



PARLIAMENT OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

**State Opening and Budget Address
Second Meeting of the 2023/2024 Session**
Third Sitting

Tuesday
12 December, 2023
(Pages 1-66)

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

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

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

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

INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town West
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APOLOGIES

Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP	Elected Member for Newlands
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**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
STATE OPENING AND BUDGET ADDRESS
SECOND MEETING OF THE 2023/24 SESSION
TUESDAY
12 DECEMBER, 2023
10:25 A.M.
Third Sitting**

[Hon. Alden McLaughlin, Speaker, presiding]

The Speaker: Good morning, Parliament is resumed.
I ask the Minister of Tourism and Ports to grace us with prayers.

PRAYERS

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Minister of Tourism & Ports, Elected Member for George Town Central:
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 Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, Ministers of 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.

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

The Speaker: I have apologies for late arrival from the Honourable Deputy Governor, who will join us later.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS

**SECOND READING
(Continuation of debate)**

**APPROPRIATION
(FINANCIAL YEARS 2024 AND 2025) BILL, 2023**

The Speaker: When we adjourned last evening, the Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency had just completed her contribution.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

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

The honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman.

[Pause]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, good morning.

I rise to offer my contribution to the Throne Speech, Policy Statement and Budget Address which were delivered on December 8th in this honourable Parliament. I take this opportunity to thank Her Excellency the Governor, for her delivery of the Throne Speech, as she represented His Majesty King Charles III.

Congratulations are also in order to you, Sir Alden, as the newly-elected Speaker; and I take this opportunity to welcome our new Premier, the Honourable Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, my colleague from Cayman Brac East, and I give credit to the Government for working quickly to finalise and bring the budget so that we, as the Speaker said yesterday, will be home for Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address a few things in my contribution today. The first would be the tourism

budget, as it provides 25 per cent of our country's income.

Mr. Speaker, we all know our country does not export natural resources like gold, silver, bauxite, and other products to gain foreign income from outside our borders; however, foreign income is added to our economy when tourism visitors spend their dollars on our shores— inward investment. Our tourism industry is one of the drivers for our economy, and it is divided into air arrivals and cruise arrivals.

When reviewing the tourism statistics I would like to provide some comments starting with the stay-over arrivals and with your permission, Mr. Speaker, quote some information supplied by the Cayman Islands Tourism Association (CITA) in the December 1st *Cayman Compass* article, "Tourism Industry Remains Hopeful..."

Would you like to see this?

[Pause]

The Speaker: Honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman, are you proposing to lay this on the Table of the House or just to quote from it?

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Mr. Speaker, I am going to quote about six lines. If you'd like me to lay it, I'm prepared to.

The Speaker: Yeah, once you quote it, you can lay it— although all of this information is already within the public realm, so it is simply a report from... Which newspaper is this?

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: *Compass*.

The Speaker: From the *Compass*, yeah, so it's already in the public realm.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Yes, okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would say that most of the information in this article was very well delivered by our Tourism Minister when he spoke yesterday so, nothing new is going to come out of this other than the positioning of what was said by the Tourism Association. **"The numbers, which were released Wednesday, showed a slight dip from the 21,580 arrivals recorded in October last year. October 2023 ended with 20,568. Every month, except October, improved over the corresponding month in 2022 and was pegged as having hit 86 per cent of the 2019 statistics, surpassing the Department of Tourism's projection of 70 per cent."**

Cayman Islands Tourism Association president Troy Leacock, speaking on Wednesday's episode of 'The Resh Hour', acknowledged that [the] October numbers were lower than expected. 'It is good to see that we're continuing to stay ahead of the 70 per cent target that the Ministry of Tourism

and the Department of Tourism had set. We in the industry definitely wanted more than 70 per cent. Our expectation was more, we've staffed up for more. I think [the] numbers for October were a little soft... [and] we saw that across the industry. September was a little bit stronger than last year."

Mr. Speaker, on the second page, he's quoted: **"We've been able to increase the prices, whether it's hotel rooms, whether it's water-sports operations, charters, etc. I think businesses are being recalibrated rather than just simply saying 'I want to get back to the same volume that I had in 2019.' It's about: 'Where's my revenue? Where is my cost base? Where's my profitability?' So I think everybody's going through a recalibration. We shouldn't really focus [purely] on [getting] back to 500,000 [and think the job is done]. It's really not as simple as that. The Department of Tourism, in a recent statement said there was an increase in the length of stay..."** which is good.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very good article, very good positioning for the Cayman Islands. I want to note what the President of CITA said, **"We in the industry definitely wanted more than 70 per cent. ...we've staffed up for more."**

With more rooms coming online in 2024, success cannot be managed or measured by comparing air arrivals for 2019. More rooms should bring more income, inflation should bring more income. These must bring more people and we must make sure we focus on profitability for the tourism businesses and industry partners— and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister who, in his delivery yesterday, which was well done, acknowledged the success of 2019, which I was the Minister responsible in 2019, for as he said, *'The highest numbers we've ever had in the tourism industry'* and our government was the government of the day.

The team that I had then, which he has now, was led by Chief Officer, Stran Boddien; and Director of Tourism, Rosa Harris; and I say hats off to the Minister for keeping them intact and for following and allowing them to do what they do well.

I want to take a minute to talk about the relationships between tourism ministers. When I became tourism minister for eight years, the tourism minister before me, the Honourable McKeever Bush, had started an initiative for a hospitality school and I didn't stop the initiative but worked to improve it; and the first time they brought a graduating class, I picked up the phone and called the Honourable McKeever Bush and invited him— and he came and looked at what he had started, and the success it was having.

I say that to give credit to the current tourism minister because we have a good relationship. If I call, he answers the phone; if he can't answer then, he calls back, and vice versa if he calls me. If he comes to Cayman Brac, he says, *I'm coming over*, and invites me to what he's doing. If he has some thoughts, we chat, we

talk, enjoy the relationship. That's how tourism ministers are supposed to be, because what's good for each one of us is good for the country; 25 to 30 per cent of the income of this country is dependent on the policies that the tourism minister and Ministry and Government of the day bring.

I was the first one in this House who acknowledged and gave him credit for his Caribbean Tourism Initiative and Chairmanship, [and] rightfully so because as he said, we are acknowledged as regional players and it doesn't matter the name that is there, the Cayman Islands are represented. Therefore, I take the time this morning to say that we're not worried about 520,000 arrivals. That number will never be right again, because more rooms are being built. Inflation is changing the prices and the percentages of arrivals will increase. It is only benchmarking what has been done now—taking us over the COVID-related year and showing that we're moving, investment is coming and we want to continue to drive tourism forward and to move it forward, short-term, medium-term and long-term.

As the President said, our goal going forward must be being bigger and attracting more tourists than we did in 2019 and we'll get there. We must concentrate our attention and improve the length of stay. We must improve and offer reasons for the average daily spend to increase. We must concentrate and improve the offerings of our rooms, our meals, our transportation and our activities—and I note in the budget, a large amount for the Turtle Farm in two years. As was explained, it is because of a capital investment in the plant itself, so, if we're going to make the anchor of tourism in West Bay successful, those initiatives are the types of things that we have to keep moving forward. That's all.

Mr. Speaker, we must, we *must*, get safety under control. You will not have people coming to an environment that is not safe, especially when our tourism is pointed at three-generational tourism. What do I mean by that? I mean high net-worth individuals who bring their grandchildren, their children and themselves; and I will tell you, that when the grandparents are here anything the grandchildren want, they get, without a doubt.

We have to work and ensure that we get our transportation problem, our infrastructure, under control. We have to get to a point where it does not feel like a burden for a hotel guest to go on the road and visit local attractions, so if you have an environment that they don't want to take their families or children in because they don't feel safe, you know what they're going to do? They're going to build a wall around the hotel and they're never going to come and meet us.

Now, they can walk out, and the advertising way is, if you want to let people know that we're safe and the community is ready to welcome them, you will put in your ads that staying at certain hotels is only five minutes' walk to a very famous restaurant in that area

which subconsciously tells our guests, "*You can leave the hotel and walk to something local.*" That's where we are today, but there are always challenges as you grow, and short-term, these are the things we have to start managing and looking at.

I see the Minister of Health shaking her head. She's very aware of the input of tourism. It is also extremely important that we have the health facilities when we have visitors who know they can be taken care of if, God forbid, they have some type of emergency.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as said yesterday, that outline goes to the trickle-down effect that sometimes we don't really notice; but think about the air transportation, especially on Cayman Airways. Caymanian pilots, Caymanian flight attendants, Caymanian CEO, Caymanian CFO, and Caymanians throughout the office. I would venture to say there is no other small national airline that is run from top to bottom—

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: —by the people of the country. Hats off to Cayman Airways and what they are able to do with our Caymanian people and labour.

Mr. Speaker, I carry that on to another subject that the Ministry has responsibility for, and that's the Airport Authority and the air traffic controllers who make us feel safe as we fly in, knowing that not only as we went to that gateway in Miami and felt like we were home because we saw some *Brackers* there, but we see Caymanians there and feel we've already arrived home. We know that when we are landing, a Caymanian air traffic controller, along with a Caymanian pilot, is going to land us. That's what an industry is about, it is to train and upskill the people to take advantage of it.

Taxis: If you want to meet a real Caymanian, go for a couple of taxi rides in a day. Not just one; two or three. They are fantastic personalities and real ambassadors for the country. Tour buses, rental cars, coordinators, drivers; and the important part, most of these are owned by Caymanians. This has given them opportunity. This is why we have to grab this industry and continue moving it forward. We have Caymanian hotel owners, we have staff, concierges and management who welcome. Not as many as we would like, but that's one of the challenges, to move forward, to bring more people into the industry.

Mr. Speaker, I want to briefly talk about the Airbnb, the friends and family. Airbnb brought us back to where we were 20 years ago. We are all creatures of habit. You shop every Saturday at the same time, you vacation every year at the same time if you enjoyed it the last year. When you stay at an Airbnb owned by a Caymanian family that interacts with you on a daily basis, you not only come back the next year, but you call them, and you find out when their birthday is and you send them text messages and check up on the

weather. That builds our tourism community. Opportunities for Caymanians.

The other big opportunity right now: local restaurants. It does not matter what part of the country you are in, people are going to ask you, *'Where can I get local food?'* We ask that too. *'Where are we going for lunch?'* Very, very local cuisine. Very important from the standpoint of what we have available.

How many people do you think work at the Turtle Centre? How many people work in the activities that people enjoy? Those are all, as we say, *'trickle-down'* effects of tourism. Sure, friends and family use these activities; the financial industry, as they and their clients come use them; local souvenir shops, go to the Craft Market, but the majority of it is pushed forward by tourism. .

All of these are enjoyed because of the importance of *'trickle-down'* and must be acknowledged and worked on— and when I say worked on, what do I mean? I mean, that there is a standard expected when you vacation in the Cayman Islands. What is our obligation as a Government, as a Ministry? Training. Where you can hold your head high and know that people can answer questions, give you guidance, give you comfort that what they tell you, you can depend on.

I was very happy and pleased to hear about the financing initiative that the Minister brought forward yesterday. One of the most important things to get into the industry is the financing that, it was outlined, is going to be available; but along with that I will ask the Minister, and the Government, to be sure to tag on the mentoring part of it. It's one thing to give them \$50,000, but don't let them go out the door without telling them how you're going to help them get involved with all the different aspects of how to manage it and be successful. Mr. Hew started it with small businesses in his last term as Minister, and I believe the Deputy Premier has continued it.

[Inaudible Interjection]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Same one?

[Inaudible Interjection]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Good one to follow.

Education: I didn't hear anything about scholarships— the UCCI hospitality school, the relationship with Johnson & Wales [University]... There is much scholarship money available both through tourism and the Ministry of Education, [and] we want our young people to take advantage of that. They have the ability to go to some of the best schools not in the region, not in the United States, but in the world. Acknowledge that, *"Oh, you went to that hospitality school?"* They can get a job wherever they want but we want them to come home.

Mr. Speaker, the final one, there could be many on this provide list, but one that I thought was most interesting was yesterday, when the new Minister for Sustainability brought up Stingray City enforcement. It was acknowledged that she would be looking into it and I think the industry itself would be very thankful for it, but on December 8th 2019, in this Parliament, it was stated by the environment minister Dwayne Seymour that, **"The Department of Environment will not be issuing any new licenses for Stingray City. This came as Environment Minister Dwayne Seymour announced a temporary moratorium on licenses Thursday evening in the Legislative Assembly."**

I do not know how he did it Minister, but yesterday I heard you acknowledge that you were going to deal with it and that there was some legislation. I am not sure if you did it without legislation or whether you looked at but—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: —the point is that it needs to stop and, before we take a while... You are very popular with [the] North Sound tourism-boat operators. Very kind words were in the newspaper about them depending on and acknowledging your interest in it.

The North Sound is the bread and butter of the industry. They talk about—*Want to meet Caymanians? You wanna find conches? Get a North Sound boat trip.* Very important to our industry. I was really glad to hear how you acknowledged it yesterday, what you're going to do, and how it's going to be looked into. I am sure the Minister was, too, and I'm sure it will transfer through the different operators in that area.

Mr. Speaker, how do we grow our tourism industry from this 2019 number?

The Speaker: Honourable Member, sorry to interrupt you, but the recording is not picking you up because you're too far away from your mic.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Is that better?

The Speaker: Yes, or you need to speak up, one of the two.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: I can do both.

[Laughter]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: How do you make it easier, because what we want to do is grow more tourism arrivals? You look at people, at how they are going to book their tourism and vacation travel, and you make it easy for them. You under-promise and over-deliver. You look at the centres of wealth that you can service, and that you can find the high net worth individual and families, or the families who have a spendable income in

that area that can afford to enjoy our country. Use your gateway cities—it's easier for you.

We're an island, so you're going to fly here—for the purposes of these arrival numbers—so you want to make it easy for people to get on the plane and get here. You look for your direct flights into Cayman and yes, direct from Miami into Cayman Brac. You know friendly people will be meeting you, and you will be meeting them. As you arrive here, you make sure that it is an easy transit through the arrival system, the airport, border control, the baggage handlers; and then, as you get outside, the taxis and tour buses that welcome you. It is probably one of the first two experiences where you are going to interact with a local person.

The accommodation should have easy check-in, good service and state-of-the-art Information Technology (IT) if they do it online, and activities available not only in the hotel area, but surrounding activities. That's the trickle-down. That's the one that we make easy, as we talked about before. Easy to get a taxi, easy to get a tour, easy to get there, walk if you'd like—make it easy; and it also gives them the opportunity to meet the local people. Departures are the same in reverse: uneventful, safe, easy check-in, easy boarding, easy flight home. Now, I said all of those things because when all of them add up, here is what happens: return guests.

Return guests. We are one of the destinations with the highest rate of return guests. What that means is, that the next time they come to Cayman it doesn't cost you a penny to get them here. They're not looking for that ad in the Wall Street. They're not looking for the ad in the New York Times. They're not looking for *Travel+Leisure* because they are repeat guests. They're creatures of habit. They're coming back to stay in the same place, same time, next year. Continue our push to build repeat guests.

Mr... I thought you were coming to tell me I need to be closer to this microphone.

[Laughter]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Mr. Speaker, tourism businesses have expenses and the tourism expenses for that business are twelve months out of the year; they're not high season. They struggle through low season. Simply put, we look at it and say that there are peaks and there are valleys. The only thing you can do in a peak is increase the price of your room to be more successful and ensure it balances, so that you don't lose business from it; but the valleys, that's when we can really capitalise, Mr. Speaker.

That is the one that, when it's announced *you have more numbers than 2019*, it is because you've driven up the valleys and brought them close to the peaks and increased the numbers. May, August, September, October, part of November. Most people look at it and see the months. Tourism looks at it and sees opportunity.

Incentive travel, small conferences for the buildings and infrastructure we have here, weddings, sporting events, cultural events; and the success for that can happen in a 12 or 18-month period; and the industry, because of what we're going to face, needs that type of short-term planning.

Mr. Speaker, I feel comfortable. The Opposition is obviously supportive of a tourism initiative and moving forward to continue to build our tourism industry. Our stayover arrivals, as has been said by the president of Cayman Islands Tourism Association (CITA) and by the Minister and his team, will continue to be reported and we are very optimistic that they will continue to be successful.

Mr. Speaker, cruise arrivals... boy, what a difference a couple of years makes.

[Laughter]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Man...

Cruise arrivals are projected to fall from approximately 1.3 million this year, to 750,000 in 2024.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: No? That's what is on Google. As Minister Seymour says, *I was a Googlist to find out that information*.

The concern from speaking to industry partners who depend on cruise passengers... These people depend twelve months out of the year on the business they get from cruise passengers: the Turtle Centre, tour and taxi transport—Georgie, "The Coconut Man", depends on that twelve months out of the year. It is personal, people centric, to look at one individual whom you see every day and want him to be successful working in the industry.

Souvenir shops, water sports, the North Sound boat operators and Stingray City operators—What is the plan to help them repurpose their investment and withstand a nearly-40-per-cent reduction in their business next year? This is people centred. This approach is a short-term review in policy, and as we walk around each one of us gets asked the question, whether it be by the North Sound or George Town operators: *What are we going to do next year when our business is down 40 per cent and the valleys are huge*.

I also want to mention, Mr. Speaker, that fewer cruise [arrivals] mean a reduction in the Port Authority's revenues—and I'll say it again: Fewer cruise arrivals mean a reduction in the Port Authority's revenues.

Think about if you were looking at a business, looking for your return, and you had the opportunity to use your physical plant 24-hours a day. That's what the Port Authority has the opportunity to do. They do cargo at night and cruise in the day; so as the cruise slows down in the day, it means that you'll have less opportunity to use your infrastructure, your physical plant dur-

ing the day. An opportunity that decreases your revenue, and when the revenue is decreased, Mr. Speaker, there's only one way that they're going to be able to get another revenue stream or to get the revenue back. They're going to have to increase the fees of the cargo coming over the dock. That's a cost of living increase because it's going to be transferred to each individual as they purchase the goods.

Mr. Speaker, we have to think about this in the short term. We have to look for solutions, and it's something that needs to be reviewed. Yesterday, there was a discussion about cruise piers, there was discussion about looking at it and finding what the Caymanian people wanted. I think the Minister is going to find from his report, with the new ships coming online, that there's not a choice as far as being able to continue to use the piers that are there now. There has to be improvements and a way those improvements will be paid for.

We looked at it and we wanted to retool and review what were the opportunities from smaller cruise ships with higher-net-worth individuals who traded in this area in the slow months. Imagine, if the improvement—which has to be because of how the new ships come online—when it's done, if during the day, that smaller cruise vessels could actually use the new pier that is looked at. I think that if you do the business model on that and you see the revenue against what the expense would be, it would be a very interesting short-term decision that will be faced.

We as Opposition Members would be very happy to be involved; as is the Minister's style, he invites you to look at these things, so I think that I can speak for all of us on this side, we'd be very happy to review that opportunity for the country. It moves us to the conversation about talking to the [cruise] lines about the smaller vessels and what is really available.

How do we strengthen our industry partners to withstand this challenge that we're going to have as we reduce the number of arrivals?

1. Reduce red tape: Talk to the one or two "mom and pop" operators and get them to explain to you what they have to do and where they can get help. As we talked about earlier, it mentors the help and the ability to do business in an easier way.
2. [Fees]: Trade and business fees, licensing fees, scheduling [fees]. I can tell you, as the Minister responsible two and a half years ago, when they have to find all the money at one time to pay some of their fees, it's difficult. That goes back to the loans available and the mentoring of how you prepare yourself to have success.
3. (CINICO) expansion: Mr. Speaker, something that we are excited about is the Cayman Islands National Insurance Company (CINICO) expansion, and one of the opportunities is in the tourism industry because as they work for themselves and in their

business, they come to a certain point when their insurance stops, so it falls on Government then, if they're indigent; or it falls on themselves to have insurance in the vulnerable years of their life.

If you could investigate what CINICO would offer for a block, and the block would be thousands of people who are involved in the tourism industry, and most of them right now are involved with a private insurance company. For a CINICO Manager to sit down and get that block of young, healthy, individuals on board is an opportunity from a business standpoint. From a health and living standpoint, doing business in the Cayman Islands and protecting our people with people-centred initiatives, is very important to the tourism industry. I leave it with the Minister today, Mr. Speaker.

4. Special mentoring and business assistance with loans: The explanation for this was already given so I don't think I have to drill down into it, but I compare it to the Government Guaranteed Home Assisted Mortgage (GGHAM) Programme of how government helped. Again, some people don't need a mentor. You know why? They have family members and being generational, their family members are showing them how they did it and what they think they could do, but we have new, young Caymanians entering the business that need this direction and help.
5. Marketing programme of small businesses: Just explaining to them how they get their name on a cruise ship or an airline; simple, but you're available and they get to look at it.

It was also mentioned earlier to look at the small and medium-sized cruise lines and cruise ships that put more vessels here in the August, September, October slow-month timeframe because, again, each one of those businesses has bills that come in twelve months out of the year, not [just] in the high season's eight or nine months.

Mr. Speaker, we could discuss more, but I believe that our outline today was talking about medium-term [and] long-term but centring on the short-term because of some of the immediate impacts we are going to have in the industry. In the same way we had to do stipends at a certain time because of COVID, we must understand how to get our partners, our Caymanian business people, through the next slowdown, especially from cruise—how to retool them, re-engage them, and look at new opportunities that they can be involved in.

Mr. Speaker, now I'd like to focus on my constituency, Cayman Brac [West] and Little Cayman, but we can talk about tourism a bit as well.

I would like to start off by thanking my constituents for the honour of representing them for the last

nineteen years. They have given me the opportunity to sit [here] and over there as well, in a seat that's theirs, not mine. Their seat; but they allowed me to sit in it to consider their business and the country's business. I will always be grateful for that honour.

Mr. Speaker, I want to publicly state that the budget that has been brought by the Premier for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman is a good budget.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: It continues what we, as the representatives for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman have done over the years. She has been there a few years more than I, but the years that we worked together, if I came and found something that she had started, I continued it. Why? Because it was the right thing to do; it was good for our people, it was started, it was cost-effective—and we continue that way [so] I am extremely happy, which I'll get to a bit later, to support a new school in Cayman Brac.

Mr. Speaker, explaining what we have is important because the phone calls I'm getting are, "*is that going to be covered?*" I want to ensure people understand [that] all the things they're worried about are going to be covered. DAL 2 is \$11,630,000 for 2024, and \$12 million for 2025. Those two amounts, Mr. Speaker, handle salaries at District Administration. [DAL 2] is the nucleus from where all things managed by District Administration in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman come from, so it is not a worry—it's protected the same way it was protected in the last budget and the budget before and the budget before.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that a large percentage of the Sister Islands' population works for government, that's why it is so important to outline publicly, as they listen, what is going to be in the new budget.

Mr. Speaker, this is the Appropriation Bill. I'm going to quote from it starting on page 11, and I've just outlined the government services that are in the Appropriation amount: Sister Island Affordable Housing Programme, \$75,000 in both years—with some management. A very important programme: the Home Repairs [Assistance] programme, \$600,000. Cayman Brac and Little Cayman have a home repair programme that I believe works extremely well and is very important to the indigent and elderly who need safe, dry, clean housing. It gives them the continued pride of living in their own home.

