve* the dignity of our senior citizens.

I'll close by saying that it sounds great, looks great, but it can't be done from behind a desk and plexiglass.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That, I think, is an appropriate note on which to conclude today's sitting. I'll invite the Honourable Premier to move the adjournment Motion.

ADJOURNMENT

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the adjournment of this honourable Parliament until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The Speaker: The question is that the House do now adjourn until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

At 6.06 p.m. the House stood adjourned until 10 a.m. Thursday, 12th December, 2024.