We also have what Minister Seymour calls the NiCE Programme, which we call the Clean-Up programme. There's \$700,000 in each of the years to continue to drive that forward, and I believe that each one of us who has visited is very appreciative of the people who work in that programme, because it's pure ambition to go in the sun for seven or eight hours a day to make your island look so much better.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Sister Islands Community Programmes/Projects, Community Culture, \$150,000 each year.

Mr. Speaker, Sister Islands Affordable Homes. I think there are seven applications to the Development Control Board for homes to start. The Affordable Housing Corporation in the Brac has the funds, and we know that as quickly as it can get started, it's needed.

Land purchase, not identified [in] Cayman Brac, Little Cayman or Grand Cayman, but it's in the District Administration budget and we know that the opportunities to look for land for next generations are being protected and looked at; \$3 million in each year.

The Miscellaneous Road Surface [Upgrades] \$100,000 for 2024; Cayman Brac and Little Cayman Roads, \$1 million in each year; Sports Complex Expansion \$150,000 in 2024 and \$300,000 in 2025; Cemetery Vaults \$50,000 in each year; improvements to multi-purpose hall \$100,000 in each year; [Storm] Drain and Deep Wells \$21,000 in each year; Docks and Ramps in the Sister Islands \$500,000 in 2024 and \$200,000 in 2025; Public Restrooms (Sister Islands) \$200,000 and \$100,00 [2024 and 2025 respectively]; \$100,000 for a play field in Little Cayman—very exciting; and \$300,000 for Public Parks improvements.

Mr. Speaker, that is the outline in this part of the Appropriation, but it is not all. The budget also reflects funding for the construction of a new high school on Cayman Brac, and Mr. Speaker, I want to publicly say, that it can only be considered a wise use of capital for the people of this country, to build schools and sports complexes. That is as simple as I can put the thought and the support for school initiatives.

The Cadet Corps, very important and very successful on the Brac. I would lobby and ask for more support from the Coast Guard [and] the Regiment. We have many miles of unprotected border and it would be nice. We don't know if there are plans—[though] we hear—to put a coast guard vessel in the Brac or Little Cayman. I will just leave it at that it's unprotected and certainly needed, and I would encourage the Coast Guard for both reasons—safety of lives at sea and protection.

Fire Service: Mr. Speaker, we have a Category 7 Fire Service Rating in Cayman Brac. That means that it's able to accept the Cayman Airways Limited (CAL) Max-8s landing and we are extremely proud of the Brac and Little Cayman service. We're also very proud of the new recruits, approximately 10, who are coming back to the Brac and Little Cayman. I would also, at this time, ask the Minister responsible and the Fire Service management, to consider the reimbursement to our new recruits for their housing, food and travel expenses.

I was told it was a budget issue; as they came to Grand Cayman on months' training, they had to continue to take care of their families in Cayman Brac. They were not compensated and had to borrow money and get help from friends and family, to pay their rent

and get transportation and food in Grand Cayman. I don't think it's unreasonable that they be compensated for their training, because they're already members of the Fire Service.

Also, which I'm told it is in the budget—I was looking for it—a new truck for Little Cayman. You know what, I'm so happy and proud that procurement for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman has changed. It used to be that whether it was an ambulance, fire truck, public works truck—whatever the vehicle was—it was purchased new for Grand Cayman and after they used it for a while, they would send it to Cayman Brac, and when Cayman Brac used it, they sent it to Little Cayman; and that's backwards because there are better facilities to maintain equipment here in Grand Cayman. [Under the] procurement policy now, “new” goes to Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

The Water Authority continues to work extremely hard in the Brac; very successful programme moving to the East and driving to get to Spot Bay.

Faith Hospital works from strength to strength. They continue to grow, to offer more services and bring more expertise. The hospital offers security and comfort not only to young or elderly, but all who know that the facility is available; and it's a CINICO facility, the card works there. I'm very proud that we have that type of hospital and that type of care, along with the Community Care Centre for the elderly on Cayman Brac.

Mr. Speaker, CINICO has an office on the Brac and I can only say good things about it. It allows people to go in and discuss issues, but they desperately need to review how they pay medical helpers [because] they are paid in arrears. If you get someone to help you or a family member, you have to pay them first, then put in the Bill and about two to four weeks later, you get reimbursed for that month—so you're basically operating six to eight weeks in arrears for helpers who are needed. It is something that family members and individuals needing this help come to my MP office to discuss at least once a week. I encourage CINICO to review that and see how it can be corrected. It doesn't seem like a big issue, but it is if you need help and you are unable to pay for it.

I would like to congratulate Cayman Bracker Mr. Garston Grant on a new office complex right by the airport. It's fully rented, yellow... you can't miss it. The courage of a Cayman Bracker, around 80-years old, to build it because he has confidence in the future of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman—*hats off to him*—I'm extremely pleased that he did. The other ones who look and say, *if he could do that, I can do it too*, you can see that kind of “can do” attitude and hear it with some of the younger ones looking at opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the sports programmes continue to move from strength to strength. They have been working. There was a little hold up with some CAL (Cayman Airways Limited) flights on a Saturday, but that has been sorted. They create lifelong memories because the Brac teams come to Cayman to play and

vice versa, and they exchange names, [create] friendships... and it continues to work in a very balanced and good way.

I want to spend a couple of minutes on the Police. We always say that for success to happen in Cayman Brac, we need proper air transportation and safety. I welcome Cayman Bracker Kurt Walton as the new Commissioner—as they would say, he “knows the running” about everything in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

We are very proud of him, and grateful for the police service and we commend them for their dedication in protecting us; however, with an increase in burglaries and two unsolved deaths, it would seem there is a shortage of police officers for investigating and patrolling our communities. I can tell you that [concerned] individuals have hired the Security Centre to patrol at night in their own car which has the Security Centres' name all over it. It seems like the community needs more police as we grow, especially. We need access to CCTV to solve some of these break-ins.

We had a police meeting in Cayman Brac, [which] the Premier and I attended. There were questions, and our comment was this: *“We are not professional police, but any time that there came a request for funds, these two representatives—Cayman Brac and Little Cayman—have always voted to fund the police in what they needed for both Islands.”*

The previous Commissioner, before Commissioner Walton took over, acknowledged that he would always get support from us, and we said, there is a standard that we need. We are not police; what we can do is vote the funds to help you get it, and that's the position, I believe, that we must take as legislators and Members of this House to make sure they have the tools they need, but then, as we have discussed, we must have the results.

I want to move to what is needed and what is planned and this is a very exciting time in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. What is needed, as we address cost of living, inflation and opportunity, is a review of cost of living issues.

The population of the Sister Islands equates to 3.2 per cent of the Cayman Islands population. A recent consumer price index for March 2023 showed a further increase of 6.6 per cent inflation compared to March 2022, and the trend is expected to continue. Groceries, utilities and gasoline increased in the United States by over 20 per cent. In the Cayman Islands, about 25 per cent. The cost of living crisis has dramatically increased the financial burden on families and small business owners in large part due to the increase in bank loans, property insurance, health insurance, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, businesses in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, which are predominantly micro or small, have been hit especially hard by the increases, given their limited customer base. Micro-businesses, as defined by the Trade and Business Licensing Act, had licence fees waived until 2023, and I have no doubt [that]

the new Government will waive them for future years, but in general, the cost of business fees and licenses are not proportionate to the size of businesses when compared to Grand Cayman.

I ask that the Government review and consider reducing import duties and licensing fees for the residents and small businesses of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, and I believe that such could actually be done by a Cabinet directive rather than having to make a legislative change, but I am not sure— yeah, see, the Deputy Premier is shaking his head in the [affirmative].

Little Cayman continues to have expanded government services provided in this budget. We have gone through numbers. Planning has approved new homes and condominium projects, which indicates a small percentage growth in Little Cayman.

I look at two overarching projects in Cayman Brac, namely the new high school sports housing block— a public sector project over \$30 million; and Zeus Marina, a private sector project by well-known IT Mr. Frank Schilling which he has told me is basically approved subject to receiving their coastal works licence and once the Environmental Impact Assessment is completed. These projects will truly be an opportunity for a sustainable Sister Islands. One to educate and one to provide industry.

Think about what I just said—

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: One provides the education that you need in a new building, new infrastructure; then industry provides new jobs and diversification of the job market in Cayman Brac, both happening at the same time.

[Cross talk]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Yeah, thank the Lord, rain is a blessing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this was on the agenda for the Conservation Council meeting last week. I haven't heard what input it was, but I was again told that they were just waiting for the terms of reference for the Environmental Impact Assessment. The owner/developer has probably spent \$1.5 to \$1.7 million with engineers and expertise of what needs to be done. He has also done development the right way to do so—he has bought all the land and *more* than he needs, because he knows he is going to appreciate all the land around him.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to show how private-public parallel investment benefits sustainability for Cayman Brac, and the country as well. This representative is thrilled, and I will say my colleague is as well, and she can certainly speak for herself— the Premier has given a nod. These types of opportunities for the people of Cayman Brac are important for us to

work on, and continue green lighting these types of investments and this type of future for younger people of Cayman Brac.

For these two to be successful— I'm glad the Minister came back— we must depend on Cayman Airways, and last year, when we talked about a third Twin Otter, the Minister championed the cause. Right there, in that committee room, the Minister said, '*Let me look into it.*' Mr. Speaker, the Twin Otter *ain't* here yet, but it is coming. Thus, today I want to finish my contribution talking a bit about the need, because we have come a long way, and these two projects along with all of the other ones supported by proper transportation turn us towards sustainability.

Presently, the Islands are served by two Twin Otters which cannot meet the weekend demands, and when they have to go on their annual safety checks abroad, it leaves only one Twin Otter to service the route. Cayman Brac is served by two Saabs, each of them booked at 30 seats. They were purchased because frequency, frequency, frequency was needed for a milk run in the community.

It means that as you have four flights a day, you can get to the doctor for specialty care in the morning and go home in the evening. You can do the work that you need to do in Grand Cayman, and get home without having to spend \$300 or \$400 on a hotel room. It is a quality of life issue, but we have outgrown the two Saabs. They're not large enough to meet the demand now, especially on weekends, and we have to backfill with the MAX-8's 160 seats to catch up and plan events on the weekends.

Then, again, when the Saabs have to go abroad, we are left with only one Saab, Mr. Speaker, so we are left vulnerable to breakdowns— and I will say that I travel between Cayman Brac and Grand Cayman quite a bit, and we have had more breakdowns and unreliable experiences than is customary for Cayman Airways.

We have been told that the number one issue is that there is no backup to support it because you only have one flight with no redundancy, one plane. Now, that is understandable when you cannot use a Saab in Little Cayman; there is only one type of aircraft that can go into Little Cayman so, Cayman Airways is forced to have five planes to service Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. It is like building a house without a front door, nothing can happen unless we get the proper air service.

Today, we have talked about solutions in the short-term. The outline projects are starting, this is the money in place for them to start. The will is with the Government and Ministers/ministries responsible. The Minister and I have chatted, and not only did we chat, but he picked up the phone and brought his expertise and had a good talk with management; and something that was talked about, was looking for a different type of aircraft that would serve both Little Cayman and Cayman Brac.

The headline on *Simple Flying* is, “**Wow: The ATR 42 Can Now Land on Runways Just 800 Metres Long.**” Problem solved.

An Hon. Member: Yup.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: You want me to give you this?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Oh, I am fully aware of it.

[Laughter]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Mr. Speaker, the Minister has just said that he is fully aware and I think he said he was supportive of how we solve the air transportation problem for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Good point.

It has just been said that the problem in Little Cayman is the airport. The problem is that I have been saying so for the last forty years. The biggest plane that lands there is a Twin Otter, and they used to let you take eighteen people on it, now it has cut down to only fourteen because you have to take bags and those are the regulations

It is a willing group that sees and knows the problem. I bring it up, and the discussions we have had is that we need to solve the problem as a short-term problem, not medium or long [term]. I commit that however I can help, I am willing to be involved and try to help from the standpoint... you got support from the Opposition, without question; but maybe there's other expertise I could help you with.

Mr. Speaker, I will just finish what this says. It says, “**ATR has announced upgrades to the ATR 42 which will enable it to land on runways just 800 metres long. The new short take-off and landing (STOL) variant of the ATR 42-600, which will make its way to the airlines in the second half of 2022, will feature a number of physical modifications**”— so, instead of five airplanes, we would now need two or three that would continue to give frequency, frequency, frequency at—

[Fire alarm sounds]

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: I didn't do anything.

The Speaker: Members, I will suspend proceedings. We should all proceed through the front door.

Proceedings suspended at 11:48 a.m.

Proceedings resumed at 12:04 p.m.

The Speaker: Parliament has resumed.

The Honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman, continuing.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before we went outside because of the fire alarm, we were just finishing up with a solution for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman's air service. We discussed the short-landing ATR 42, meaning we would need two, maximum three planes, instead of the five or six planes that are now needed.

Mr. Speaker, I want to finish with what Cayman Airways does for the country, and the importance of its offering. We know what it did as far as an insurance policy to get us through COVID; we know what it's done as an insurance policy to get us through hurricanes and bad weather.

To make it as simple and easy as possible to understand the value of CAL: if you look at how the budget reflects core, strategic, domestic [air services], the average stayover guest stays six days and spends around \$1,800 for that week. If you put a hundred stayover guests on a CAL 737-8 in JFK, and fly them down charging them \$500 round trip, but it costs you more than \$500 round trip to bring them here— let's say it costs you \$800. The Government purchases that \$300 from CAL because the Government is going to have the difference between what they spend and what it costs to get them here, spent in the local economy. It becomes the second driver for our economy, so we encourage it. It's a model that has worked for many years. We have excellent planes, good service, good pilots, good staffing, so all is well with that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, now that we have aired out and got a commitment from the Minister about the ATRs and sorting out Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, I want to finish up [by] reviewing, because there's a cost for everything; and I appreciate that there will be a question and the Ministry and the management of CAL will have to justify how they look at these routes.

In the budget, we have [Strategic] Domestic Air Services, \$3,134,000; [Strategic] Tourism, Regional and Core [Air Services] \$15,435,000, Equity Investment [CAL], \$12,100,000. We have an operating deficit of \$13,100,000.

Mr. Speaker, I find it hard to believe that with what has to take place, you have to basically sell two planes, I would say you will net \$3 or \$4 million; the Twin Otters are very valuable planes, you'll probably get \$6 or \$7 million, so you've got \$10 million that will cover a short-term solution, but this is not short term when you're looking at the type of investment the Government is going to make and continues to make, and what private sector is going to make.

I raise these points to say, that if more funding is needed, I believe on balance, this is people-centric. To give proper service to Cayman Brac and Little Cayman; to develop the Islands into sustainability, to give health care to the Caymanian people, to get transportation for all of their daily needs— and it is extremely

important to push this forward. I laid out the numbers. Two years, it's a \$70 million spend.

From that, we made the comment that if we don't have proper air service, nothing can happen as far as development. What I would like to see, or if more is needed once it's looked at, is for Cayman Airways' employees to get increases. You talked about the new legislation which has been in place for three or four years, but also, industry standard is what Cayman Airways works by, so to review and ensure that our employees are industry standard or better. Better domestic service as soon as possible to Cayman Brac and Little Cayman and to fly the routes that benefit the Cayman Islands tourism product and the people of the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity and the time to offer my comments on the budget this morning. I thank my colleagues for listening; for committing, and for being involved in an important way forward for tourism and for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my family. I want to thank my Personal Assistant (PA) Ms. Liz Walton Thompson, my committee and my constituents in Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman; and all of Cayman Brac. I want to take this opportunity to give thanks to God for our many blessings, and wish everyone a safe and happy Christmas season.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

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

The Honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I did promise to try and be brief—I'm already short.

[Laughter]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I know that we are all eagerly awaiting lunch.

Mr. Speaker, let me start by congratulating the Governor on a most thoughtful and gracious message from the Throne. The Governor in her key points, was very timely as we debate and dissect this 2024-2025 budget.

Her Excellency spoke of the external factors that have created challenges for our people, such as the wars between Russia and the Ukraine; Israel and Hamas; and the ongoing tensions across Asia. Mr. Speaker, these external threats have caused what Her

Excellency termed as “**steep cost of living increases.**” We've seen significant increases in food and raw materials such as steel, fuel and other oil-based products, Mr. Speaker, and I fear we have not seen the end of these challenges.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 and the aforementioned wars, coupled with a global recession, has brought tremendous pressure to the cost of living for our people and threatens their very ability to live comfortably. Her Excellency listed her four areas of priority, those being:

1. Education;
2. Health;
3. Infrastructure; and the
4. Environment.

These are all very broad and important subjects, Mr. Speaker, however, I am more concerned about the things that are affecting our people on a daily basis such as traffic, housing, cost of living and the mental health struggles these pressures are causing our people.

Mr. Speaker, I was heartened to hear the Honourable Premier, my friend, as she so aptly articulated on the UPM's plans to address these and many other issues facing our people. I could hear the passion in the Honourable Premier's voice, and her commitment and stamina in delivering the Government's plans through the Budget Address, “Laying the Foundation for Our People's Wellbeing”, and the Budget Policy Statement, “Nurturing Our Future: A United, Sustainable Path to Recovery, Hope and Prosperity”.

I know it could not have been easy, Mr. Speaker, to put this budget together in such a short period of time. All of the indications that we received were that the budget needed to be scrapped and a temporary budget put in place, so we understand the commitment that was made to deliver this budget; but Mr. Speaker, I hope we are not once again falling into what I termed as a ‘**PACT trap**’ of over promising and under delivering.

In his contribution to the budget debate, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the record levels of spending by the PACT Government and the way in which their budget, two years ago, included excessive levels of borrowing in order to fund their capital spending plans.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, the Leader also spoke about the \$1.2 billion price tag attached to future infrastructure projects that the PACT has committed to, and the need to clearly lay out how those projects can be funded, and prudential rules adhered to.

These are important issues, Mr. Speaker, but it may be that they are issues that we do not need to

worry about. We only have to worry about funding projects if there is any hope of them actually getting delivered.

Mr. Speaker, let me take the time to examine the previous government's (the PACT Government's) track record of failure looking at the projects that they promised two years ago that would be delivered, using the latest information on the third quarter of this year:

- Road surface upgrades - \$3 million budgeted for 2023, but the spend rate in the first nine months of the year only going at around two-thirds that would be necessary to deliver the promised programmes of improvements.
- Minor district works should total \$0.5 million in 2023, but as of 30th September, only \$125,000 spent.
- The project to deliver a modernised court building had some \$3.2 million budgeted for 2023, but only \$0.5 million spent in the first nine months.
- One million [dollars] budgeted for upgrades to national parks; spending at less than half of that total as of 30th September.
- John Gray High School Project C, dealing with the Further Education Centre and the school's sports fields were due to be finished this year with \$5.8 million budgeted for 2023, but I note the completion date has now been put back to April, 2025.
- The Ministry broke ground at the Theoline McCoy Primary for a new school hall in December 2022, but at the end of September, only \$1.4 million had been spent this year and the project is not expected to be completed until at least October.
- The project for a hall at the Joanna Clarke Primary, budgeted to cost at least \$9 million, is way behind schedule. Although \$3 million was expected to be spent in 2023, it appears not to have even started and will now [not] be completed until March 2025 at the earliest.
- At the Red Bay Primary, additional classroom spaces have been promised for two years as a part of the commitment to extend the reception classes to all schools. A contract was finally signed for three new classrooms only at the end of August. That is good news.
- The Lighthouse School expansion project seems to have stalled, Mr. Speaker.
- The so called 'Waterfront Tourism Experience' seems only to have ever expanded in scope without any building happening on the ground. The estimated cost of the project, as set out in the Government's unaudited accounts more than tripled to over \$5 million just between June and September of this year.

Announced as a major priority two years ago, the Government's own estimates put the project at only 2.2 per cent complete as of the 30th September this year. The latest estimate I saw, Mr. Speaker, suggested the construction would begin just as the Minister is about to leave Office.

- Scranton Park - a project very close to your heart, Mr. Speaker.

Although it was a Progressive-led Government that acquired the land for the project in late 2018, after [he] posed for a photo opportunity at a community clean up in February 2019, the Member for George Town Central told how the dream of a new park was "**starting to come true**". He recognised that delivering the park would take resources, but criticised the then Government for not having the resources in place immediately and stridently told the community, "**We don't want to wait.**" Well, after having that Member at the Cabinet Table two and a half years, and with resources identified in the budget, the community continues to wait.

Mr. Speaker, the park project remains beset by delays, [with] the latest official government estimate having slipped the project by yet another year. It is now expected not to be completed until sometime in 2026. There is a beautiful artist impression on YouTube that you can look at though, Mr. Speaker.

- A new fit-for-purpose prison remains a very distant prospect with the PACT having done *nothing* to move the project forward, despite commissioning architects over a year ago. It would be interesting to hear how the Government plans to address the estimated cost of \$125 million for the prison, across the future years.
- Mr. Speaker, the promised new accommodation facility to house migrants, expected to cost \$4.5 million, is delayed whilst we have migrants wandering our neighbourhoods seemingly unchecked.
- A new public transport system, we know might cost \$50 million, but the Government has so far not even gotten as far as identifying its preferred solution, while congestion continues to blight every commuter getting to work and every parent trying to get their kids to school.

Also, may I dare say that my good friend, the Member for Bodden Town East, still can't get his extra hour sleep.

An Hon. Member: No.

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

- A third undersea cable, Mr. Speaker, some \$15 million originally budgeted for the project in 2023, but PACT has only gotten as far as commissioning a feasibility study and appointing consultants to support future work.

- Mr. Speaker, the promises PACT made to establish a Public-Private Partnership to implement a national sewage and wastewater system, and to establish a Public-Private Partnership to install an underground utility network inclusive of fibre, have not made any significant progress and were never properly budgeted for in any case.
- Similarly, Mr. Speaker, the promise to increase and improve infrastructure in the Eastern districts was never even set out in any detail, let alone delivered.
- Finally, the Government's biggest single sustainability project, ReGen, is now more than two years behind schedule and the capital cost of around \$200 million negotiated by the Progressives has spiralled to heights we do not yet even know, thanks to the former Premier's dithering and delays. I will say more about that shortly, Mr. Speaker.

While they have failed to deliver the projects I have spoken about, the Government continued spending excessively on other things. In some cases, Mr. Speaker, it is far from clear as to what purpose the money had been used for. Was it delivering agreed government objectives, as it should be, or individual Ministers going about their own way?

Mr. Speaker, even when facilities do actually get off the ground, they are plagued by delays, and the Government fails to get them into operational service. The new Poinciana Residential Mental Health Facility in East End, which is costing over \$20 million to build, remains unopened despite repeated promises that the new facility would be opening imminently.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, it's not just capital infrastructure projects that the PACT failed to deliver. Despite record levels of operational spending, there are scores of promises that were made by the PACT government in their first Strategic Policy Statement that have not yet been delivered. Let me take the time to highlight a few, Mr. Speaker.

- The reintroduction of 'A' levels into Cayman's public high schools; not yet delivered.
- Ensuring home internet access for all school students; not yet delivered.
- Overhauling the legislative framework for health services; not yet delivered.
- A shuttle service for accessing district health clinics; not yet delivered.
- Free health care for the elderly and children; not yet delivered, Mr. Speaker.
- New arrangements to improve oversight of the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service (RCIPS); not yet delivered.
- Implementing an effective anti-gang strategy; not yet delivered, despite the rising crime problems and all the work done by the

Progressives that could have been harnessed to create a solution.

- Lowering overall health insurance rates by increasing the Cayman Island's National Insurance Company's (CINICO) competitiveness. Insurance rates have increased.
- Enact legislation to reform the pension system; Mr. Speaker, not yet delivered.
- Improved recycling. Mr. Speaker, recycling has gone backwards with the glass crusher out of action while the future of the ReGen project continues to be an absolute mystery.
- End dependency on cheap labour; failed.
- Reform work permit fees; not yet delivered.
- Increase minimum wage and consider the implementation of a Universal Basic Income (UBI). Mr. Speaker, they have failed to deliver the first, and as far as I can see, done nothing on the second.
- Decriminalisation of marijuana; not delivered and no sign of the promised referendum.
- Change planning fee structures to encourage smaller and energy efficient homes; not yet delivered.
- Ensure the protection of mangroves. Planning decisions continue to impact existing mangrove areas.
- Ensure climate change policies are included in development laws; not delivered.
- Review and revise the National Development Plan; not yet delivered and by the former Premier's own admission, will not be during this term.

Mr. Speaker, I do have to pause to say that all of the issues we talked about— housing crisis, traffic, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, public spaces— all begin with the National Development Plan. It is the foundation of these things and we are still working on a plan that is 26 years old; and yes, Mr. Speaker, I was a Minister too who tried to do it. However, I feel that we had a solution. I feel that we were so close had it not been for COVID-19, using the PlanCayman framework and dividing the country into five zones, doing one zone a year, therefore, reviewing the plan every five years, as the law requires.

Mr. Speaker, I could add that neither the National Roads Plan nor the National Infrastructure Plan nor the National Storm Water Management Plan that were promised have been delivered either.

- Enact changes to existing labour laws and regulations; not yet delivered, Mr. Speaker.
- Ensure maternity, paternity and vacation leave policies are in line with international standards. Coming?

An Hon. Member: Soon.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Soon come. I won't say not yet delivered; good to change up the speech anyhow.

- Enact stronger legislation to protect the disabled, elderly and other vulnerable groups; still haven't been delivered.
- Provide initiatives to address the underemployment of Caymanians. Mr. Speaker, under employment remains a real problem.
- Promises to revamp the National Tourism Plan. We heard that it is coming up, an interim one and then a longer term one but to this point, Mr. Speaker, two years later, not delivered.
- As a consequence, a promise to reimagine cruise tourism has also been dropped, but we had revelations last night on where that is going, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the Opposition's list of demands of any kind. I want to reiterate, perhaps for those who may have just tuned in, that these are more than twenty-five examples of the PACT Government's failure to deliver its promises and to meet its commitments— and Mr. Speaker, I could have listed many more. I have painfully gone through this list in the spirit of illumination and certainly not criticism, as we talk about the future.

Mr. Speaker, moving on to Project ReGen. I have to say a few words on it, because I promised to try and be brief, but as the Leader of the Opposition reminded the Parliament, Project ReGen is the single biggest sustainability project currently envisaged for the Government yet, instead of being embraced and driven forward, it has been the subject to endless dithering and delays.

Mr. Speaker, I have been encouraged by the assurances offered by the new Honourable Minister of Sustainability and let me say this to the Minister: *I stand ready to assist*. This is near and dear to me, as it sits squarely in the middle of my constituency— and before people say Camana Bay, look at the map.

From Webb Road on North Sound, to Watler's Road (known as Dog City), down to Parkway and across to Camana Bay and Britannia, communities are being affected depending on the direction of the wind or, God forbid, we have another major fire, Mr. Speaker. It threatens not only these residential neighbourhoods I just spoke about, but also closes a major highway, bringing traffic from the North to a halt. They would lose two hours' sleep to get to Town, Minister Seymour.

We are fast running out of time and available landfill space. Mr. Speaker, Minister, we must now drive forward with the implementation of ReGen as a matter of urgency. Oh, or Mr. Speaker, may I dare suggest that we move the landfill out of George Town and away from the major highway and in plain sight of our arriving stayover tourists and from the balconies of our

cruise tourists. We don't want to have another '*Not in Bodden Town Bobo*', moment.

Mr. Speaker, moving on to a bit about public transport. I was personally encouraged when the [then] Minister responsible for Transport, the Member for George Town Central, told us just after taking office that his goal was to transform our approach to public transport. I say that because for many, many years, public transport was such a small part of a large Ministry, that it did not get the attention it deserved, and so I was warmed by the enthusiasm of the Minister then responsible.

Mr. Speaker, you would expect, then, that the PACT Government would make this issue a priority. However, despite there being considerable work on transformed public transport begun by the Progressives that he could have picked up on, it was not until November 2022, over eighteen months after taking Office, that the Minister launched a consultancy study to design a solution; while we in the Opposition were sceptical of the Minister's approach, fearing that the study might have been designed simply to confirm preconceived ideas on a bus system.

Now that the consultant's report is in the public domain, we see our fears confirmed. The study was too focused on buses and different options for their operation to be able to consider more radical options. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, we should not let the "**great be the enemy of the good**". Rather than starting again, the Government needs to tell us how the work to choose the best option for a new bus service will be taken forward and how that solution will be implemented including, Mr. Speaker, its financing and a timetable for implementation.

We must make progress on public transport, Mr. Speaker. Any further dithering on public transport would be bad news for commuters, bad news for those who need access to modern public transport, and bad news for our environment. Camana Bay just launched a hop-on-hop-off with a cute little electrical air-conditioned bus. Cricket Square has a hop-on-hop-off service for its tenants, even a shuttle into town. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have the private sector leading the Government. Quite frankly, as my Honourable Leader said, "*putting us to shame*".

Mr. Speaker, let me highlight that at a million dollars per mile to construct a new road, we have some \$26.5 million budgeted over the next two years; versus \$2 million for public transport over the same period. Then we can see where it would be worthwhile putting more immediate focus and resources on public transport. We cannot build ourselves out of this traffic issue. You could put \$100 million in there, the only thing you will do is have more issues with the environmentalists and run out of space to build roads.

Mr. Speaker, I'll take a few minutes to touch on the NiCE Programme. The Leader of the Opposition reminded the Parliament of the Motion that I brought be-

fore the House in September, which proposed supporting those who are finding it difficult to access work to get on a pathway of full-time employment. We can all agree, Mr. Speaker, that we have a litter issue. The teams at the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) are not enough. They can't keep up with the National Roads Authority (NRA) trimming of the roadsides where we see the Bush Hogs cutting and chopping up the paper and the garbage and exasperating the situation, Mr. Speaker.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Tourism—he left the room and I'm saying the piece that took me so long to put in for him.

[Laughter]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I want to congratulate the Minister of Tourism on his '*Keep Cayman Clean*' campaign. I told him so personally. It's something that I thought about, championed and encouraged for a long time because growing up, I remember not only the '*Keep Cayman Clean*', but [the] '*I work for Tourism*' campaigns.

Growing up, I remember those two campaigns on the radio and the newspaper, where you had persons from all over the community encouraging us to keep Cayman clean. We had persons from across different sectors saying, '*I work for Tourism*'. I'll never forget persons like then Cable and Wireless' Larry Cayasso; persons in the retail sector, the hotels and the airport, saying, '*I work for Tourism*'—so, I must congratulate him on that campaign; and of course, it would be remiss of me not to mention the ongoing work by the Member for Savannah, who is so passionate about keeping our Islands clean.

Mr. Speaker, my Motion suggested an extended version of the successful National Community Enhancement Project in order to provide Caymanians with employment and work experience. With the associated training programmes also in place, this would considerably enhance the job prospects of hundreds of Caymanians in long-term unemployment or experiencing other barriers to meaningful work.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Development responded positively to our ideas during the debate and he has already put in place measures that will at least partially bring our ideas to fruition. In bringing forward the Welfare Reform Package that the last Progressive-led government initiated, the Minister announced recently that those outside the labour market and in receipt of Needs Assessment Unit (NAU) assistance would be supported to find what he described as internships. Mr. Speaker, that would include some of the activities we proposed in our Motion such as beach cleaning, roadside painting, et cetera; but the Minister extended the approach into the private and not-for-profit sectors as well as public service.

I have concerns, Mr. Speaker, that when someone can't afford their utility bills or to put food on

their table, whether or not they will go and volunteer at a not-for-profit or [in] any other sector. I don't think that is the intention, but Mr. Speaker, we welcome the Minister's initiative. If he can achieve our objectives by adapting our idea, then we certainly will not argue. In welcoming his plan, though, there are two things I would like to ensure that he incorporates, Mr. Speaker.

Firstly, although his plans focus on NAU recipients, I would like to see his proposed internships extended to others experiencing barriers to employment, such as former prison inmates. Secondly, the internship must be accompanied by structured training and development that incorporates not just on-the-job skills, but also meets the wider needs of participants to develop both basic skills in Math and English, and broader skills such as time and life management.

Mr. Speaker, knowing the Minister and his drive to do things right, I believe he will be receptive to both of those points if he has not already incorporated them.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate the Honourable Leader's plea, that instead of twenty different things, we would urge the Premier to think about seven key priorities this budget should focus on. Three of those priorities are about tackling what we consider the most pressing challenges currently facing Cayman, namely:

- To overcome the ongoing impacts of the cost of living crisis;
- To reduce crime and the fear of crime; and
- To enable better and more affordable access to housing.

Mr. Speaker, the other four priorities are areas where action in the next two years covered by this budget is necessary to meet immediate challenges and better prepare Cayman for the future and those are:

- To restore Cayman's economy to a path of steady, sustainable growth;
- To accelerate action to mitigate climate change and to adapt to its impacts;
- To resolve Grand Cayman's worsening traffic problems; and
- To respond positively to the challenges of an aging society.

Mr. Speaker, I know that those on the other side are passionate about the plans proposed in this budget, but I urge them to be aware of the economic conditions and the obligations being placed on the shoulders of our people. I would encourage them to consult with the industry and hear their suggestions; ask how they can help transition new fees and taxes to avoid unintended consequences such as the decision to add four per cent tax on bullion, which resulted in an opposite result, where gold and silver left the country, and importation of gold and silver hit a record low.

Mr. Speaker, let's encourage them to first focus on the needs of our people today and in the future. I

guess we are the Opposition and they are the Government and the difference was described once by former US President Ronald Reagan when he said, “**The difference between them and us is that we want to check government spending and they want to spend government checks**”.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, may God bless these Cayman Islands.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

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

The Honourable Member for George Town South.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Elected Member for George Town South: Mr. Speaker, I rise to deliver my contribution to the State Opening and Budget Address.

Let me begin by reflecting positively on a couple of things that have been achieved by the Ministry of Education over the last two years.

The Speaker: Madam Member, could you adjust your mic? Thank you.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: The first is the completion of the John Gray High School main campus improvements. As you well know, Mr. Speaker, this was a project that I was involved in alongside the current Premier and Minister of Education, during the last Progressives-led government.

I was pleased and impressed with the new facilities at the high school when my colleagues and I had the chance to visit John Gray earlier this year. There is a significant price tag attached to the project, Mr. Speaker, with around \$90 million having been spent, but that certainly seems to me, justified, on the basis that the new high school provides better facilities and a better learning environment that will be enjoyed, not just by current students, but by future generations as well.

I would like to put on record my congratulations to the current Premier and Minister of Education, the school staff, the Ministry staff, and others who were involved in the successful delivery of the John Gray Scheme. There are subsequent works to be completed, and the Government's financial documents for the current period previously gave December 2023 as the completion date for both Project B—the refurbishment of the George Hicks site; and Project C—Demolition of the Cayman Islands Further Education Centre (CIFEC) campus and construction of new sports fields.

Mr. Speaker, I note that the most recent set of quarterly unaudited accounts have slipped the date for

completion of the final phase of the scheme by well over a year, to April 2025. It would be helpful to hear from the Premier and Minister why there is such a long delay.

Of course, the major new initiative contained in the education budget introduced two years ago, was the Free School Meals Programme in Cayman's public schools. One of the features of this year's spending by the PACT Government is that the school meals budget has been under spending. Eventually, the projected underspend had to be taken in order to help to offset massive overspends elsewhere in the Ministry's budget, notably for scholarships and bursaries.

I accept, Mr. Speaker, that the amount budgeted for the Free School Meals Programme was only ever a rough estimate. It was hard to know the cost prior to implementation, given that the Government had not prepared a properly costed implementation plan prior to announcing the initiative. I expect we will see a more realistic budget for 2024 and thereafter, set out in the budget papers; but either now or in Finance Committee, I would like the Premier and Minister, to explain the reasons behind the underspending on free school meals. As far as I can see, there could be three possible explanations for the underspend.

Presumably, the budget was worked out by creating an estimated amount per meal for each type of meal and then multiplying it by the expected take-up. Leaving aside some Ministry overheads, those two things will therefore be the drivers of spending. For there to be an underspend, either the cost per meal is lower than estimated or the take-up is lower than expected.

If the first is the case, I want the Premier and Minister to reassure the House that cost per meal has not been reduced by cutting corners on quality. In particular, I want reassurance that appropriate nutritional standards are still in place and are still being met. I want to know that suppliers are being inspected to ensure hygiene and other requirements are also being met. If it is the case that take-up is lower than expected, does the Ministry understand why that has happened? In particular, is lower take-up compromising the efficacy of the programme?

The third possible cause is that the annual budget was correct, but the delays in the rollout of the programme have caused a one-off underspend. If that were the case, I would still like the Premier and Minister's reassurances on nutritional standards and the other matters I referred to just now. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, I still want to hear the Premier and Minister's view of the efficacy of the programme.

As the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out on more than one occasion, the lack of a coherent response to the cost of living crisis has led the Government to try repeatedly to rebrand the Free School Meals Programme as an initiative designed to help hard-pressed families with their monthly bills. This is simply not true. For one thing, were the programme in

place to tackle the cost of living crisis, as the impact of that crisis lessens as we all hope it will in the months ahead, will the Government be ending the programme? I very much doubt that will be the case. The reason for that, is that this was never designed as a cost of living measure. Let me recall the former Premier's heart-warming justification for the policy when it was first presented to Parliament in his first Strategic Policy Statement speech on 14th July, 2021.

The former Premier told us, **"...study after study has shown that hungry children are poor students. They have poor cognition and educational performance; they are more likely to repeat a grade, come to school late or miss school altogether. We know for a fact that we have children who come to our public schools who have missed meals. I have spent time with Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) and the incredible parents who have all spent time to try to address these issues. I see the concern on their faces and I share the need with them to have this issue addressed. Mr. Speaker, this [PACT] Government has, as one of its goals to continue to improve education beginning with a basic step: to ensure that all of our students are fed, giving them the foundation to earn a great education."**

Mr. Speaker, this was always intended as an educational initiative, and now that we are well into its implementation we should be able to judge its success. The former Premier referenced the many studies on this topic as justification for the Free School Meals Programme; therefore, the Ministry presumably used those studies to define the success criteria for the programme. The former Premier mentioned a few such goals, and there are others.

Presumably also, the Ministry has been hard at work monitoring the impact the programme is having against the success criteria defined so, can the Premier and Minister tell the House the results of the monitoring and evaluation that her Ministry has been doing? Is the free school Meals Programme achieving the educational goals that were set for it?

One more thing before I move on, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned just now that the underspend on school meals this year went to prop up the scholarships and bursaries budget, which was incurring expenditure at nearly double the expected rate. It would be useful to also hear from the Premier and Minister whether she expects that level of expenditure on scholarships and bursaries to continue, and whether it is reflected in the new budget figures before us.

The completion of the John Gray campus and the Free School Meals initiative are perhaps the most obvious things that have happened in the last two years, Mr. Speaker, and as I have said, both should help improve learning in our public-school system; but big projects such as those two should not blind us to the problems of lack of pace and lack of urgency in driving up educational standards that have characterised the PACT Government's approach.

I have said many times that I am broadly supportive of the current Premier and Minister's policy direction. It is, of course, a continuation of the policy we were working towards together during the last Progressives-led Government; but I have also said repeatedly that I would be holding the Premier and Minister to account for the progress that she's making in implementing that policy direction and making improvements that will benefit our students. Mr. Speaker, her report card currently reads, *"Could do better and must try harder"*.

One of my concerns about the shake-up on the benches opposite, is that it leaves the new Premier with a mammoth job to do. Not only is she Premier, a hard-enough role itself even in the best of circumstances—and as we have seen, these are not the best of circumstances—she's also Minister of Finance and Economic Development at a time when getting this budget together has been so problematic and when, as the Leader of the Opposition highlighted, the country faces significant economic and fiscal challenges. She is Minister of Lands and Minister of District Administration and she has ministerial oversight of the Cabinet Office; and finally, she is Minister of Education. While her colossal capacity for hard work is well-known, this seems way too much. The Education Ministry should not be a part-time job. It requires full attention and relentless focus. It will be very difficult for the Premier and Minister to try harder when her attention is taken up by so many other responsibilities.

As a result, it will be very difficult for her to do better; but try harder and do better she must, if she is to get Cayman's public schools on to the improvement trajectory that is necessary. The evidence that the trajectory of improvement from the very latest inspection reports published by the Office of Education Standards (OES) presents what is at best, a mixed picture. While most public schools are maintaining their position in terms of the overall inspection judgments given, we are not seeing public schools improve their rating in the way we should be expecting. Let me just illustrate this issue by focusing on our three high schools.

The second inspection cycle reports on John Gray High School and Layman E. Scott Sr. High School awarded both schools an improved rating of "Good". Clifton Hunter High School also took a major step forward, improving its rating to "Satisfactory" in the second cycle. In all three high schools therefore, the focus on raising standards of the last Progressives-led government led to demonstrable improvement in each school's performance.

The third inspection cycle reports have just been published, Mr. Speaker. Each high school has maintained its rating from the second cycle. Under the PACT Government no high school has improved its overall rating; but if we dig down into the inspection reports we see a more mixed and nuanced picture. The detailed judgments given to our three high schools suggest that Layman E. Scott is continuing to improve towards an excellent judgment. John Gray has broadly

maintained its position, and Clifton Hunter has, if anything, slipped backwards.

The inspection judgments are an important benchmark of our schools' performance, and the evidence is that we need to see much more improvement before we can be in any way, satisfied; but school improvement is most important not in its own right, but in helping us to gauge the ability of our schools to support our students to achieve. It is the metric of levels of attainment by students that needs to drive our policy and our budget decisions.

The key issue that I have raised from the very beginning of this administration was the need to maintain our focus on raising standards and levels of attainment—and in order to do that, to continue to make improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. In my view, the necessary focus has been lacking and we have lost the momentum of improvement that had begun under the Progressives.

Let me focus on one more issue to illustrate my point, Mr. Speaker. It is an issue close to my heart, which the Leader of the Opposition referred to earlier in this debate, namely, levels of achievement in mathematics. When the Ministry of Education released its data report covering the 2020-2021 academic year, I immediately highlighted the need to focus on improving mathematics results.

I made statements, I wrote press articles, I pressed the Premier and Minister to take action to tackle what was clearly a deficit that needed to be addressed. Despite my public campaign, very little happened. When the Ministry released its data report for 2021-2022, it revealed that rather than improving, the situation had gotten worse. The number of Year 11 students achieving Level II in Mathematics had in fact fallen from 43 per cent in 2021, to 40 per cent in 2022. As I have repeatedly warned, this low attainment rate in Mathematics is holding back the level of achievement of the national standard of five Level II subjects including English and Mathematics. Clearly though, despite my warnings, the issue was not being addressed.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the only thing that had changed was the Ministry's acknowledgement that I was correct. This year, the Ministry's report confirmed my analysis by concluding that success in raising the number of students achieving the national standard is tied to the ability of schools to raise achievement standards in Mathematics. It had taken the Ministry a year just to acknowledge the problem—a year in which that problem could have been tackled. A year in which, instead, more Caymanian students suffered from the consequences of the failure to act; so having identified the problem and correctly identified its significance, one might have expected immediate action to be taken.

Positively, the Ministry identified the need to introduce specialist Mathematics teachers to drive up the quality of teaching of the subject, but we then learned that there was apparently no money to pay those spe-

cialist teachers, so the initiative could not be progressed until Finance Committee voted additional monies to the Ministry at the September meeting.

I hope the new teachers are now all in post in our schools and operating effectively. The problem is that they were not put in place until eighteen months after I started raising the issue, and it should not have needed me to raise the issue, Mr. Speaker. The problem was obvious from the data, as this year's report noted; so, why was it not picked up in the 2021 data report and acted upon immediately? I must also ask what else is being done to focus on improving mathematics results in our public schools.

I welcome the introduction of specialist teachers. It is something I have previously advocated, but that alone is not sufficient. The introduction of the new National Curriculum by the last Progressives-led Government is an important step. It provides the coherent, focused and demanding mathematics curriculum the country needs, reflecting the logical and sequential nature of mathematics. We now need to ensure that all the teaching of mathematics is closely aligned to the curriculum, and that all lessons achieve at least a "Good" rating from inspectors.

Beyond that, I have consistently argued that we need to see differentiated classroom instruction with immediate intervention for students who are not mastering Mathematics standards, to give students the individual instruction they need to succeed. In short, Mr. Speaker, we need a focused strategy for improving Mathematics; but improving standards in mathematics—while the most important thing—is not the only thing we need to be doing.

As I have said repeatedly, improving the quality of teaching across the board is the most important contributor to raising standards in education. That starts with being able to attract the best and brightest of our young Caymanian talent into the teaching profession. I therefore welcomed the increases in funding available as Education/Teaching Scholarships to those wishing to pursue teaching qualifications when that funding was announced two years ago. Again, we should now be able to judge the success of that programme. Can the Premier and Minister tell us what impact the increased funding has had over the last two years?

After recruitment, continuing professional development is essential. This needs to take the form not just of formal courses and training programmes, but most importantly, it needs to focus on in-classroom support to improve teaching practice, and Mr. Speaker, we know that the quality of teaching *must* improve. Last January, the Office of Education Standards published a comprehensive report summarising its view on the progress that had been made in Cayman schools over its first two full inspection cycles between 2018 and 2022.

On the positive side, the Office of Education Standards (OES) reported significant improvement in the quality of teaching in Cayman secondary schools;

however, inspectors also found that teaching quality has remained stagnant in primary schools and that this presents a significant barrier to raising education standards. That report was published nearly a year ago. What action has the Premier and Minister taken in that time to drive up the quality of teaching in primary schools, and when will the necessary improvements be seen in Cayman's public-school classrooms?

It is clear that further improvements in teaching will be necessary. The OES found that there are no judgments of excellent teaching in core subjects in government schools across both inspection cycles. We cannot be satisfied with that situation, Mr. Speaker, so can the Premier and Minister tell us what targets have been set for improvement in teaching for the next two years? Further, can she assure us that there are sufficient resources in the budget before us, to ensure that the quality of teaching by all teachers, and I repeat that, by all teachers, in Cayman's public schools will improve over the next two years. The focus in everything we do in education needs to be on raising standards in our schools, so that we can better support our students to achieve, and to realise their potential.

Mr. Speaker, I note that the Ministry of Education recently congratulated government schools on the examination results they achieved this summer. The Ministry points to what it describes as a steady upward trend in exam performance in our schools. Of course, we have not yet seen the data on which the Ministry is basing its message. I look forward to seeing the annual data report when it is published, presumably early in the New Year. For now, Mr. Speaker, I will make just two points.

First, we need to make sure that any general trend of improvement is apparent across the board at all levels, and in all subjects. As I have illustrated, previous reports have reported an overall trend of improvement that mask under-performance in Mathematics. I therefore hope that the Ministry's analysis goes beyond the general trend, identifies areas where improvement is necessary, and proposes action to target those areas of weakness. That is what will make the biggest difference, Mr. Speaker.

Secondly, I will be very interested in the rate of improvement in results— is the steady upward trend identified, good enough? In mathematics we know that steady improvement is not sufficient. Cayman is lagging way behind international competitor jurisdictions, and it will necessitate a step change in our results, not just a steady improvement.

In short, Mr. Speaker, I hope the Ministry's message of congratulations to our schools is not a sign of complacency. We all know that much more needs to be done if we are to take Cayman's public schools to the position we all wish them to be in. The Ministry must be relentlessly focused on the action needed to drive improvement.

In that context, the last issue that I want to raise today, Mr. Speaker, was also raised by the Office of

Education Standards in the report I just mentioned. It is the issue of school governance. The Office of Education Standards Report concluded that the lack of effective school governance is impeding progress in Cayman's public schools. They went as far as to say that there is a necessity to swiftly progress plans to improve governance structures in the education sector to strengthen engagement and promote accountability. Mr. Speaker, has that call for swift progress been heeded?

Following the publication of the report in January, I asked the Premier and Minister about her plans for governance reform at the parliamentary session in April. Towards the end of May, I received a written response which I will read to the House. The Premier and Minister replied, *"I have recently led a delegation to the UK to visit high-performing schools and had the opportunity to gain valuable information on school governance models. The Ministry team and Education Council will now take this work forward as we craft a model which will be advantageous to the unique Cayman Island context"*. UNVERIFIED QUOTE

This response was hugely disappointing, Mr. Speaker. That it took nearly a month to produce such a bland couple of sentences suggests that the governance issue was not being acted upon with any great urgency despite the OES's criticisms. More importantly, not only does the reply kick the can down the road, it kicks the can down the road we have already travelled.

The Premier and Minister led a similar delegation to the UK during the last Progressives-led administration. She said then, she'd gained valuable information. She asked the Education Council then to define a bespoke scheme to suit Cayman's circumstances. As a result, concrete proposals for improved governance arrangements were recommended to her by Education Council during the last Progressives-led Administration.

Plans were in place to pilot the new arrangements in two primary schools, but were delayed prior to the last election, first by the implementation of the new National Curriculum, and then by the COVID pandemic. Why has no progress been made during the PACT term of office? Why has the work begun all over again? Nothing has changed in the UK that means different lessons will be learnt from last time. Nothing has changed in Cayman's context that means the previously recommended model needs wholesale revision. It is long past the time to get on and deliver a new governance model for our public schools, Mr. Speaker.

After two years of totally unnecessary delay, will the Premier and Minister now commit to making the swift progress that both her own Office of Education Standards and we in the Opposition believe is necessary to implement new governance arrangements for Cayman's public schools? Will she tell Parliament today what she plans to do, and by when? Will she guar-

antee that any necessary resources to support the transition to, and the operation of a new governance model, are in the budget before us?

Mr. Speaker, there is a clear pattern here. Leave aside that the Opposition's calls for improvement are going unheeded; we might expect that, but the Government is failing even to listen to itself. The need for progress on improving mathematics teaching is clear in the Ministry's own data, but it takes over eighteen months before action begins to be taken. The OES observes that the lack of necessary governance changes is holding back school improvement, and far from the swift progress recommended, we get more prevarication and delay.

The real problem with Cayman's education system is the lack of urgency in implementing the changes that Government itself knows are necessary, and that failure is having a real impact on Cayman's students right now. It must change, Mr. Speaker, this budget is an opportunity to ensure that the considerable resources available for education are properly targeted on the things that will have the biggest impact and make the biggest difference. The Premier and Minister must reassure me and the country, that the budget she is presenting to Parliament takes that opportunity.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on a brighter note, I would like to turn to my Christmas message.

Christmas is a special time of the year because family and community feature at the very heart of our festive celebrations. As we go about buying gifts, decorating and preparing the delicious meals we all look forward to, I know we will also find ways to give wholeheartedly to others in need, for that is our custom, especially at this time of the year. I particularly hope that we will reach out to our seniors in our constituencies as well as to the sick and those who have lost loved ones over this past year—and many of us have. Pay them a visit, or take them a meal.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish my family, my constituents of George Town South and the wider community; all of my colleagues here in the Opposition, and also in the Government, and the Parliament staff, a very Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy, safe and blessed New Year.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member for George Town South.

We will now take the luncheon suspension. We will resume at 2.30 p.m.

Proceedings suspended at 1:18 p.m.

Proceedings resumed at 2:56 p.m.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Good afternoon. Just before we took the luncheon suspension, the honourable Member for George

Town South had just completed her speech. Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]*

The honourable Member for George Town West.

[Pause]

Mr. David C. Wight, Elected Member for George Town West: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to deliver my contribution to the State Opening and Budget Address.

Mr. Speaker, **"it is easier to destroy a country than to rebuild it"**. Before I go on to say what I have to say, I want to touch on something that was said last evening by a Member. During his contribution, the Member for Bodden Town East mentioned that he was somewhere and some tourists came up to him and spoke to him and they were so happy to hear his accent. He said he won't change and his accent won't change. Well, I just want to tell him that is how you're supposed to be. Just be who you are. You were elected, be who you were before you were elected; don't change your accent, don't change anything— just continue as you are.

I just want to say that I've known the Member *from time* he was a young boy, and I grew up with his father's family on Shedden Road and I know his mother's family very closely. His aunt Ronnie worked with my mother for many years. I will be mentioning it again, but I am a very proud Member of the PPM and I have not seen one PPM or Progressives' Member who has been elected who has changed after they have been elected and that's one of the reasons...

Mr. Speaker, you as an example. You have been through everything— Premier, you were knighted... There is only one other person who has been elected who has achieved what you did, Sir Alden McLaughlin, and got knighted, that was Sir Vassel Johnson. You are the Speaker, [and] you are still the same person from time; and you are amongst us common people all the time, nearly every day, so, you won't change. I am just asking everyone, no matter who you are, don't be fake, just be who you are. Thank you, Member for Bodden Town East. Don't change, don't change and don't change your accent. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is easier to destroy a country than rebuild it, and in my view, Cayman was two and a half years on its way to destruction. I have the deepest sympathy for whoever will be charged with trying to rebuild Cayman— and that starts with the current Premier— but, more importantly, the Government that will be elected in May 2025. They will have a tough job on their hands.

Mr. Speaker, we are here to serve the people of the Cayman Islands and do what is best for Cayman and not to enrich ourselves, especially at the cost of the Cayman Islands and the Cayman people. Every two years the ruling Government is supposed to work to-

gether to produce a budget in the best interest of Cayman. This is to ensure that the Government can continue to function and operate effectively, including paying the bills and meeting its obligations. It is not meant as a means for Ministers to boost their own projects to ensure that they get re-elected.

I want to touch on the Budget Policy Statement delivered by the Honourable Premier on Friday where she stated, and I'll just quote from it, it's on page 69. **"Mr. Speaker, I make this appeal today to all my colleagues in this honourable House. Let us never forget our solemn oaths and our duties as Members of Parliament to serve as trustees for our people. We have been blessed beyond measure to be able to enjoy a level of prosperity our forefathers could never have imagined. That means we have to be good stewards of these financial resources and ensure that every penny, every project, every effort or initiative, and yes, every piece of legislation, is for the benefit and betterment of the Caymanian people. More importantly, it should be beneficial to future generations so that our descendants will reap the rewards of our foresight."**

She went on to say on page 70, **"Mr. Speaker, it should be our collective prayer that the Cayman Islands will always be ever bound in community and served by caring governments who put our people first."** I want to thank the Premier for that.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is anything that I can add to what my colleagues on the Opposition have contributed. They made a very clear presentation of the work the Opposition has done in dissecting and understanding the proposed budget, but I will make a few comments on a couple of subjects and concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I grew up with sports being a major part of my life, and it saddens me to see and hear the state that Cayman sports are in right now. I have always been involved in some way with most sports in Cayman, and those that I have not been personally involved in, I have followed, so I know many of the people involved. That includes the newest and fastest-growing sport in Cayman, Pickleball.

Hardly a day goes by that I don't talk with someone who is either playing, watching or otherwise involved in local sport that does not have a complaint. The sad part, is that most complaints criticise the former Minister of Sports, not only for a lack of attention paid to their sport, but complaints have been made about the victimisation of persons involved in trying to make sports better in the Cayman Islands. I have felt it too.

I only want what is best for Cayman and the Cayman people. I have never been someone who strives for recognition or publicity, and I am definitely not someone who is full of self-praise, therefore it really bothers me when I see someone who does things only for recognition and publicity, no matter who gets hurt. Always remember that **"character is easier kept than recovered"**. I only hope that the new Minister of Sports

will put confidence back into all sporting bodies and that attention will be paid to the running and administration of sports and not on how many trips can be taken abroad.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight a few young athletes who we need to encourage and give them a reason for wanting to continue to participate in their respective sports. Only a few names, because it is such a long list; I don't want to go into much detail about what they do.

In swimming, we have Jillian and Jordan Crooks— always making Cayman proud; Sierrah Broadbelt, Lila Higgo, Harper Barrowman, Lev Fahy Will Sellars, James Allison. These swimmers will continue to make Cayman proud.

Then we have the track and field athletes: Davonte Howell, winning the 100-metre at the CARIFTA Games in April this year, and Anthony Chin, Jr. winning the bronze medal, for long jump Under 17.

We also have names coming up— it is a pretty long list, but I want to read their names because we are all proud of them: Jaiden Reid, Alex Gordon, Andrew Stone, Ty Goddard, Delora Johnson, Mikayla Brown, Jamie-Dean Stewart, Devon Wright, Krystal Campbell, Jeleah Maize, Arion Wright, Aaliyannah Anderson, Jamar Ellis, Michail Michelin, Rachel Pascal, Renia Smith, Brianna Smith, Ashantae Graham, YaNelli Dawkins, Alejandro Barrett, Amelia Marriott, Necoya Dickens, Alafia Smith, DeAndre Beckford, and Michael David Smikle. All of these people, will continue to make Cayman proud, but we have to encourage them.

In golf, we have Aaron Jarvis, Justin Hastings and Holly McLean.

There are nine focused sports that the Government has continued to focus on, namely: football, cricket, tennis, rugby, netball, volleyball, squash, basketball, and softball. We need to ensure that they get as much help and attention as necessary to put Cayman back on the map where sports are concerned, and I have every confidence in the new Minister. I know that he will be putting every effort into continuing to do what is good for sports in Cayman and if he ever wants a little advice— well, not advice, but if he wants to ask me anything, unlike the former Sports Minister, I am always available.

I stand here as a very proud and honoured Member of Parliament for the past six and a half years. I pride myself on being a very loyal person in all aspects of my life. I first voted in 1980 and in the run up to the 1984 elections, I supported and campaigned for Dr. Hon. Linford Pierson. From then, I always supported who ran on his platform, especially the Hon. Norman Bodden and Hon. D. Kurt Tibbetts, and this continued for eighteen years until 2001. I joined the PPM in 2002, and remain a loyal and proud member. I have been a part of all [that] the PPM have stood for and accomplished over this time, but my loyalties do not stop at politics, and in most things in my life I remain loyal— be it sports, occupation or friends and family.

I just want to give a few examples and then go on with what I'm saying. My grandfather Oscar Stanley Wight was selected to represent the West Indies Cricket team on the 1930-1931 Tour of Australia. I had two grand-uncles, Vibart and Leslie Wight, who also represented the West Indies Cricket team; and I'm a Caribbean man, which I think makes me obligated to support the West Indies Cricket team— even though it is very frustrating and sometimes, I wish I was not the loyal person that I am.

[Laughter]

Mr. David C. Wight: And the Attorney General would know it, too.

Mr. Speaker, through the ups and downs I have remained a loyal supporter. My life is Cayman, so I will always support Cayman in everything, not only in sports. I will always be loyal to Cayman. Just to mention a couple more, I have suffered for years as an Arsenal and a Dolphins supporter, but I remain loyal.

Again, I have used sports as an example for my loyalty, but I use it to point out my loyalty for the Progressives; and I remain convinced the Progressives are the best way forward for Cayman. The best leaders have a high consideration factor, they really care about their people, and this is why I proudly and loyally remain a Member of the Progressives. The Progressives work together for the people, and Mr. Speaker, **“A culture is strong when people work with each other, for each other. A culture is weak when people work against each other for themselves.”**

I have experienced strong and weak through my involvement in sports, especially team sports. In my opinion, over the last two and a half years we have seen the problems caused by a weak culture where members do not work together, but rather against each other. Again, I congratulate the Premier on doing something that a couple of weeks ago we thought was going to be impossible and that is, to produce a budget for the Cayman people and get it here on time.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. David C. Wight: As I said, I have been involved in politics for over forty years. I have visited Parliament very often and listened to Members through the years, and I have been impressed and learned from many great MPs; but I am sad to say that I have been embarrassed and disappointed by a few. **“Arrogance is the most insidious disease of the heart and the effects are reflected in the behaviour and conduct of the sick person...”** And time and circumstances can humble even the mightiest.

The greatest tragedy of all this, is that a time of desperation and emergency reveals leadership, and for two and a half years, we have seen leadership that was lacking of character; lacking of honesty; lacking of common sense; lacking of unity— in fact, lacking any basic

sense that there could be any sign of love for our beloved Cayman Islands; and when you see such being displayed, it is indeed heart-breaking and very sad.

I know I am going on about it, but I know it's going to be a different Government with the Premier as the Premier, compared to the last two and a half years.

The Speaker: Member for George Town West, I think you should leave that there.

Mr. David C. Wight: Okay.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. David C. Wight: I was going to talk about how... Well, no, better not.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. David C. Wight: No; as I said, I have been disappointed at the road we were going down. I [also] wanted to mention what my uncle Roy had done for Cayman— but I'll leave that—and that I do not want to be standing here as a Member of what could have been a Government that saw Cayman destroyed sixty years later, after all he did.

Mr. Speaker, let it be known that I am truly humbled to have been elected in 2017 and re-elected in 2021 by the great constituents of George Town West. I deeply thank them and will continue to do my best not to let them down.

I also want to thank persons like you, Mr. Speaker; the Hon. D. Kurt Tibbetts, and the Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman, who approached Chris and I in 2017, and encouraged one of us to put our name forward as a candidate for the constituency of George Town West, where we grew up and worked the majority of our lives. After we decided I would be the one to put my name forward, and I was proudly elected, I made a promise: To leave Cayman better off than I found it when I was elected. One of your favourite sayings, Mr. Speaker, is *‘You may love Cayman as much as I do, but I promise you, you do not love Cayman more than I do.’*

Mr. Speaker, I am praying for the new Premier and the Government. I hope that they can work together and put all their differences behind them and continue to do what is good for Cayman. Well, you see now, it would be best not to go on here. I will just say, **“never assume that loud is strong and quiet is weak”**. **“It is the lion's silence that signals danger, not his roar”**.

Mr. Speaker, I want to finish by saying, that even though we will be going into Finance Committee and we will be digging in a little deeper and I trust we won't be voting for everything (or we'll have our concerns), I will be voting for the proposed budget.

I want to wish all of Cayman a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, especially the constituents of George Town West. I would like to wish you Mr. Speaker, the Premier and all Members of Parliament and all the staff of Parliament, a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Sorry that I upset you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: No, honourable Member for George Town West. You did not upset me at all, but my job is to try to moderate some of the more strident things that get said in here.

Mr. David C. Wight: Okay, thank you.

[Cross talk]

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak?

[Pause] Does any other Member—

The Minister of Infrastructure and many other subjects.

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure and Transport & Development, Elected Member for North Side: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I stand today with a deep sense of duty, commitment and appreciation.

First, I would like to thank all the hardworking, civil service members, especially those at the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure, Transport, and Development. Your dedication is vital to our progress. To my North Side constituents, your trust motivates my commitment to represent you in this honourable House. To my family, your tireless support inspires my efforts for a brighter future for us all, and I thank God for His blessings and guidance.

Mr. Speaker, I extend my gratitude to Her Excellency the Governor, for her inspirational Throne Speech and her support for our Government and the people of the Cayman Islands.

I commend our Premier, Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly; Deputy Premier, André Ebanks and my colleagues, for their dedication and leadership. As we reach this midway point, it is a moment for reflection and strategic planning. Our current position is a result of significant achievements driven by resilience and dedication to the Cayman Islands. As part of this Budget Address, it is vital to review the journey, celebrate the milestones and outline the future aspirations that this budget aims to achieve. Mr. Speaker, let me begin with the Department of Agriculture.

Department of Agriculture

Over the past two years, we have made significant progress including the recent passing of the Plant Protection Act, 2023. [Such] achievements set the

stage for even more remarkable results in the years ahead.

One of the most crucial factors in improving the people's wellbeing is ensuring that safe, nutritious food is accessible, available, and affordable. This is why the Ministry has been leading various strategic policies, programmes and projects to strengthen the Cayman Islands' Food and Nutrition Security. We are working towards our vision of making the Cayman Islands a food and nutrition-secure nation. We have identified the factors that pose threats to our food supply, and have developed comprehensive measures to address them.

A robust legislation agenda is in place to benefit our agriculture sector and strengthen our food security. There are five separate pieces of legislation at various stages of development:

- The Animals Act
- The Pesticide Control Act
- The Plant Protection Act (recently passed)
- The Veterinary Act; and
- The Agriculture Act.

These laws will update and enhance our legal framework ensuring a vibrant agriculture sector in the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, while some enhancements require legislation, others can be made as a policy improvement. Over the last two years, the Ministry has undertaken several such improvements.

The Cayman Islands Food and Nutrition Security Policy (CIFNSP) provides a broad framework for strengthening our food supply and an action plan to translate that framework into concrete results.

LEAD Action Plan

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge [that] at the heart of these efforts is the Agriculture "LEAD" action plan.

"L=Land-Use Licence for Agriculture Purposes/Legislative Agenda", marks a significant stride in enhancing agricultural production, offering farmers structured and organised land parcels for cultivation. The development of the Cayman Islands Agricultural Land-Use License Policy (CI-ALLP) by the Ministry is designed to help make large tracts of arable Crown land available for farmers to grow agricultural produce, raise livestock and poultry, among others.

Under this pillar of the agricultural LEADS, the Ministry will provide Land-Use licences for farmers under the Cayman Islands Agricultural Land-Use Licence Policy (CI-ALLP). The recently approved policy, aided by extensive stakeholder participation, will provide licences to farmers for a period not greater than two years to increase agricultural production— when I say two years, automatically [*sic*] you would have to re-sign your agreement for the farmland every two years.

The first site will be developed at High Rock Agro-Park. Works have begun on this project with the Ministry of District Administration and Lands surveying

the property to establish lots and identifying boundaries for road construction. The Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the National Roads Authority (NRA) have commenced the construction of the road. This policy is another initiative developed to help ensure that our land supports increased production in the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, achieving food and nutritional security requires more than just prioritising domestic land use for agriculture. We must also do more to support and grow our existing domestic poultry and livestock industries. This is where expansion is vital.

E - Expansion of Agricultural Sectors

Under this banner, the Ministry is targeting the poultry sector and livestock sector. To this end, a National Egg Strategy (NEST) was crafted aiming to foster growth in the egg production sector, improve market access, increase the market share of local egg producers by 40 per cent in four years, and develop a food and safety quality standard for the egg production. A poultry expert was recruited to lead the implementation of this strategy through experienced leadership and technical support.

In November, we delivered the Cayman Islands Poultry Standards for layer operations. The first of its kind for any of our sectors, it certifies all local egg producers [in order] to provide assurance to purchasers and confidence to consumers.

National Livestock Development Programme (NLDP)

Mr. Speaker, the expansion continues with the establishment and development of the National Livestock Development Programme (NLDP). This five-year programme will improve the local livestock genetics and herd quality, increase livestock population and [improve] food security in meat production. To jumpstart the initiative, the Ministry has provided a total of CI\$350,000 to the Cayman Islands Agricultural Society to procure livestock.

Cattle Breeding Programme

The Ministry successfully imported 22 Jamaica Red Poll cattle to start a breeding programme. The programme is a key element of the Livestock Development Programme, designed to enhance cattle genetics in the country—providing calves for sale, artificial insemination and serving as a centre of excellence/cattle research; continuing the modernisation of the sector and increasing the technical support to cattle farmers.

We also constructed a cattle breeding centre in Cayman Brac. With the successful importation of the animals from Jamaica and the upskilling of two vet services staff for the Brac, the programme to reintroduce the stud-bull service is underway. We will continue

training and development of the Department of Agriculture's Veterinary Services [Unit] (VSU) and increase the provisions of resources to the unit.

Agri-Business Development

The 'A' in LEAD is for Agri-business Development—nurturing growth, fostering economic development and ensuring sustainability in the agriculture sector. A successful agriculture programme is an important component of our security; we believe it's important to incentivise young Caymanians to undertake agricultural initiatives and develop the skills and experience needed for a vibrant agricultural sector so, as I mentioned before, we will set aside 25 per cent of all land allocated in the Agro-Park for women and youth.

Development of Agriculture Innovations, Technologies and Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, further development of our technologies and infrastructure through innovation plays an integral role in the success of the agricultural programme. Agriculture LEAD initiative "D" is the Development of Agriculture Innovations, Technologies, and Infrastructure.

The Ministry has led the development of the Cayman Islands Agricultural Business Information System (CI-ABIS), partnering with Hazard Management Cayman Islands (HMCi). This comprehensive database system drives the collection of agricultural and marketing information and includes a livestock identification and tracking system. We believe such critical information will help our policy development and budget building, enabling both data-driven decision-making, and our ability to provide grant support to our farming community, especially after disasters. As a priority, the Ministry completed an agricultural census under this system registering almost a thousand farmers—two and a half times the number of farmers previously on record.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to quality data collection is evident in both our Farmers' Identification and Registration Programme (FIRP) and the National Livestock Identification and Tracking System (NLITS). [The] enhanced farmer identification system improves the delivery of benefits for commercial producers and subsidies by the Cayman Islands Government (CIG). After conducting consultations to inform farmers and stakeholders about policy changes, the FIRP is now operational with identification (ID) and registrations in progress. Regarding livestock, under the NLITS programme, we have successfully tagged 80 per cent of the animals.

As Members of this honourable House can see, we believe that our farmers are a critical part of our community. They also face unique risks from the impact of hurricanes and tropical storms, and because

of the special role they play, the Cayman Islands Government is quick to support them during those times of need, and so the Department of Agriculture, along with the Ministry, provided immediate support in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Grace.

Responding to aid in the quick recovery of the agricultural sector, the Government allotted \$3 million dollars in support, providing supplemental income to cover labour costs and purchase agricultural inputs necessary for farmers to recover from the loss and damage. I thank the former Minister of Finance for his full support in that programme, along with my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, in moving agriculture towards innovation, the Ministry has obtained hydroponic flex farms capable of producing of 394 pounds of vegetables annually. These farms were distributed to our schools, Beacon Farms and the Department of Agriculture. These hydroponic systems are the first of their kind in the region with funding provided by the Sony Foundation. We are thankful for Sony, as its partnership augments our National School Garden Programme.

National School Garden Programme

Under the National School Garden Programme the Ministry issued five grants totalling \$7,000 to four schools. A total of \$30,000 has been set aside for this programme in this year's budget cycle and we will be promoting it to increase exposure to agriculture and the benefits that can be derived from this sector.

Cayman Islands' Food and Nutrition Security Policy

Mr. Speaker, our efforts extend to fortifying food nutrition and security, as we seek to deliver the Cayman Islands Food and Nutrition Security Policy over the next 15 years. This document will guide the development and modernisation of the Agricultural Sector in the Cayman Islands, with a strong focus on sustainability and food sovereignty [so I am pleased] today to share a pivotal update that marks a significant stride in realising the goals outlined in the Policy: Island Shipping has committed to this cause by facilitating bi-weekly shipping options to Grand Cayman.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members, this initiative is also a testament to collaborative governance. The Ministry sought invaluable input, recommendations, and advice from several key entities, including the Port Authority, Customs and Border Control (CBC), the Cayman Islands Development Initiative (CDI), the Department of Agriculture, and the Legal Department. Such engagement has been instrumental in aligning the project with our nation's regulatory and operational standards. Ensuring a dependable food supply is fundamental to the welfare of the Caymanian people.

Cayman Islands Public and Affordable Housing Policy and 10-Year Strategic Plan

Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of Caymanians demand not just affordable food on their tables, but affordable roofs over their heads.

Access to affordable housing is a global crisis, and it's a challenge we confront in the Cayman Islands as well. Currently, Caymanians struggle to secure affordable housing and the Ministry is fully committed to advancing a policy that expands access to affordable homes for our fellow Caymanians, ensuring their security and comfort.

The Ministry is developing such a policy to be inclusive and comprehensive. We received approvals to seek consultative services and have procured the expertise to develop the Cayman Islands' Public and Affordable Housing Policy and a 10-Year Strategic Plan. The initial consultations, a critical step in this journey, began November 14.

To ensure direct communication and engagement, I sent out letters to every Member of this honourable House via e-mail (November 2nd and 3rd) strongly encouraging their active participation in these consultations. We must put aside any political differences, prioritise and work together in the best interests of the people of our beloved Cayman Islands. Your input and contributions are invaluable as we start shaping a strategic plan that aims to enhance public and affordable housing across our country.

National Housing Development Trust

As many in this honourable House well know, the focal point of the Government's efforts to develop more affordable housing is the National Housing Development Trust (NHDT). Given the significant events of recent years, which profoundly impacted our economic and housing landscape, the comprehensive reassessment of the NHDT is crucial. This will not only sharpen its focus, it will also firmly establish its authority to meet its mission.

The Ministry has proposed to establish a new, modern Home Ownership Mortgage Empowerment (HOME) [Programme] which aims to assist first-time Caymanian homeowners who can qualify for a home mortgage, but do not yet have the necessary financing to meet their bank's requirements. While in the working stages, the programme is designed for Caymanians purchasing developed property to use as their primary home, anywhere within the Cayman Islands, with options for financing up to 100 per cent from any financial institution participating in the programme.

Amounts up to CI\$600,000 at the lowest possible fixed interest rates and terms up to forty years... Mr. Speaker, this is what helping people is all about. These are all long-term policy solutions.

I want to stress to the honourable Members of this House that the Ministry has already taken concrete

actions to expand the supply of affordable housing for Caymanians. Mr. Speaker, the NHDT built eleven homes in 2022, fifty-two in 2023, and we are committed to completing one hundred and ten in the next budget cycle; confirmation that this Government is committed to solving the housing crisis in Cayman— and, Mr. Speaker, if we can ever get out of this Parliament, I have been reliably informed that I can deliver the keys to eight homes for Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I like to say is [to] let the work speak for itself. No other Administration has delivered the number of homes that we have. If you want to deliver success, you need to get up and come to work to deliver success.

An Hon. Member: Right.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: It is particularly crucial to provide Members of this House with a deeper understanding of the ongoing National Housing Development Trust project, as it relates to each of their districts. It is important that all Members are thoroughly informed about these significant developments. West Bay Light House Garden: After breaking ground in March of this year with Phase 3, I am pleased to report the construction of nineteen affordable homes. You heard me mention earlier that I will deliver eight keys for Christmas; the remaining eleven will be delivered as New Year's gifts. Mr. Speaker, what better way to celebrate Christmas and start the New Year, than in a brand-new home?

An Hon. Member: Yup.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, you heard me mention earlier one hundred and ten homes are committed for the next budget cycle. Let me share those numbers by district:

District	No. of homes
West Bay	59
East End	32
North Side	19

That is one hundred and ten homes to be completed in the next budget cycle. We are trying to find more land in the Bodden Town area to be able to build more homes there.

Minister Wilks, I know Apple Blossom is very dear to you; it has been pushed aside for far too long, and I want you to know that a Minister stands before you today, committed to building out the fifty-nine homes in your constituency in West Bay.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, Minister of Youth, Sports and Heritage, Elected Member for East End: Say it

again, Minister, so the people of West Bay can hear, sir.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Amen.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Ground breaking is set for January 2024, [at] which I know you will be happy to join me.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has tasked the National Housing Development Trust with undertaking a capital project to develop the Eastern Avenue Honey Suckle Site in George Town with a multi-complex/multi-story design to cater to the much-needed demand for the residents of George Town. The initial draft design could facilitate 81 dwelling units, [and] it is noted that the NHDT will be seeking designs and proposals tailored to the demands of the people of George Town.

North Side Mango Tango Property: The National Housing Development Trust has acquired a 14-acre property in Hutland Road, North Side; with potential for further development, a subdivision design for 64 single-dwelling units has been submitted for consideration by the Planning Department. Mr. Speaker, access to affordable housing is very important to the UPM Government.

Mr. Speaker, I have tasked the NHDT not only to build homes, but to also do home repairs—as you yourself may already know, we've had a few conversations with some of your colleagues and their people who need repairs—[and] to do subdivisions with affordable lots to bring down the high rising costs when it comes to land.

Mr. Speaker and honourable Members of this House, affordable housing is part of the fabric of our community and the infrastructure of our country. As I noted at the beginning of my remarks, another top priority of this Government and the Ministry I lead, is building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands. Housing is one element of that infrastructure; roads are another.

Roads

Mr. Speaker, the state of our roads impacts every one of us in this beautiful country. Safe and effective roads also support our tourism sector as visitors will judge their experience on the ease with which they get around the Islands. Again, the Ministry along with the National Roads Authority (NRA) has made good progress for those who call Cayman home.

One of our key strategic goals as a Ministry is to improve traffic management and road networks through immediate and long-term road connectivity projects— and we are delivering on this. First, we are developing a road network that will service our communities well into the future. We have advanced projects such as the Airport Connector Road and the widening of the Linford Pearson Highway. Just this weekend, Mr.

Speaker, we opened the brand-new Bobby Thompson Roundabout.

Mr. Speaker, I know all Members of this House will be familiar with our initiative to reduce commute times, with the East-West Arterial. It is not only about reducing commute times but redundancy, by providing alternative routes from east to west— and this Government is committed to completing the East-West Arterial Expansion, Mr. Speaker.

This Government is fully committed to continuing to improve the road infrastructure of our Islands, and doing so in a sustainable way. [At its core,] this project is about improving the quality of life for people of the eastern districts. I'm sure all Members have heard stories of lives disrupted because of the daily traffic challenges from the eastern districts; getting children to school or people to work on time from those communities. I hear about it all the time and I actually live it, every morning and afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, it is considered a transportation best practice to have at least two ways into and out of a city; yet presently, there is only one road that runs along the coast, putting it at risk from hurricanes and flooding. To compound matters, that single option does not have the capacity for today's Cayman. The people deserve better, Mr. Speaker, and we can and must do something to improve this situation for our fellow Caymanians.

At the same time, we have a unique environmental heritage that we must preserve and protect for the future of our Islands. There are ways to achieve both objectives. We are not the first jurisdiction to face these challenges, Mr. Speaker, [and] I'm proud to say we have the expertise to analyse our requirements and make informed recommendations for how to expand a transportation network while mitigating the impact on the environment.

A full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) [for Phase II] of the East-West Arterial, conducted by world-class experts, commenced in June 2023. From the study, we expect informed recommendations for how best to design an arterial extension that limits environmental impact in keeping with our Sustainable Development Plan. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to updating Members of this House as that process goes forward.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the buildout, we intend to have a multi-lane arterial "highway" that can accommodate all modes of traffic—from pedestrians and cyclists, to single and high-occupancy vehicles. We expect this will encourage carpooling and greater use of public transport. All together Mr. Speaker, our daily commute should become more enjoyable.

Progress on the East-West Arterial EIA is just one of several significant accomplishments by the National Roads Authority over the previous two years. I'm proud to share some highlights of the work they have done to build a modern infrastructure for all. However,

before I do, I want to respond to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

He said, "...looking at the projects that they promised two years ago that would be delivered, using the latest information on the third quarter of this year:

- **Road surface upgrades - \$3 million budgeted for 2023, but the spend rate in the first nine months of the year only going at around two-thirds that would be necessary to deliver the promised programmes of improvements".**

Mr. Speaker, as at the end of November, the Ministry and NRA have spent a total of \$3.347 million out of an allocation budget of \$3.627 million. This leaves an approximate balance of \$280,000 to be utilised in December. It is important to note that while the initial budget for the appropriation was set at \$3 million, an additional \$627,000 was carried forward from the 2022 fiscal year into 2023. This adjustment brought the total budget for that year to \$3,627,000.

He went on to say that "**minor district works should total \$5 million [sic] [\$0.5 million] in 2023, but as of 30th September, only \$125,000 spent**". Initially the Ministry was allocated a budget of \$500,000 for the works. In addition, we had the foresight to carry forward \$21,835 from the 2022 fiscal year into 2023. Prudent financial management resulted in a total budget of \$521,000 for the current year.

As for the expenditure for Minor District Works, I wish to inform the House that these are ongoing and the finance team is diligently working to Table the exact figures and expenditures. While I am unable to provide the amount spent at this very moment, I can confidently state that a significant portion of this allocation has been utilised effectively in these projects. I assure the House that detailed reports on expenditure will be made available as soon as the finance team completes their commitment to not only utilise the funds efficiently, but also maintain transparency in reporting the expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to let the Member know that his numbers were off and whoever his source was, he needs to get a new person. I think they are misleading him.

National Roads Authority's Strategic Operations Plan for 2022-2024

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister responsible for Planning, it will not surprise you to learn that I place great value on developing and executing strong plans; that's why I believe the completion of the National Roads Authority's Strategic Operations Plan for 2022-2024 is a significant milestone. The plan prioritises and focuses our investments to create the most impactful results for our road infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, many of those results are well known to the Members of this honourable House. In particular, the Hurley-Merren Boulevard was widened to six lanes, now supporting drivers between Grand Harbour Roundabout and Selkirk Drive.

Another meaningful infrastructure project in process is Section One of the Airport Connector Road which will provide a direct line between Esterley Tibbetts Highway to Lincoln Drive and Sparky's Drive. If we can come out of this House early enough, we would be able to go out there for its first-time opening this week or next.

Mr. Speaker, next I will share what the National Roads Authority expects to action over the next twelve months.

By the end of 2023, we expect to complete the four-lane expansion of Rex Crighton Boulevard between Poindexter Roundabout and Hirst Road which we have started. Crewe Road will be expanded to include a third eastbound lane from the CUC Roundabout to Grand Harbour.

Also by the end of this year, hopefully, [we expect] to complete the Kings Connector Road, adjacent to Kings Sports Centre that directly links Edgewater Way with Crewe Road at the CUC Roundabout— Mr. Speaker, achieving this will depend on addressing utilities issues with CUC and Water Authority and some land claim settlements; however, I look forward to providing more updates on this project in the months ahead.

If this sounds like an aggressive schedule of major road enhancements, it is. Our road network is the backbone of our economy and directly impacts the quality of life for all. That is why we are pressing ahead urgently with these vital improvements.

Mr. Speaker, my responsibility as Minister is to serve the entire country and the interest of the Caymanians. My duty as a Member of this honourable House is to ensure that the Government fairly serves those I represent in my constituency of North Side.

I would like to update you on some significant road improvements in the North Side and East End areas. These upgrades reflect our commitment to enhancing infrastructure and safety in these communities.

- Roads in the Cayman Kai area received hot mix asphalt to improve surface conditions which enhances the driving experience and also limits wear and tear on vehicles, and bicycles for those like yourself who ride, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Used to.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks:

- Updates were made to the Old Man Bay parking lot, which will expect additional traffic given the work now completed to upgrade the Old Man Bay Dock;

- The National Roads Authority has also installed culverts and a water main on Further Road in North Side to protect the integrity of the road network in those communities;
- Road safety guardrails by the East End Blowholes are currently being replaced.

These milestones foreshadow even greater road upgrades in these communities in the years ahead.

- Frank Sound Road will be re-engineered and resurfaced and a Frank Sound/Seaview Road Intersection design is already ongoing;
- We have repaved sections of High Rock Drive in East End;
- Shoulder improvements on select parts of Queens Highway and Old Man Bay are in progress.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that our constituents in both the North Side and East End will directly benefit from the road modernisation efforts prioritised by this Government, demonstrating our commitment to enhancing infrastructure across our Islands.

Transport

Mr. Speaker, Ministerial changes brought Transport into my Ministry. The addition of Public Transport to the Ministry is a welcome and effective reorganisation which further supports the holistic approach of the initiatives we have set forth.

Mr. Speaker, the Deloitte Report, commissioned by the former Ministry of Transport provides an assessment of a public transport strategy for the public bus system in Grand Cayman. Despite the ongoing transition, I assure honourable Members of this House of our Ministry's unwavering dedication to advancing public transportation development. My commitment is absolute. The insights from Deloitte's Comprehensive Report will assist in crafting the future transportation blueprint for the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to inform the House that the Ministry has recruited two secondees from the UK, specialising in public bus transportation, to support the Ministry in improving the public bus system.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry received approval from the Cabinet to explore potential avenues to merge the National Roads Authority, Public Transportation Unit, and Department of Vehicle & Drivers' Licensing (DVDL). This brings us to the National Road Safety Strategy approved by Cabinet.

National Road Safety Strategy

Mr. Speaker, the National Road Safety Strategy addresses critical areas for action such as enhancing driver education, improving pedestrian and cyclist

safety, upgrading road infrastructure, and leveraging technology for better enforcement. The strategy also emphasises the importance of community engagement and education to instil a culture of road safety. Through the efforts of committees, the national campaign began in late November. This cross-government initiative is set to reduce road fatalities to zero by 2038. *Safe Roads, Safe Cayman; The Road to Zero*.

Mr. Speaker, our Ministry is seriously committed to addressing the pressing challenges plaguing our roadways and I am very, very proud of the work that has been accomplished thus far.

Mr. Speaker, beyond enhancing the road network and mitigating traffic issues, the Ministry is deeply committed to refining the experience for drivers when they access government services, such as applying for licences and vehicle registrations. To do this, Mr. Speaker, we are working with colleagues in this House to achieve several legislative reforms to improve our road and traffic environment and support our status as a premier international tourism destination, and home to world-class and internationally engaged professionals.

Mr. Speaker, these reforms are further amendments to the Traffic Act and Traffic Regulations including:

- Facilitating driving licence exchange with the United Kingdom and its Crown Dependencies;
- Compatibility with the Geneva Convention to allow for the international exchange of driver's licences to countries that are signatories to the Convention;
- An amendment to section 6(4A) of the Traffic Act for the exchange of information with the insurance industry;
- Amendments to allow the introduction of electronic driver's licences and electronic vehicle registrations; and finally,
- An amendment to the Traffic Control Regulations (Road Code) to facilitate recommendations to the Traffic Management Panel as it relates to roundabouts, new traffic signs, road markings and traffic lights.

Online Upgrades

Mr. Speaker, this Ministry and DVDL have successfully increased the number of government services that are available online. In 2022, 25 per cent of total vehicle licence and driver's licence applications were made online. That is nearly three times as many online applications as were made in the last year before the pandemic. The value of this online activity is more than \$4.3 million, and the Department continues to expand its online services. We particularly look forward to completing e-services for customers to book written or road tests online.

Mr. Speaker, to provide some perspective, in 2021, DVDL manually managed—yes, I did say manually—13,329 written and road tests, and in 2022, this increased another 3 per cent. Utilising e-services for the testing, will encourage the growing number of customers requiring written or road tests to use this option. Critical upgrades to DVDL's computer systems are underway to accommodate these and other online products and services, supporting the future integration of systems for a better customer experience with DVDL.

DVDL conducts regular customer service training, and late last year, officially opened the West Bay Licensing Office at Jacques Scott Market Place. We are also on target to open the new Licensing Department office in the Brac, if we can get there to do that ribbon cutting.

Mr. Speaker, systems have been integrated for vehicle management, and nearly 30,000 vehicles have been re-plated in collaboration with Tönnjes & Computer Services Department.

Mr. Speaker, the expansion and renovation of the Crewe Road office are underway as well as plans to grow DVDL staff, and we hope these initiatives continue to be supported by the budget.

The Ministry is actively engaged in formulating Vehicle Safety Regulations. These pivotal stipulations are designed to guarantee that vehicles imported into the Cayman Islands meet our stringent national safety standards, fostering consumer confidence and trust in the system.

Department of Planning

Mr. Speaker, managing how we develop as an island nation is as important to the well-being of Caymanians as is the modernisation of our infrastructure; [as such] the Department of Planning plays a critical role in helping to ensure that development is sound and stable.

National Development Plan (Plan Cayman)

The review of the National Development Plan—Plan Cayman—has been an ongoing effort over the past two years. The Department of Planning has collaborated with the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency to ensure that the plan review reflects the Government's policy goals.

To assist the Central Planning Authority (CPA) in this responsibility, a work plan was provided to the CPA proposing the creation of a joint project team, which includes representatives from the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency. This document also proposed to update the 1997 Planning Statement using the Plan Cayman National Planning Framework as a foundation.

Community Works

Mr. Speaker, late last year, the Department of Planning launched a new Community Works platform, representing an important update to the Online Planning System. With Community Works, customers now have more tools and control options to better manage their projects and data. The new system allows for more dynamic features to be added more quickly, and is also more secure. Additional hardware and cybersecurity infrastructure were included as part of the upgrade. As more functionality is added, the system will incorporate more of the Department's functions, and will become increasingly easier to use.

As the Cayman Islands continues to grow and develop, the need for careful project review and approval becomes even more critical. In 2021, the Department of Planning approved 793 projects totalling more than \$1.2 billion in value across the residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, tourism, recreational and other sectors.

In 2022, it approved 922 such projects totalling more than \$722 million in value; and in the last two years, the Department has approved 933 Certificates of Occupancy, which are granted when a structure is deemed suitable for human occupation, thereby allowing that structure to be connected to the power company's grid.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important to mention here that the approval of projects occurs only after the Department of Planning carefully reviews plans to ensure they meet all of the requirements for safe, stable construction and sustainable development. The Department of Planning conducted 15,671 such reviews over the past two years, a testament to the committed team of the department.

Mr. Speaker, once plans are approved and construction is underway, the Ministry continues to represent the interests of our community by conducting inspections to ensure that structures' structural, plumbing, mechanical and electrical components are compliant with applicable codes. More than 26,000 such inspections were conducted over the previous two years.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that the Department of Planning has also identified room for improvement, and has taken steps to expand [in order] to meet demand and maintain efficiency.

The Ministry also has several key initiatives to support the department and the industry that we feel will build on a strong foundation and increase efficiency. These include key legislative changes [such as] pursuing revisions to the Cayman Islands Building Code to enable the adoption of the International Code Council's (ICC) 2021 planning codes.

Mr. Speaker, these revisions will ensure that the environment built in the Cayman Islands remains sustainable and resilient in the face of natural disasters; are environmentally responsible, and cost-effective. The ability to use more environmentally friendly methods and materials will lead to the delivery of tangible

outcomes for both the environment and our country. Other legislative changes include:

- Amendments to the Development and Planning Act and Regulations to ensure they remain fit for purpose and deliver the highest and best outcomes for these Islands, in real terms;
- Amendments to encourage more innovative use of the built environment, through the encouragement of mixed-use developments; and more effective building and land utilisation.
- Delivering real tangible benefits and outcomes for the people of the Cayman Islands in the areas of social, economic and environmental development that are truly sustainable; and
- Implementing a sustainable framework for the registration of trades and services involved in the development industry.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, a system that protects the interests of both tradespersons and consumers; and allows the development regime to implement fairly with accountability and transparency at its core. Undertaking such improvements will raise the quality of our industry while allowing flexibility, and fair regulations that should see an increase in our professional standards and a process that's easier and more efficient.

Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services, Public Works Department and Facilities Management Department

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry includes the Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services, which has achieved some notable accomplishments within the last two years to help improve the servicing and sustainability of the government's vehicle fleet.

Last year, the Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services completed and opened Phase II of its Redevelopment Project, which consists of a new garage facility that includes nineteen service bays capable of servicing the various vehicles and equipment owned by the Cayman Islands Government. These range from light-duty to heavy-duty vehicles and equipment. This new garage facility will lead to more improvements in the Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services, including better turnaround repair times and increased working stability for large vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is committed to a National Energy Policy with a focus on reducing dependency on fossil fuels. To align our vehicle fleet with that commitment, a section of the new garage is designated for work with electric vehicle technology, including technician training, maintenance, and repair of electric vehicles. This new space will facilitate the Department's expansion of its training programme, which will

also provide opportunities for more young Caymanians to get hands-on experience in the automotive field.

To meet the requirements of the National Energy Policy, Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services is upskilling its staff. Training has commenced with an on-island partner in Advanced Equipment Technology and Operations and all technicians are expected to be certified by the end of Quarter 1 in 2024.

Public Works Department (PWD)

Mr. Speaker, the Cayman Islands Government relies heavily on the Public Works Department for the management and preservation of its built environment. This Department stands as a cornerstone, ensuring the Government operates with stability, efficiency, and a high degree of accountability. In tandem with the overarching goals of the government, PWD has recalibrated its operations, aiming to better serve its client agencies. This is characterised by the introduction of streamlined, transparent processes that govern service requests, decision-making, and the allocation of resources.

Mr. Speaker, reflecting on the past two years, the Ministry's Public Works Department has been proactive. Not only have they revealed countless designs for upcoming facilities, but they have also overseen over one hundred major and minor projects distributed across the Cayman Islands; so it brings me immense satisfaction to announce that for the year 2023 alone, we have seen the successful completion of twenty-nine projects, showcasing the Department's dedication and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, today, I have illustrated the pivotal role of the Ministry's Public Works Department in safeguarding the functionality of the built environment, a cornerstone in sustaining the operational efficiency of the Cayman Islands Government. In pursuit of excellence, the Public Works Department, has streamlined its service requests, decision-making, and resource allocation processes, thus enhancing transparency and efficiency in service delivery. Over the forthcoming two years, these refined processes will enhance communication, information management systems, and training initiatives within the Department.

Mr. Speaker, we planned an organisational audit for the restructuring of PWD. The PWD's commitment to training, is symbolised by the remarkable journey of the Construction Trades Training Centre. This past September, we welcomed 43 Caymanians into our programmes. We eagerly anticipate celebrating their accomplishments in the graduation ceremony slated for January 2024. Furthermore, revel in the successful placement of our graduates in full-time roles and internships, a beacon of a brighter and prosperous future.

Facilities Management Department (FMD)

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry's Facilities Management Department steadfastly commits itself to fostering

a safe, sustainable, and efficient environment for everyone. Their roadmap for the coming years is anchored on the pillars of digitisation, sustainability, customer service enhancement, safety [augmentation], and infrastructural developments.

To propel us into a modernised future, the Facilities Management Department is gearing up [to bolster] efficiency, curtail expenses, and refine service delivery. Concurrently, the introduction of a renewable energy initiative stands as a testament to our dedication to diminishing environmental impacts, aligning with the nation's energy policy objectives.

Mr. Speaker, the Department [envision] reinforcing the resilience of the Government's data centre, thereby safeguarding vital data through the integration of additional system redundancies. In anticipation of evolving community needs, plans are underway to construct a multi-purpose hall in the Northward area, doubling as a hurricane shelter. Additionally, the establishment of a remote working centre is in the pipeline, a move designed to offer a flexible working space, coupled with the installation of a "pony" chiller to enhance indoor air quality.

Mr. Speaker, the Facilities Management Department continues to foster collaborative ties with over 55 agencies and various stakeholders, a synergy that promises smooth operational flows and successful project executions.

As we navigate forward, we acknowledge the pressing challenges at hand, including staffing gaps and space constraints. We are actively addressing these issues, with a focus on expansion and potential relocation opportunities to accommodate our expanding workforce.

Mr. Speaker, in the wake of recent global events, the urgency for a robust emergency evacuation protocol has amplified—we had one here today, [but] I didn't have anything to do with it. Our efforts are directed towards fostering inter-departmental collaboration in crafting meticulous evacuation plans, ensuring preparedness and safety in critical times.

Mr. Speaker, the Facilities Management Department remains committed in its mandate to oversee the optimal functioning and maintenance of government assets. Our vision is centred on addressing pressing challenges and fostering a nurturing work environment for all civil servants; [and] I urge the Honourable Members of this Parliament to extend their support and collaboration as we strive to cultivate a government ecosystem marked by excellence and safety.

George Town Revitalisation Initiative

Mr. Speaker, this is a fitting point to update this honourable House on the progress achieved by the George Town Revitalisation Initiative (GTRI) in 2023.

As you are aware, the George Town Revitalisation Initiative was established to breathe new life into

the bustling heart of our capital, George Town. Last year, we witnessed tangible progress, including the transformation of a section of Cardinal Avenue into a pedestrian-friendly zone.

I am delighted to inform that the first phase of the Cardinal Avenue and Albert Panton Street upgrade has concluded successfully, introducing enhanced aesthetics and functionality to the area. Highlights include new street lighting, mature tree plantings, and infrastructural improvements enhancing safety and utility services.

Moreover, we have forged a connection to Seafarers Way's pocket park, featuring solar-powered smart benches offering free public Wi-Fi. Moving forward, Phase 2 at the Edward Street and Main Street intersection is now underway, to ensure smooth operations and traffic management.

Our commitment to fostering a vibrant community spirit is evident in the array of events and initiatives introduced this year:

- **Street Food Festival:** A celebration of local culture and culinary delights;
- **Art in the City:** A week-long art festival in June showcasing a variety of galleries and pop-up shows, fostering artistic engagement in the heart of George Town; and
- **Town Market:** This event aims to nurture community engagement, with plans underway to organise it more frequently.

Mr. Speaker, as we progress, several collaborations and future initiatives are on the horizon, including the Water Project in partnership with Rotary Central and the development of a Smart City Platform. Additionally, a specialised group is working to enhance parking and housing facilities, paving the way for a well-planned and modern George Town.

Mr. Speaker, the GTRI embodies our steadfast dedication to rejuvenating George Town and nurturing a community that is vibrant and inclusive. We value the ongoing support and collaboration from this honourable House as we continue as promised.

Subsea Cable Project

Mr. Speaker, moving forward with my Ministry's updates, I would like to highlight a project critical to the Cayman Islands' impending prosperity— the Subsea Cable Project.

World-class communications infrastructure stands as the backbone of any progressive nation. Recognising its pivotal role, the Ministry has been diligently collaborating with submarine cable and business development specialists, consulting extensively, and analysing an excess of potential solutions. We have been vigilant in understanding the intricate risks associated with such massive projects.

With technological advancements and the rise of the internet, the telecommunications landscape has

changed dramatically since the inception of our current cables. Our current international telecommunications systems— responsible for 99 per cent of our external communications— though critical, are nearing their end of life.

Mr. Speaker, it's imperative to note that the majority of this vital infrastructure is privately owned [and although] typically, the private sector would have initiated replacement plans at least five years before the system's end of life, to our knowledge no such concrete plans exist; therefore, given the extent of our Gross Domestic Product relying on resilient and high-quality communications, passive observance is no longer [an option]—

Suspension of Standing Order 10(2)

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, we have reached the moment of interruption. May I call on the Honourable Premier to suspend Standing Order 10(2) in order that the business of the House may continue beyond 4:30 p.m.?

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

Mr. Speaker, I wish to move the suspension of Standing Order 10(2) in order to allow the House to continue beyond the hour of interruption.

The Speaker: The question is that Standing Order 10(2) be suspended in order to allow the proceedings of the House to continue beyond 4:30 p.m. 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: The Minister continuing.

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

I'm pleased to inform this honourable House that the Ministry has taken steps towards this initiative and we have on-boarded the necessary submarine cable expert to spearhead the subsea cable initiative.

In our pursuit to modernise our submarine cable infrastructure, our Request for Proposals (RFP) for advisory and project support garnered multiple responses. Following meticulous evaluation, a preferred supplier was recommended to the Public Procurement Committee (PPC) on 30th August, 2023. With approval secured on 13th September, 2023, contract negotiations completed, and the agreement signed 6th November [2023], the project's initiation is underway.

The project's primary goals include drafting a final recommended approach, obtaining Caucus' endorsement for the final business case, and devising a

detailed project plan. Depending on the chosen options, we envision the completion of this new infrastructure within the next 24-48 months— that is what we are talking about with the business case, going forward.

Mr. Speaker, the importance of this project cannot be overstated. Our existing cable is not just outdated; it operates at its maximum capacity on one system. The public must understand the repercussions of any failure in these cables. Events in places like Shetland Islands over the past year are stark reminders of the exposures we face.

Our detailed business plan for the inception of a new subsea cable has been crafted with utmost diligence, encompassing a broad spectrum of considerations:

- Strategic Case: Options and insights poised to steer Cabinet resolutions;
- Economic Case;
- Financial Case;
- Commercial Case; and a
- Management Case— A blueprint [delineating the] approach towards project realisation.

Mr. Speaker, the business plan recognises the potential for governmental intervention to fill the gap left by insufficient private-sector investment. While the urgency may dictate swift actions, we remain committed to ensuring that any solution is durable, cost-effective, and future-proof. The Government's objective remains firm: to fortify the long-term resilience of the Cayman Islands' international communications, ensuring both citizens and businesses benefit from unmatched services at affordable rates, for generations to come.

Utility Regulation and Competition Office (OfReg)

Mr. Speaker, my final update today is on the strides made in 2023 by the Utility Regulation and Competition Office (OfReg), as well as the focal points for the concluding quarter of this year.

In the ongoing year, we have achieved several milestones across different sectors. Notably, we have instituted rules to safeguard our Critical National Utility Infrastructure (CNU), such as cyber security and undersea cables. This move aligns with our efforts to enhance consumer protection and bolster enforcement activities with specific advertising and broadcasting conduct guidelines set to be implemented in 2024.

In the fuels sector, OfReg established National Fuels Quality Standards (NFQS), slated for implementation next year. This is complemented by initiatives like the introduction of renewable fuel E85 to reduce environmental impact, and planned amendments to the Dangerous Substances Act (DSA) for greater transparency in fuel pricing.

Mr. Speaker, going forward, we aim to continue regulatory account pilot programmes and finalise a licensing framework to enhance competition and regulatory oversight in the fuel market.

In the Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) sector, we have modernised regulatory policies to ensure network reliability and customer protection, including a substantial fine imposed for unapproved price increments— no one can say they aren't working in that department. We are [also] working towards drafting a National ICT Strategy to guide the development of infrastructure and services in the Cayman Islands, while fostering cooperation amongst local broadcasters to address common issues and new policy initiatives.

In the energy and utilities sector, Mr. Speaker, we expanded the Consumer Owned Renewable Energy (CORE) programme allowing more households to connect to the CUC grid, and advised the Energy Policy Council on the National Energy Policy. Our focus remains on launching solar and battery storage projects, facilitating negotiations for waste-to-energy projects, and overseeing the Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) Project conversion process. As we move ahead, we remain committed to enhancing consumer protection and ensuring the operational reliability of the infrastructure utilised by licensees in a variety of sectors.

Mr. Speaker, two years ago, in my very first budget address to this honourable House, I expressed optimism about the programmes and initiatives the Ministry and its Departments and Agencies would complete. I stand before you, proud of the accomplishments we have achieved together, and I remain optimistic about our future. We have laid a solid foundation, and with the support of this budget we are poised to continue our good work and fulfil our plans moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to submit this budget statement to this honourable House. A heartfelt thank you to the dedicated staff of the Ministry, whose tireless efforts and unwavering dedication have been instrumental in our achievements. I also extend my profound appreciation to the finance team, whose expertise and diligence have been pivotal in crafting a budget that reflects our commitment to the Cayman Islands and its people— we have to take our hats off to the Finance Team because they really worked hard to get us here in the timeframe they had.

Mr. Speaker, as we proceed with the deliberations on this budget, I urge the honourable House to support it, recognising the immense value it holds for every Caymanian. Let us unite in our commitment to the betterment of our beloved Cayman Islands, ensuring that the legacy we build today will benefit generations to come.

Mr. Speaker and honourable Members, I appreciate the opportunity to share our progress and future plans with you all. I just want to give an update on some of the [projects] going on in my constituency of North Side.

North Side Constituency

Mr. Speaker, when I got in, one of the first things we looked at was the roadways going into North Side. Some of them were never gazetted, or were not in the right location. We started a clean-up exercise not only in my district, but throughout the island, transferring many rights of way to the Crown so that we don't end up in court over them as we have before. We cleaned and paved them, and as we found them, or Members brought them to my attention, we got them gazetted and transferred into Crown [land]—some developers had them in their name and were very happy to transfer them over to the Crown.

Recently, we undertook the expansion of the corner by the gas station, to widen that area. This year alone we had seven accidents recorded on that corner, so we had to do something about it. We had to acquire some land to be able to widen the road, so we purchased the corner house and knocked it down; now it is much easier to see around the corner when you're coming. In the New Year, the NRA team will get back there to finish the expansion and put in a sidewalk around that particular property using the rest of the land as overflow parking for the Ronald J. Forbes Playing Field, for which we don't have much parking now, so that will help.

We have completed the buildout of the Old Man Bay dock. I'm happy to say it's done. We are in the phase right now of building the restrooms on the land side for that particular park. Currently, we are engaged to build the three cabanas and an international-sized volleyball court area on the seaside and we just completed the basketball court on the land side, which I must say the kids are very happy with. I thank the team and the Government for their full support. I can tell you, about every night that I go home, there's at least someone there enjoying that basketball court.

We have purchased several beach properties in North Side that I thank the Government for their full support on; purchasing a property by the Hutland Junction, which will allow us to build a park there in the future for the people of Hutland so that they don't have to go too far anymore if they want to enjoy the beach—they have a beach right at the entrance now. We [also] purchased a property at the Frank Sound Junction next to the Frank Sound Launching Ramp. I thank all my colleagues for their support and, next to me, my colleague from East End also; it was something that we fought for as we thought it was really good, and the full Government supported it.

We have committed to doing the homes in North Side which I spoke to. We've purchased property for the expansion of the Edna Moyle Primary School, which I must say the works of the design phase are being done and going through the Ministry of Education. I thank the Premier for her push into seeing that this is necessary and getting the design work done. I thank you, ma'am, from the people of North Side; we thank

you too, for the support and we do thank all of the government colleagues.

We are engaging on the final reports for the Kaibo Public Beach which, as many of you who go there know is eroding very badly. I think we are 98 per cent completed with the design work going for the coastal work matters now to be able to see that project finished next year. It's been a plague on the people in North Side for quite some time. It's something that they have wanted to see completed, and I'm glad that we have pushed that milestone to see its completion.

Something [else] we are looking to engage in is a home for the North Side seniors with most of the works being carried out by PWD. I must say they have been moving quite well with the project so hopefully, the Deputy Premier will be able to do the ribbon cutting in the New Year; so I am proud to be able to stand here today and say that there are several things that we have gotten done for the constituency of North Side, which is dear to my heart.

I must say that what gets me up and in that traffic flow every morning is knowing that when I drive through I can see the difference we are making, not only for North Side but from East End to West Bay. Like my friend [who sits] behind me says we consider ourselves "social butterflies", so we end up from North Side to West Bay. I want to say thank you from the team, for all the support for all of the work that we have done, and I thank you all for all the work that we have to continue doing.

I also want to talk about the East End fishermen who have been asking for a new East End dock. The Member for East End is on board 100 per cent, and has been pushing with me to get that coastal works licence done so that we can look at building a new concrete dock for the East End fishermen in the New Year.

We also looked at building a new dock for the Members in West Bay at— what is the name of that property again?

An Hon. Member: Morgan's.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Morgan's Harbour.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: We are also looking at getting the coastal work done to build it for them. It is one that needed to be done also. We looked at whether we [should] do another wooden dock, but it was actually more feasible for us to build a concrete one, so we are [getting] a design to get it done. Most of this work will be commencing in the first quarter of next year.

[Desk thumping]

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Yes; and when it comes to Bodden Town West, we have several roadworks that we are completing. I'm also looking at the parks in Bodden Town. I think the one we are looking at falls within Bodden Town East, but we are also looking at building a park in Will T. Drive, in Bodden Town West. That is ongoing, and we should see the completion of it next year.

Another big [project] that we should see the completion of is the Bodden Town Hall that has been ongoing for several years, sir. It is coming to near completion right now. I want to say, I think we should have that completed hopefully in the first quarter of next year. That, again, will be another milestone that has been completed for many individuals. I think it has passed through several administrations' hands, so it is a big one.

I want to say Merry Christmas when it comes, to all of my colleagues. To my constituency of North Side; they are my heart, they are the ones who really drive me, who get me going. There's nothing better than helping and knowing that I'm making a difference for them in this honourable House so, my people in North Side, I look forward to seeing you all— if Sir Alden doesn't hold me too late in this House throughout the week. I would love to see you all for Christmas.

An Hon. Member: You have to do Red Bay roads.

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Merry Christmas to everyone. Yes, we are doing some roads in Sir Alden's area, speed tables in Marina Drive— and how could I forget to add, Sir Alden, the Eddie Sanchez Park in the area of Red Bay, which I know is close to you too. That is definitely moving forward and getting near completion.

I thank you all and have a good day.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister of Planning and Infrastructure, et cetera. Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]*

The Honourable Deputy Governor.

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer my contribution to the debate on the 2024-2025 budget. It would be remiss of me not to begin by acknowledging the arrival of Her Excellency the Governor, Ms. Jane Owen who expertly delivered her first Throne Speech at this meeting.

Since arriving, Her Excellency has offered unwavering leadership, dedication and advocacy on behalf of the people of these beloved Islands. Mr. Speaker, I work with Her Excellency every day; she is an excellent Governor and she works very hard for the benefit of the people of our Islands. As her words reflected, she is keen to see that the Cayman Islands continue to succeed and for the UK-Cayman Islands

partnership to flourish in recognition of our shared past, mutual ideas and common aspirations for the future.

Equally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Premier, and Honourable Ministers and Members of the United People's Movement for their leadership and so clearly setting out the strategic direction for the Cayman Islands by way of the 2024 and 2025 budget.

Mr. Speaker, we have a Premier who is a strong leader, God-fearing and willing to make the difficult decisions to make the lives of our people better. It has been a pleasure to work with her in her short time as Premier.

I wish to assure this Government that I, along with my capable senior leadership team will continue to work alongside the Government to deliver the policies and initiatives necessary to fulfil the objectives of the Strategic Policy Statement, ensuring that we meet the current and future needs of our most valuable asset, our people. As Deputy Governor and Head of the Civil Service, I can confirm that we have established broad foundations which will provide fertile grounds for fulfilling the Government's ambitious plans and vision for this country.

Mr. Speaker, they say that change is the only constant, and as I have the pleasure of engaging with you in your new role, I know that I need not convince you of this truth. It has been a distinct pleasure to work with you in many capacities in which you have served our country, and as you take on the role of Speaker, I pledge to you— as I have [to] your predecessors— the full support of our Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, Cayman Thanksgiving is not long past. For all of the challenges that have been raised during our deliberations, and rightly so, I cannot help but feel blessed. The good Lord spared these Islands from storms and even the threat of storms in 2023. Political challenges were overcome, not only peacefully, but with both sides of the aisle pledging to work together for the good of the Cayman Islands; and a clear and deliberate path has been set forward in this budget to take the Islands safely forward.

Mr. Speaker, from time to time I say how lucky we are as a people, as the Cayman Islands, and my wife reminds me we are not lucky, we are blessed. I really believe that.

As I reflect, I also wish to thank the Government for its foresight by continuously investing in its workforce. Mr. Speaker, the men and women of our Civil Service and the wider public service continue to make us proud, and their performance overall helps the Cayman Islands to stand tall in the world. Whether large or small, employers in the private or public sectors are battling to secure talent. That struggle is even more fiercely contested for our Civil Service, which aims to attract, retain and promote Cayman's best and brightest and, where necessary, to augment our workforce with similar minded global talent who is highly skilled and share our common purpose to make lives better.

On the heels of the *Great Resignation and silent quitting* phenomenon, which globally reduced the size of available workforce and froze employee engagement respectively, CIG has focused on leadership, talent development and employee recognition to fuel our team's passion for delivering on behalf of our Government and the people of these beloved Islands. In 2022 and 2023, as Cayman's economy rebounded and demands for public services intensified, the Civil Service has consistently risen to meet these challenges. Meeting these challenges has meant some growth. To put this growth in context, it is important to look at the situation nationally.

Over the past twenty years, 2003 to 2023, the Cayman Islands population has increased by 90 per cent. Over the same time frame, Civil Service headcount only grew by 46 per cent, or half of the population growth. Civil Service headcount is also considerably lower than growth in our Islands' overall workforce, so I agree that the Civil Service has grown in recent years, but it has not done so in a bubble. As our population grows, it drives demand for:

- Expansion and innovation in education, which represents roughly one-quarter of the Civil Service;
- Intelligence-led and properly equipped law enforcement, who safeguard our borders and patrols our streets and our waters, represents the next largest professional group;
- Passionate teams to preserve our heritage and safeguard our fragile environment.
- Policy experts to support Cayman's economic interests by delivering the Government's strategy to combat threats to our financial industry, while encouraging economic growth and diversification; and
- A whole cadre of service providers who toil every day on behalf of a growing population to collect our waste, eradicate mosquitoes and process applications for everything from imports to passports to first-time Caymanian land owner stamp duty waivers, to name just a few.

Hence, Mr. Speaker, the Civil Service has experienced some growth to meet these demands, yet the growth is below our approved perimeters.

It is notable that during 2022 to 2023 the Civil Service was forecasted by the Ministry of Finance to deliver these and more services far beyond our personnel budgets. In 2022 to 2023 the Civil Service was forecasted to achieve around \$66 million in Human Resources savings. Many teams not only worked beyond their job description but rose to the occasion by fulfilling other job descriptions, simultaneously.

I am therefore most grateful to the Premier and the Government for utilising a portion of this HR underspend to authorise, this December, the one-off payment of \$1,500 for civil servants and public servants in the Statutory Authorities and Government Companies

(SAGCs) who achieved similar savings. This funding comes at an important time for employees, and I cannot tell you just how many civil servants have expressed to me their sincere thanks to the Government, and indeed this Parliament, for holding us to account but offering rewards where they have been earned.

My Portfolio also had the privilege of working with an incredibly dedicated Board of Directors, Executives and team at the Public Service Pensions Board (PSPB). On their behalf, please allow me to go on record to express our sincere thanks to the Honourable Premier and our Government for its support for our pensioners. Approximately 600 Caymanian retirees who worked for Government for more than a decade before reaching the normal retirement age, and whose monthly pensions were below the \$1,250 per month, saw their pensions uplifted to this new minimum threshold.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to go off script for a minute just to say this: there has been much criticism. Why is the Government giving these people money? When she heard about the \$1,500, a civil servant said to me— this is a single mother who makes just over \$3,000 per month, has one child and is paying rent. She said, *'DG, please pass on my thanks to everyone involved in this decision, because I was faced with an issue that no mum should have to face, in that, I was going to have to decide whether to pay my light bill or buy my daughter some gifts for Christmas. This \$1,500 will allow me to do both.'*

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Government is to help its people and if we can't give some very deserving persons \$1,500 for a year's work, that's a problem. That is a problem.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson:

Mr. Speaker, I believe some of us, not everyone, are drifting to where, when something good happens to people it seems to be a problem; but when something bad happens, we want to celebrate.

[Cross talk]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson:

How did we get here as a people?

How did we get here? How did we get here, where when you hear about something good happening to one of your fellow Caymanians you don't say, *'Wow, I'm so happy for them; they deserve it.'* Now it's, *'But why you didn't give it to me?' or 'Why did you give them this amount?'*

Come on, Mr. Speaker. As a people, I think we need to have a check in 2024 and say, *you know what? Let's put this all behind us.* We are going to be one; one Caymanian, one person. We are going to celebrate with each other, and when we see someone who is not in a good place, we're going to help them. Not post on

Facebook or on Instagram or all the other social media, *'Look at what happened to this person. Let's celebrate.'* Let's try to help those persons.

Mr. Speaker, the thing about our pensioners, these are persons who worked for us years and years ago, many of them under very difficult conditions, and had over ten years of pensionable service, [yet] they were only getting a few hundred dollars a month. The Government has consistently increased that to where we were at \$950, but Mr. Speaker, we know you can't do anything with \$950. You know? That's a light bill. Mr. Speaker, I applaud the Government for caring, for doing the right thing— and Cayman, let us stop the criticism. Let us come together and celebrate our successes and when we see someone who is struggling, let us reach out a hand to help, not to hurt.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Regardless of how long they worked or how much they earn, all public service pensioners benefit each and every year from a rare but important plan-design feature. Specifically, during retirement, pensioners' fixed income is inflation-protected. During 2023 alone, pensioners received an 8.3 per cent cost of living adjustment, which is called an augmentation when it applies to pensioners.

This augmentation, which is calculated based on the Economics & Statistics Office's (ESO's) data and paid annually for all substantive pensioners, was paid retroactively to January 2023 to more than 2,000 retirees. We are very proud that we can take care of our pensioners, Mr. Speaker. This is a built-in design feature of public service pensions to enable persons who have exhausted their working years to still have prospects of living in dignity during retirement. Another important feature is that whether a retiree lives to be 80, 90 or 110, they have the comfort of knowing that they will receive their pension as long as they live.

Finally, another key component is the way that public service plans anticipate the need to extinguish debt before entering retirement. The public service pension plan allows a one-time withdrawal or computation of up to 25 per cent of the total value of a pension. This withdrawal coincides with retirement and allows persons to dispose of high debt in order to live on a fixed income during retirement.

These innovative features— inflation protection, lifelong annuities and one-off withdrawals at the time of retirement— were specifically designed with sustainability in mind for the plan as well as the participant. Today, the PSPB invested assets have grown to more than \$1 billion to secure the future. This outcome is made possible by the foresight of past lawmakers, the diligence of current plan administrators and investment advisors, and the discipline and ethos of current lawmakers, policy advisors and plan participants.

I say this is rare because in an information age, the lure of instantaneous gratification is stronger than ever. There are constant pressures to borrow from tomorrow to fix today; however, there are trade-offs to every system. In our system, making the previously described outcomes possible for current and future retirees requires a disciplined way of forcibly saving for our future. The Bible says, *'To everything, there is a season, a time to reap and a time to sow.'* For those who are still a part of the workforce and are sowing seeds which they will reap during their long retirement, we are committed to finding solutions that are sustainable.

Early withdrawals from pension plans may work for some plan designs but would begin to unravel the rare benefits which our public service enjoys. We believe that maintaining competitive salaries, which includes elements of timely salary scale adjustments that benefit all active employees, is one highly effective way to help persons qualify for home ownership in the first instance and to maintain it when inflationary pressures on interest rates threaten such ownership.

Public servants have other tools at their disposal— again, some of those institutions were born of foresight, discipline and an ethos that speaks to investing in our futures; by working with institutions such as the Cayman Islands Civil Service Association (CICSA) Credit Union, the Staff Association and other stakeholders and concerned parties, we are committed to finding alternatives that do not threaten the sustainability of our pension programmes, but provide access to persons needing bridge financing to secure housing.

The Public Service Pensions Board proposes amendments to the Public Service Pensions Act and similar laws for PSPB members that will allow its members to make additional voluntary contributions. Such investment vehicles, which are [also] funded by employee contributions, could have more flexible withdrawal components because they would be in addition to the current minimum 12 per cent contribution. The Government has signalled a strong support to help all Caymanians within the private and public sectors; and policy practitioners are keen to engage on sustainable options to achieve this outcome within the public sector.

Mr. Speaker, as Deputy Governor and Head of the Civil Service, I am responsible for the Portfolio of the Civil Service which delivers work across such overarching areas as HR strategy, governance and public sector reform. The upcoming fiscal period will present fresh challenges and opportunities as the Civil Service embarks on the latest mile markers of our journey to becoming a world class organisation.

Mr. Speaker, when we first embarked on this journey in 2018, we recognised that setting such a lofty vision could put a target on our backs. Thousands of persons use government services each and every day which represents thousands of interactions that could go wrong. Notwithstanding the risk, I wholeheartedly supported this vision and still do— I borrow inspiration

from the Premier's Policy Address, "the audacity of optimism".

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Yes.

In this case, my optimism is strung from the realisation that I am blessed to work with an amazing team of civil servants who are driven by a common purpose to make lives better.

Throughout the debate over the last two days, Ministers have risen and given praise to the Civil Service for the work that they do, and I want to thank all of the Ministers, and the Opposition as well, who spoke highly about the Civil Service. I have great faith in our people, and that is why I believe our vision, although very bold, is the right one; because our people deserve to be treated by a world-class Civil Service. Our elected Government deserves a world-class Civil Service to do their work. Mr. Speaker, it's a *vision*. It is not something that we say that we are today, it is a vision.

I want to read Amazon's— whom we all are familiar with— vision statement: **"To be earth's most customer-centric company; to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online."** Now, that is a very lofty and bold vision statement, *to be earth's most customer-centric company where people can go and discover anything they might want to buy online*. Amazon has not achieved that vision [because] you can't buy cassava cake on Amazon, but we all want to use Amazon and we say that its vision is a very good one because it is what they want to achieve. We want to be world-class because our people deserve it, our Government deserves it— and Mr. Speaker, if there's any group of people who can deliver it, it is our people. They can do it, they have done it and we will achieve this vision.

Since 2018, as part of the Civil Service strategy, CIG has closely monitored client interactions at some of our heaviest visited agencies, ranging from visitors coming in and out of our airports to users of postal services, some 36 portals are deployed across the Cayman Islands soliciting feedback from persons creating new companies at General Registry, to persons seeking financial assistance at NAU.

Earlier this year, this optimism was met with tangible successes in delivering favourable customer experience. Mr. Speaker, in September, CIG celebrated an overall customer satisfaction rating of 93 per cent gained from one million responses received to our *Happy or Not* customer service feedback terminals. I think in any country, 93 per cent is a world-class score. You get 93 per cent on an exam, you get an 'A'. One million times those buttons were pressed, and we have a 93 per cent 'Happy' rating. That is something that we should be very, very proud of and we should celebrate; and I want to thank all of our civil servants who work hard every day to attain that outcome.

Two of our earlier adopters of this programme, the DVDL and the Cayman Islands Post Office are examples of the benefits of monitoring and acting on customer feedback. The DVDL in response to early feedback made concerted efforts in 2021 to improve its service delivery. As a result, their 'Happy' index increased from 67 per cent in 2018, to 91 per cent in 2021, and 94 per cent in 2022. Mr. Speaker, that is progress.

I want to thank the director, Mr. Dixon and his incredible team at DVDL. There was a time when I got complaints about DVDL and people having to wait there for hours to get their car registered. Now you can get your car registered online in less than ten minutes, you don't have to go to DVDL. You don't ever have to go to DVDL to get your car registered. I think you still have to go to collect your driver's licence and that is going to change soon. Mr. Speaker, we are listening to our customers, taking their feedback and making world-class changes that are making people's lives better.

Since 2018, the Cayman Islands Post Office has consistently maintained a 'Happy' index of over 90 per cent by monitoring its customer satisfaction results. That team continuously seeks to improve its service delivery, and has recently started to utilise the digital hyperlinks associated with the kiosk to obtain deeper insights into customer feedback. Again, let us thank Ms. Glasgow and her team at the post office for the work they are doing to improve customer experience.

Other empirical data is also being tracked to improve customer experience. In September this year, the department of Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC) saw increases in the average customer feedback rating. This happiness is linked to improved service delivery. That month WORC served 6,907 clients, averaging 329 per day. On average, all clients were in and out of the office within 15 minutes and 14 seconds which included a ten-minute wait time and five minutes of transactional time. Again, I used to get complaints about people having to wait there for hours; now the average time is 15 minutes.

Leaders at WORC are leveraging these insights to motivate their teams and to continuously seek improvements that benefit the public. Earlier, the Minister for employment mentioned Mr. Jeremy Scott and his team. I, too, want to commend Mr. Scott and his team. We have a new Caymanian Director taking up this department and he's doing a fabulous job.

There are other ways across the Civil Service where we have made gains in improving our capacity to deliver exceptional customer service during the original five-year strategic plan for the Civil Service for example:

- We adopted a new CIG customer pledge which is to deliver, thereby creating a common approach for improving customer experience;
- We launched our customer service academy and trained 1,487 ambassadors on the front line across the CIG;

- We developed workshops and trained 107 customer service champions;
- We conducted monthly and annual recognition of employees across the Civil Service through the Deputy Governor's Award Programme designating scores of persons as our Employee of the Month, with many others receiving Chief Officers Choice Awards for serving with distinction within their own Ministry and Portfolio;
- We integrated team recognition into an employee recognition programme to support ways of embedding our core competency of working together as our business-as-usual behaviour;
- We increased the convenience of service delivery to our customers by increasing self-service options, working in tandem with eGovernment to the extent that 62 services are now online or in development.

Let me say that again, Mr. Speaker. There are now 62 services offered by the Government that are online or in development.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: That's a great achievement. We also achieved numerous goals in our leadership work:

- We launched a leadership academy through the Civil Service College;
- We hosted regular leadership events for senior leaders including virtual sessions during COVID pandemic lockdown periods;
- We have started work to develop and further support succession planning arrangements;
- We developed and promulgated the Civil Service code values;
- We extended existing wellness programmes through the Wellness Committee and delivered employee health and well-being initiatives, including 'Lunch and Learns', the DG 5K, the pedometer challenge, the Sports Day and the half marathon;
- We have administered six annual employee engagement surveys which shows an increase in the engagement index to our present level of 73 per cent, up 6 per cent since 2017;
- In 2022, we conducted the second annual 360-degree reviews and coaching with 594 leaders and senior managers participating—up from 323 in 2021;
- We distilled key concepts into a succinct leadership statement for the Civil Service.

Talent development

- We developed a Learning and Development Policy position applicable across the Civil Service, which reflects CIG's commitment to lifelong learning and performance improvement; adopts minimum annual training targets for continuous development, catalogues the range of training interventions sponsored by the Civil Service College, and identifies commitments expected of both management and staff;
- We are expanding the learning and development offered to all civil servants using the Civil Service College learning pathways;
- We developed and adopted a core competency framework applicable to all civil servants at all levels;
- We are developing career pathways for identified professional vocational clusters within the Civil Service;
- We have developed terms of reference for advisory committees and heads of professions who will provide guidance on learning and development priorities for different professional vocational groups;
- Work has started to develop and deploy a common framework for strategic workforce planning and the strategies for acquiring, developing and promoting talent.

Effective Communication

- The Cabinet Office created the Department of Communication, CIG Communications, [and] we created and launched a communication cascade which we continue to use to disseminate key messages across CIG;
- We consistently achieved over 90 per cent awareness of the vision to be a world-class Civil Service;
- We developed and implemented a communication strategy which consistently promotes the government's policy priorities across internal and external audiences;
- We developed and launched brand standards to reflect the Cayman Islands Government identity;
- We effectively improved our crisis management communications which helped Government to communicate key messages during COVID and achieve the level of success that we did;
- We facilitated communications via an updated hub which helps us to embed the vision of a world-class Civil Service;
- We continuously communicate the results of the annual Civil Service Engagement Survey which provides the baseline for measuring employee motivation;

- We developed professional competencies of the communication profession to drive improvements in government communication delivery;
- We developed and rolled out the new gov.ky platform.

Governance

- We adopted, implemented and communicated the CIG governance model;
- We provided ongoing training to public officers on ethical conduct;
- We established an independent whistleblower hotline;
- Over 800 employees completed the online anti-fraud and whistleblowing training;
- We introduced an expanded orientation programme to statutory authority boards;
- We introduced mandatory orientation for all new hires within CIG;
- The Cabinet Office delivered training to 435 participants on policy development;
- The Strategic Reforms Implementation Unit (SRIU) trained 214 managers in programme and project management;
- We established the Audit and Risk Committee;
- We took an independent quality assurance of the Internal Audit Service;
- We launched the Standards in Public Life Act;
- We launched the Parliament Management Commission thus establishing this Parliament as an independent branch of Government;
- We established the Office of the Ombudsman;
- We implemented a range of anti-fraud policies including the Code of Business Ethics and Conduct Policy, the Record Retention Policy, the Whistle-Blower Policy, and the Hospitality, Entertainment and Gifts Policy;
- We implemented the Public Authorities Act;
- We designated and launched training on designing and implementing policies;
- We implemented the Whistleblower Protection Act.
- We expanded policy development and project management training for civil servants;
- The Minister of Finance implemented the Procurement Regulations;
- We undertook a quality assurance review of the internal audit function;
- We created a competency framework for the policy profession in 2021; and
- We developed and launched the Data Protection Act.

Much work, Mr. Speaker, much work. Our job is to implement the policies of our elected leaders, and we are blessed to receive from them clear and ambitious policies that tell us how we can make lives better by delivering their broad outcomes to:

1. Improve the quality of life for Caymanians;
2. Enhance competitiveness while meeting international standards;
3. Future proof to increase resiliency;
4. Modernise Government to improve public sector performance; and
5. Protect and promote Caymanian culture, heritage and identity.

Mr. Speaker, the Civil Service is energised around this mandate. The renewed civil service strategy will continue to focus on enhancing customer experience, leadership, talent development, communications and governance. Additionally, it will introduce a pillar on accountability to embed our past successes as business as usual.

Within the past budget cycle, the Portfolio of the Civil Service (PoCS) core HR team, supported by talented HR professionals across CIG, delivered many cross-cutting, innovative projects aimed at ensuring that the CIG has the necessary talent now, and in the future, to deliver the Government's policy priorities.

Mr. Speaker, with the facilitation of the PoCS Management Support Unit (MSU), the Civil Service has made significant strides in realising its vision to be a world-class organisation, which is nothing less than our citizens, our Government and our employees deserve.

In the upcoming fiscal period, the Civil Service will embark on the next leg of this journey with a renewed strategic plan. The Civil Service remains committed to the mission which is to support the elected Government by delivering caring, modern and customer-centred public services and programmes which deliver value for money. Our purpose continues to be focused on making the lives of those we serve better.

As part of the refresh of the strategic plan, we engaged stakeholders through a consultative review process and I listened to the feedback from our elected Government Officials, our civil service teams and many other participants. Based on this feedback, we bolstered initiatives under the existing goals and we added a focus on developing a culture of accountability within the civil service which reconfirms my commitment to creating a world-class civil service.

Civil services across the globe are managing many of the same challenges that we face in the Cayman Islands. These range from existential threats like climate change, to finding sustainable ways to support aging populations, manage growth and immigration; and tackle increasing cost of living, just to name a few. We feel the impacts of these challenges here in the Cayman Islands, and I applaud the Government for the

policy-focused initiatives and funding that not only recognises these global issues, but provides targeted and effective solutions for our people in all three Islands.

We have already demonstrated our ability to be world leaders when managing global challenges through our response to the COVID 19 pandemic—our lives literally depended on it. The leadership displayed by elected officials through successive governments and the work supported by a highly coordinated civil service was nothing less than world-class. This strategic and collaborative effort is one that I am incredibly humbled by and proud of. You should all be proud.

As part of our strategic plan refresh and the renewed emphasis on creating a culture of accountability, I have called upon our Chief Officers to provide strategic leadership and support for an internal review of our programmes and services in 2024, with a view of identifying opportunities to improve our efficiency and effectiveness. This review will help us to embed a culture of continuous improvement and ensure that we are well placed to support the elected Government, and by extension the people of the Cayman Islands, to provide services that deliver the best public value.

The review will also enhance our customer service efforts as we develop initiatives where consideration of the needs of the citizen is central to the design and delivery of services. The comprehensive review will be supported by a diverse team comprising both new and seasoned civil servants hailing from various Ministries and Portfolios. The inclusion of new civil servants in the review team is aimed at bringing in a novel perspective while also leveraging the strengths of our younger workforce, as well as those persons who have worked in the private sector or other civil services around the world.

Opportunities will be available to incorporate insights from both local and international private sector and civil service viewpoints. The review will include a strategic analysis of our human capital, Mr. Speaker. We recognise that as the population of the Cayman Islands increases, more is required for the civil service to meet the expanding needs of the country. With that being said, it is critical that we manage the growth of the civil service to ensure that we can respond effectively to population increases.

Mr. Speaker, I was reminded by the Father of the House a few sessions ago, that we simply cannot continue to grow the size of the Civil Service—it is not sustainable; the answer is not to promote widespread increases in the size of the civil service, but to strategically plan for, and manage any increases, while simultaneously reviewing and improving our needs to meet our country's needs.

We will also focus on cost-saving opportunities and mechanisms, and make recommendations to our elected leaders that meet government objectives while prioritising higher standards of service delivery. We recognise the importance of ensuring efficiency, cost effectiveness and innovation in the delivery of public

services, and we will be seeking to leverage technology, optimise procurement processes, eliminate duplication of services, improve strategic personnel management, and enhance policy advice through research and the effective use of business case thinking, tools, and methodologies.

Mr. Speaker, while I have spent much time elaborating on the refreshed strategic plan and the 2024 internal review, I wish to speak about our key initiatives rolled out by the Management Support Unit in 2022 and 2023 such as the digital smileys to front line departments to augment the existing manual feedback process, as well as their launch of communities of practice for deputy chief officers, heads of departments and the HR profession.

In the two years ahead, the Management Support Unit will launch year three of the 360-degree feedback and coaching process focusing on developing a culture of accountability in the Civil Service; launch a community of practice for the finance profession, and roll out events for frontline workers aimed at energising and reconnecting them to the CIG focus of serving our customers—and we have already begun by speaking to our frontline workers. The Deputy Premier and I attended such an event just a few weeks ago [and] I thank him for his participation. It's important that we have a joint approach to these initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the 2022 to 2023 budget marked two productive years for the Office of the Deputy Governor (ODG). As part of the strategic support provided by my Office to strengthen good governance initiatives, the ODG developed a number of governance and management circulars, providing senior civil servants and managers with guidance on best practice in the areas of public service mergers, contracts and legal advice; the delivery of e-services projects and management of third-party risk. In addition, policy advice and proposals were developed to guide me and the Cabinet on the remuneration of boards and committees, including a pilot implementation. To date, under this pilot, there have been a total of 14 public bodies which have had applications successfully reviewed and considered.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition talked about the anti-gang strategy, Mr. Speaker, and I want to speak a bit about it. As we end 2023, the ODG has significantly advanced the work to update the anti-gang strategy originally due to be launched in 2020 when COVID struck. During and following this crisis, the SRIU has been on a long-term reassignment to facilitate the border reopening strategy and drawing upon lessons from the pandemic to help the Ministry of Health assess various public health delivery models.

The original anti-gang strategy proposed a holistic 10-year strategy with the first phase, to be delivered over the first three years, focusing on coordinated policy initiatives across various Ministries. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, this ongoing work resulted in 12 of the 19 projects [being] significantly advanced, including:

- Projects to enhance early identification of at-risk students;
- Enhance and expand the safety skill programmes offered in schools;
- Enhance the community policing efforts to include intelligence gathering and resettlement support, to name a few.

As much time has passed since the strategy was first developed, efforts have been undertaken during 2023 to review the anti-gang strategy, Mr. Speaker, with the intention of ensuring that it remains fit for purpose within our current context.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson:

The review is an ongoing effort. It is being carried out by the team in the SRIU with the Office of the Deputy Governor in participation with other key stakeholders, so I want to assure the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that the Government takes this strategy very seriously. They have given me funding to advance the strategy and the work is ongoing so, Deputy Leader, you can tick it off as being well advanced.

The ODG has continued to provide significant levels of project management and business case development support to government entities managing key projects for initiatives of national importance such as support to the Minister of Health and Wellness in the development of a business case to enhance the National Public Health Services. The Minister of Health and Wellness is very keen on this project and it was a pleasure to work with her and her team. She mentioned this in her speech.

The work of the SRIU Professional Certification Programme continued to build civil service capabilities in relation to the development of robust business cases and the delivery of successful priority programmes and projects. Of significance, this Programme resulted in 109 civil servants achieving a total of 122 foundation-level qualifications in project management fundamentals, agile project management, change management and better business cases; 61 civil servants achieved a total of 64 advanced practitioner level qualifications in project management, agile project management, change management, and better business cases; and 75 civil servants attended the strategic master classes covering various disciplines.

Mr. Speaker, why is this important? Successive Auditor General Reports said that civil servants were not doing well in the area of developing business cases and our change management abilities were not where they needed to be. We are addressing that concern, and have taken it to another level where civil servants who are involved in the development of business cases are highly trained. It means that our projects have a much better chance of success if we get the business case right. It's almost like trying to build a

house without house plans— you're not going to get very far.

During the past two years, Mr. Speaker, the ODG supported the Cayman Islands Independent Monitoring Board (CIIMB) which expanded their services to include the monitoring of the Customs and Border Control detention facilities. Policies and procedures specific to the monitoring of detention facilities were developed, and all board members were trained in this area. The Independent Monitoring Board's work is very important, as they go into our places of detention and ensure that persons there are being treated fairly; listen to any concerns they have, and make sure that the facilities are fit for purpose. I want to thank the board for all the work that they do. It's a difficult job, but they do it very well.

Mr. Speaker, I take great pride in the work of the Child Safeguarding Board that I currently chair. The Board, supported by the Government, consists of Chief Officers and other senior leaders who have portfolios with child safeguarding responsibilities. The Board represents our cohesive efforts to prioritise the safety of those in our society who may be most vulnerable: our children; our future. Hence, our vision is to develop a world class civil service that helps to create communities where children are free from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices.

This is in line with international best practice. It is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and supports the civil service's mission to work with the elected Government to uphold the highest standards of governance and deliver essential services and programmes that serve the needs of the Cayman Islands' community. In the Cayman Islands, we believe that every child has a right to grow up in a safe environment, protected from abuse. We recognise, however, that child safeguarding concerns arise in our community as they do in every part of the world, therefore, child safeguarding is an absolute priority for the Government.

Mr. Speaker, child safeguarding calls upon every sector of society, not just the Government, to work together. Within the Government, Ministers have championed this important work by prioritising and funding it so, again, I thank all our Ministers who take this issue so seriously and provide the necessary funding to numerous Ministries so that we can tackle this problem [and] hopefully prevent much of the abuse that happens.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight some of our collaborative efforts to safeguard the children of our Islands. With this targeted approach, the Board is able to coordinate and bolster the range of child safeguarding strategies, policies and initiatives that spread across government Ministries, Departments, Agencies and Statutory Authorities. This is an excellent example of breaking down silos, as numerous Ministries across CIG, are all working together for the common purpose of safeguarding our children.

- The Ministry of Education is one of the leaders. They prioritise child safeguarding in their

policy and operational frameworks which include, but are not limited to:

- The national Special Education Needs Policy;
- The national Child Protection Policies;
- Volunteer policies; and
- The Free School Meals Programme for students in government schools which ensures that every child has access to a healthy meal while in school.

Mr. Speaker, you know, sometimes people complain about this; but this is safeguarding our children. Going to school hungry? You can't learn when you're hungry, you can't. You misbehave when you're hungry. These things that people think are not a big deal are a really big deal for our children. Those persons who think it's not a big deal may not have been hungry ever in their life.

- Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development to carry out legislative reform for the Adoption of Children Act.
- Ministry of Home Affairs, in collaboration with partner agencies, to strengthen the services for young persons in prison through a series of multi-agency strategic discussions and workshops.

Through this work, we are helping to ensure that any young person who ends up in the prison system has wraparound support from government agencies.

- The National Youth Commission, which monitors the implementation of a national Youth Policy and advocates for youth issues in legislation.
- The Health Services Authority, which initiated a project to provide parents with techniques relating to talking to kids about staying safe.
- The National Council of Voluntary Organisations, which provides families with positive parenting strategies in order to minimise the incidents of child abuse and neglect in the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, the list of partners and related initiatives is long; these are just a few to highlight the crosscutting and impactful nature of the work that has been delivered today with respect to child safeguarding.

In terms of enforcement and support, we have the Multi-Agency Support [sic] Hub (MASH) which operates as the primary child safeguarding focal point with strategic and operational responsibility for all child welfare matters in the Cayman Islands. It is a framework for interagency cooperation through the co-location of agency partners in the same workspace acting

as a catalyst for greater information sharing and collaboration. The partnership includes the RCIPS, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Health Services Authority, the Department of Education Services, and other government and non-government agencies.

While much has been done through the collaborative efforts of multiple government agencies and private entities to help prevent child abuse—to protect our children and to support them and their families, we recognise that there is still more to be done to raise awareness and to eliminate child abuse in the Cayman Islands.

To this end, Mr. Speaker, in 2024 the Board will be launching a Child Safeguarding Strategic Plan that reinforces our coordination of the strategic priorities set by the Honourable Premier and Government Ministers. The strategy will outline a way forward to enhance child safeguarding work in the Cayman Islands; provide a pathway to these improvements; and call upon every sector of society, in addition to Government, to work and invest together to prevent abuse against children.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the launch of the Child Safeguarding Strategy Plan, other key priorities for my office in 2024 and 2025 are:

- To develop government-wide guidance on project cost management to support CIG leaders seeking to position government projects to deliver best value for money;
- A project to establish the SRIU as a centre of excellence for project management and business case writing;
- Further development of the SRIU Professional Certification Programme to offer hands-on experimental workshops for civil servants to apply skills and knowledge gained during the certification courses to new and ongoing projects;
- A project to support the revision and drafting of an updated Public Health Act and a standalone Environmental Health Act—which I know is going to make the Minister of Health a happy, happy Minister, which is our job;
- Establish two new ODG units of strategic importance—and these are coming before our Caucus in January:
 - A new Enterprise Risk Management Unit to provide coordinated leadership advice and support services to promote more effective risk management within both core Government and, where appropriate, across the wider public service including SAGCs; and
 - A new National Security Vetting Unit to provide security checks and developed vetting clearances

together with continuous monitoring for roles within Core Government, Uniformed Services and SAGCs which may be involved in the handling of sensitive information.

Too often we hear of things being leaked out of the Government Administration Building and this is one of our efforts to reduce that and to hold people more accountable.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on another area of my Office and I want to get a bit serious about it because it is a major problem in our country and I know that the Government shares my concerns. The Minister with responsibility for Employment and Labour and WORC is well aware of it and is taking charge in the area, but [as] my Office deals with it, I want to highlight it.

It is naturalisation, Mr. Speaker. This is where someone who is free from an immigration time restriction can apply to become a British Overseas Territory citizen and get a Cayman Islands passport; being free from an immigration time restriction means you either have Cayman Status or Permanent Residency. You can get Permanent Residency through residence, marriage or through independent means.

Mr. Speaker, this year we received 930 applications for naturalisation.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: We have 470 by residence, 201 by registration, which normally means a child who was born here; and 259 by marriage— and it is marriage that I want to speak about.

Mr. Speaker, my office does a cursory marriage check before we make decisions on these applications, we simply call both the spouses at the same time and ask them a series of the same questions. If we have reason to believe that the marriage is not intact or has broken down, we then refer the matter to WORC for a complete investigation— and Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing in terms of marriages of convenience is getting worse.

We have a case that we looked at a couple of months ago, where we called a Caymanian man who could not tell us his wife's name.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Mr. Speaker, how did we get here? Why would you do this?

Unless we catch everyone, which is very unlikely, these persons whom you have married are going to have our passport; they are going to represent *us* at home and abroad. They have our Islands' reputation in their hands, so...

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Mr. Speaker, this is something that we need to look at; and let me just say this— and I'm sure I will get criticism for saying it but I must say it. No one voted for me.

[Desk thumping]

[Laughter]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Caymanians complain that people come here and take things from us. That's not the case with this. We're giving it away.

An Hon. Member: Amen.

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: We are selling it.

An Hon. Member: Yup.

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: We find cases where people say, *I felt sorry for this person so I married them*. Really!

Mr. Speaker, that can't be it. Do we understand what we're doing? Ask the RCIPS right now. Some of our most dangerous criminals are people who are married to Caymanians.

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: How did this happen? Who are we going to blame for this? We have to blame ourselves; we have to blame ourselves. The Cayman people need to step up and say, *"my birthright is precious; I am not going to sell it to anyone. I'm not going to give it to anyone. I'm going to safeguard my country's reputation"*— because, Mr. Speaker, the Government shouldn't have to legislate for this.

We shouldn't have to change laws for this. This is something that is completely in the power of our people. We as a community need to stop this. Stop marrying people whom you do not love; who you have no intention of being with. Stop feeling sorry for other people, and feel sorry for your people. Mr. Speaker, like I said, the Minister of Border Control shouldn't have to bring legislation to fix this because if he does, he is going to make it harder for those who are in genuine relationships, but what are we supposed to do?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Yes, and that's the plan too.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Yes, perhaps we should arrest some of the marriage officers, I agree.

Mr. Speaker, to be serious, I'm raising this issue because we are putting the Island's reputation at risk. Mr. Speaker, I naturalise these persons—in other words, I swear them in as citizens, it's one of my [duties], and I say to them, [that] the Cayman Islands is not the special place that it is simply because we have beautiful beaches and sunshine. It is our people who make us special. They have now become one of us, and we expect them to uphold our democratic values. We expect them to observe our laws. We expect them to uphold our people's high traditions, which is why we have to be so careful when we say “yes” or “I do”.

Mr. Speaker, I've said enough on this but I think it is something that we all need to be aware of, and I say to the public: This is within the total control of our Caymanian people.

If you are in a marriage of convenience, go over to the court and file for divorce before we get you, because the team at WORC has got a stack of files like this *[Indicating]*, which they are also investigating—I visited their office. Again, some of our most dangerous criminals have decided, “*the easy way for me to stay in Cayman is to get married*”, and if they have a child, [they are] very, very difficult to remove.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have said it, but it's very important for all of us in the Cayman Islands to stand together on this one and have a zero tolerance for this type of behaviour.

[Inaudible interjection]

Pay and rewards

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Mr. Speaker, I would now like to speak on the work carried out in 2022 and 2023 by the amazing team in the Portfolio of the Civil Service (POCS), in the area of pay and rewards. Over the past 24 months, the POCS undertook significant work to help address the rising cost of living; to facilitate pay progression; and to gradually reduce the extent of overlap of salary grades. The specific payments made in 2022 were:

Three honorariums totalling \$450, paid in June, July, and August, 2022 to offset higher electricity costs linked to sharp increases in fuel prices over the summer holidays. These were paid at a flat rate for employees on grade ‘E’ and below, thereby offering greatest relative benefit to persons on the lower salary grades.

A two per cent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), aimed at offsetting inflation and preserving relative purchasing power, applicable to all employees, was paid in September, 2022.

A one-point-within-grade increment, valued at 2.5 per cent, was paid in December 2022 to employees on salary grades ‘E’ and below who had not already achieved the highest-pay point on their respective salary grades; and for the very small percentage of employees who were already at the top of their individual salary grade, an honorarium of \$700 or six months’ value of the 2.5 per cent increment, whichever was greater, was paid on a one-off lump sum—again, we are doing what we can to take care of the team.

Mr. Speaker, in late 2023, the government supported the payment of \$1,500 to all eligible public servants. This payment was processed in December’s payroll, and with the Christmas season upon us, it is a welcome and timely payment for all our hard-working staff.

[Additionally,] in 2023, work was delivered on behalf of the Portfolio of Legal Affairs and the Office of the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP), to propose ways CIG may begin to tackle longstanding pay issues for the legal profession within CIG. This work is still in discussion with hopes that it may be implemented in the near future, as we want to ensure that we are doing our best for our CIG attorneys and lawyers. I know the AG is very [much] in support of doing something special for them so that we can retain the Caymanians that we have, and attract the best talent.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Okay.

Mr. Speaker, let me pause. The Premier has given me permission to announce some more good news to, hopefully, add Christmas cheer.

One-off payment to pensioners

We spoke about our pensioners and the valuable work that they have done for us over the years; persons who have ten years or more of pensionable service in the civil service. We agreed to move them from \$950 to \$1,200, and today the Government agreed to give them a one-off payment of \$250, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Again, it is most welcomed. It provides a bit of Christmas cheer, as I said, and I would again like to thank the Premier, and all the Members of the Government, for their support and for caring about the people of the Cayman Islands.

Employee Engagement Survey

Mr. Speaker, since 2017, the civil service has conducted the Employee Engagement Survey to measure staff engagement and to hear from our employees on various important topics.

In 2022, POCS facilitated the delivery of the sixth Annual Survey, which yielded responses from 87 per cent, or 3,707 civil servants. The engagement index, which is a measure of the average level of engagement across all civil service entities, increased by one per cent from 2021 rising to 73 per cent. Mr. Speaker, when 87 per cent of the civil service responds to a survey it is a very good thing, as it means that we have a very, very good idea of what civil servants are thinking, and how they are feeling.

A score that [I am] particularly keen to see every year is the score in response to the statement, *"I feel proud to be a civil servant."* Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that in 2022, 89 per cent of respondents said they felt proud to work in our civil service—a score that brings great joy to me. I am glad that so many employees share the same pride about working in the civil service as I do.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, what the number would be if people gave them a little praise, rather than constantly complaining about things that they probably have not even done. You know, it amazes me, that with all of the negativity about the civil service we still have Caymanians wanting to join the civil service and people are staying with us, and 89 per cent say they are proud. Mr. Speaker, you know what goes a long way for feeling proud? When the government looks after them and shows them that they are appreciated.

When you feel proud to work for an organisation, it will not fail. It will not fail. It means, *"I have bought in to the vision of the civil service"*, *"I have bought in that my job is to deliver for the elected government"*, it means, *"when I come to work, I'm going to give the government 110 per cent of my effort every day"*, *"I'm not going to call in sick unless I'm really, really sick"*, *"I'm going to come to work on time, and I'm going to work hard"*. Mr. Speaker, that's 89 per cent of our civil servants. It is something to be really proud of.

Mr. Speaker, the 2023 Employment Engagement Survey just closed at the end of November, however, preliminary data shows that in 2023, the civil service achieved similar results in terms of participation and engagement. These early indications of yet another survey reporting high levels of engagement, leave me feeling that the civil service continues to do many things right to keep our staff engaged and motivated to deliver the government's policy priorities. As I have done each year for the past six years, I will announce the results via a town hall meeting in January, 2024.

my-VISTA

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to innovation and efficiencies, in 2022 POCS began implementing the

CIG's new Human Resource Management System called my-VISTA. The first component of the project, the E-recruitment platform, www.careers.gov.ky went live in February 2022, modernising CIG recruitment by introducing an online application process. The new platform created a seamless user experience by allowing the creation of a profile to store relevant information about the applicant and to provide 24-hour access to view vacancies, and track application progress, among other benefits. For recruitment managers, the platform reduces manual processing and allows the CIG's HR community to deliver a refined recruitment process to all job seekers.

Mr. Speaker, the new platform forms part of our ongoing efforts to improve the customer experience for job applicants, recruitment officers, and hiring managers. As a true testament to the benefit and convenience of www.careers.gov.ky, 28,186 persons have registered to the portal to date, and hundreds of recruitment managers have successfully been facilitated across the civil service— That means that about 28,000 people said they want to come and work with us.

In 2024, the new system will go live with payroll activities, and in doing so will introduce greater flexibilities and efficiencies in government operations. One reform which coincides with system changes, is reducing the number of bespoke payroll runs within the civil service. For an ever-decreasing number of persons paid on a bi-weekly basis, government currently operates three to four separate payroll runs each month. HR teams have been supporting transformation with their business areas and the need for so many payrolls will all but be eradicated early in 2024.

As the country's single largest employer Mr. Speaker, CIG is shifting the way it supports talent management. During 2024 and 2025 we will adopt bespoke job families, streamline role descriptions, and further ease any barriers to the movement of talent within the civil service by providing professional road maps. Armed with this information, civil servants will be in the driver's seat and will be able to better navigate their future careers, whether they seek upward promotion or lateral growth in the new areas of civil service delivery.

Succession Planning

Succession planning is also getting an overhaul in 2024, and I know Members of this House would be happy to hear that, as it is one of the areas people have been talking about for quite some time. Some of the greatest inhibitors to succession planning are being tackled in CIG's new policy; also, while the policy retains healthy competition for those who are successful in being added to a succession pool, they will have a distinct advantage both before and after a role is declared vacant and is ready to be filled.

Second Chances Programme

Mr. Speaker, the Civil Service offers a Second Chances Programme for persons who have been rehabilitated after serving a custodial sentence.

To date, a total of 14 Caymanians have benefited from this programme, including 11 who are now fulltime employees. This is part of the Civil Service trying to be part of the solution. These are 14 persons who were unable to get a job, unable to become productive members of our community. Some of those persons had been out of work for years— years, Mr. Speaker, years. They are now working with us and doing a great job. They come to work every day and simply do their job.

It means, Mr. Speaker, that we need more companies in Cayman to step up and do this. Otherwise, the concerns about crime raised in this House, by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and by other members of the community do not lessen. If when you come out of prison, you can't get a job, what are you going to do? You'll become a recidivist, Mr. Speaker.

Fourteen persons. I hope to be able to do it again this year, because they are persons who want a chance— who deserve a chance; and we are going to try to do it for as many of our people as possible, without it posing a risk to our services.

Emerging Talent Programme

Another programme that I am very, very proud of, is our Emerging Talent Programme, which aims to assist Caymanians who have recently graduated and need experience.

Mr. Speaker, we have this issue where our young people get out of university, they have these amazing degrees and they are very talented, but they have no experience. They apply to the job in the civil service and we say, *"We love you, you're absolutely fantastic, but we need somebody with some experience."*

What the programme does, Mr. Speaker, is that the government has given POCS funding— and I can use the Department of Agriculture as an example, where we had a lady who graduated as a vet and applied for a job there. Of course, they needed experience, so, we were able to fund this lady's employment for two or three years until she got the experience. Now she will take over from the vet who is there, whose contract will be up shortly. That is the kind of innovation that we need for our people.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: I am pleased to say that over the last two years, I believe it is, we have had eight Caymanians come through that programme who are all doing really well.

Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that we have had almost 100 per cent success with both of these programmes; there's been one person in our Second

Chances Programme who didn't work out— one. Everyone else has worked and done what they said they were going to do. In other words, it is the old adage, Mr. Speaker, our people just need an opportunity. We give them an opportunity, and they will shine.

Office of Education Standards (OES)

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight the great work completed in 2022-2023 by the Office of Education Standards (OES). The Premier mentioned some of it in her speech, I believe, but I want to highlight it just to give a bit of background.

The OES was placed under my Office so that there would be complete separation from the Ministry of Education in order for the OES to be able to work independently and I think we will all agree, that it has worked very well. The two agencies have a great relationship, but as one is the auditor and the other the auditee, we wanted to ensure that there was separation.

Mr. Speaker, in early 2023 the OES conducted eight inspections of early years' centres and schools. More recently, in October and November, the OES completed 15 full inspections, and two follow-through inspections at primary and secondary schools across the Islands. The results of the 25 inspections showed improvements in the overall judgments at 20 per cent of inspected schools, including two previous "Weak" schools moving to "Satisfactory" judgments— there were two schools in the private sector that were "Weak", which have now moved and joined us in the civil service as "Satisfactory". Three Government schools retained their judgments of "Good", although the inspectors noted improvements in various aspects of their overall educational provisions.

This is good, Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the Premier for all the work she has been doing to enhance our education.

[Desk thumping]

First Steps to Success

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: A significant achievement of the OES in 2023, was the development of a bespoke Cayman Islands early childhood inspection framework aptly named *"First Steps to Success: Nurturing Environments and Thriving Children"* [which] **"delineates seven performance standards and numerous quality indicators that mirror the values, skills, dispositions, knowledge, and practices essential for fostering high-quality early childhood care and education."**

The framework provides **"exemplars of sector-leading standards to promote high-quality experiences and outcomes for children. The framework is also designed to assist owners, leaders, and staff of early childhood facilities in assessing their practices and provisions to ensure quality and**

facilitate continuous improvement” to improve outcomes for children [aged] zero to five years in the Cayman Islands.

The significant milestone was achieved through cross-sectoral support involving the Ministry of Education, the Department of Education Services, the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association and a core working group. This new inspection framework will be utilised for early years’ inspections beginning in January, 2024.

In 2024-2025, the OES plans to deploy a risk-based approach to inspections. A risk-based approach to school inspection is a method of evaluating and assessing educational institutions by prioritising resources and attention on those schools deemed to have a higher level of risk in terms of educational quality, compliance and regulations, and overall performance. Overall, a risk-based school inspection model aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of education by focusing on schools that need the most support and intervention. It balances accountability with support, leading to better outcomes for students, and the education system as a whole. This model will also realise significant cost-savings for the department, as schools securing “good” or “excellent” [judgements] will be moved off the two-year inspection cycle, and would instead benefit from an annual desk review, to ensure standards are maintained.

In 2024, the OES also intends to strengthen and expand the Cayman Islands’ Associate Inspector Programme by introducing a tiered approach to entering and advancing through the training Programme. In the first instance, through the knowledge-built pathways, interested persons will be able to develop their understanding of inspections and apply their learning within their own school. Through the second tier, namely, the Certified Cayman Associate Inspector pathway, participants will be able to express interest in assuming responsibility as a full team inspector, once they become qualified.

Internal Audit Service (IAS)

Mr. Speaker, I’m almost finished, but let me talk a bit about the successes of our Internal Audit Service (IAS). The IAS developed a new methodology and a way of working to align more closely with the UK Government’s internal audit agency and best practices. In addition, the Internal Audit team delivered a comprehensive assurance plan and year-end report opinion providing assurance on payroll and health care costs, as well as tourism and border revenues.

The IAS also undertook restructuring activities which resulted in the re-organisation of the IAS team to improve its efficiencies, and to place greater emphasis on the delivery of quality audits. The team also strongly supported Caymanians, (who now make up 75 per cent of the internal audit team) in their pursuit of professional internal audit qualifications, by sponsoring applicable

courses of study and allowing time off for preparation and sitting exams— Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that this support strategy has resulted in 100 per cent exam success rate to date, which is growing the pool of qualified Caymanians in the internal audit profession.

In 2024 and 2025, the Internal Audit team will continue to work to enhance the overall control environment within the CIG by continuing to drive the IAS’ work plan towards areas of greater risk, and focusing more on strategic reviews thereon. The IAS will enhance its use of data analysts to direct its work and aid testing, which will facilitate broader coverage of audit testing, and allow for increased assurance.

Additionally, IAS aims to provide regular insight reports to me and my leadership team, including proactive action, tracking details, and sharing of good practice, all with the aim of breaking down silos.

National Archives

Mr. Speaker, we know the importance of the National Archives— which falls under my Office, and the work that they do to preserve Cayman’s historical and vital records.

In 2022 and 2023, the National Archives continued to utilise digital technologies to promote and access historical collections; to educate, and promote greater awareness of Cayman’s history, heritage and culture within the community. As a public sector regulatory agency for records and information management, they continued to support and advise government agencies on the efficient management of their information assets to both ensure compliance with the National Archive and Public Records Act and facilitate good governance, transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, in 2022 and 2023, the Archives saw steadily increased demand for archival referral services, with just over a thousand local and overseas research interactions. They embarked on the dedicated and strengthened promotion of its historical collections via eighty social media posts and eight interactive educational presentations to various schools and community groups. The Archives [also] created and led a seven-session participative workshop to assist eight public agencies with the development of operational disposal schedules.

Over the next two years, to support Strategic Broad Outcome 4 – To modernise government to improve public sector performance, the Archives plans to strengthen record and information management practices across the civil service through the proactive issuance of streamlined guidance, documents, and more interactive measures. Under Strategic Broad Outcome 5 – Protect and promote Caymanian culture, heritage, and identity, the Archive will continue to provide, promote, and make its historical collections more accessible through innovative outreach programmes facilitated

via social media streams and the development of outreach packets for teachers.

Commissions Secretariat

Mr. Speaker, the work of the Commissions Secretariat continues to support the Cayman Islands' constitutional commissions by providing strategic, operational and administrative public relations and education, recruitment, research, policy, and investigative support. We also have the judicial and legal service commissions to ensure effective recruitment to key positions such as Chief Justice, two judges of the Court of Appeal, and two judges of the Grand Court.

To assist with our country's response to the Financial Action Task Force, the investigative team provided evidence on behalf of the Anti-Corruption Commission to demonstrate the jurisdiction's investigation and prosecution of money laundering, all of which contribute to the Cayman Islands being removed from the FATF's 'grey list'.

With respect to educating the public in terms of the Constitution, educational materials were developed and shared with learning institutions to increase the younger generation's awareness and knowledge about the Cayman Islands Constitution.

In 2024, the commissions will focus on advancing Broad Outcome 2 – Enhancing competitiveness while meeting international standards by:

- Filling all of their vacancies;
- Focusing on providing professional and uninterrupted support to six commissions, so they can effectively deliver on their respective mandates;
- Developing and rolling out a key public relations education initiative to support the mandate of the commissions, which would include:
 - Revising and reintroducing Bill of Rights training on behalf of the Human Rights Commission; and
 - Introducing anti-corruption training to key departments as a proactive measure to prevent incidents of corrupt practices.

Civil Service College

Mr. Speaker, let me speak a bit about our Civil Service College because they do outstanding work for us. We want to give every civil servant, an opportunity to advance in the Civil Service by improving their education, and we do much of this work through our Civil Service College.

In the area of formal education to support effectiveness and career progression, during the 2022-2023 budget cycle, the Civil Service College revamped and upgraded the informal communication skills offered, to an internationally accredited programme

namely, the Foundational Business Communication. Effective business communication continues to be one of the critical areas of success in the workforce; by focusing on this area the Civil Service is assisting civil servants to improve their effectiveness and efficiency in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, the Civil Service College also drafted the critically important scholarship framework to implement a structured approach to scholarship offerings for Caymanians who remain in fulltime employment while pursuing further qualifications as part of succession planning or other career pathways within the Civil Service.

In the area of building core competencies to equip the Civil Service for success and upskill our civil servants, the Civil Service College continued to embed a culture of lifelong learning through access to on-demand training via:

- LinkedIn's learning platform and a comprehensive programme to encourage its use;
- Initiatives including monthly learning topics on The Hub;
- Quarterly 'learning challenge' competitions; and
- Our first-ever 'learning at work' week.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of these efforts—and I want to highlight this—*over 14,000 courses were completed by civil servants on LinkedIn Learning over the two-year period.*

It means that our civil servants were able to take courses via LinkedIn [while] sitting at their desks; they didn't have to leave to go into a classroom, which has been a game changer for many in the Civil Service because some of them have child-minding responsibilities, and so cannot afford to work in the evenings or to be away from their desks. Now they can do so without having to leave their workplace or home, so we are doing everything we can, to upskill our civil servants.

Leadership Development

During the 2022-2023 budget cycle, over 300 civil servants achieved internationally recognised accreditation in leadership and management, which represents a significant increase from 185 in the previous budget cycle. One of the drivers of the success of our leadership and management initiatives has been the Associate Facilitator Programme, through which committed, qualified, and certified civil servants support their fellow civil servants' development through programme facilitation.

As the Civil Service turns its attention to the two years ahead they plan to continue looking at ways to meet increased demand for leadership and management upskilling, as well as programme optimisation. In addition to the traditional Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) offerings, the Civil Service College will

be piloting a comprehensive Coaching for Leaders Programme targeted at building our leadership team's ability to support and guide their teams.

Also, during the next budget cycle, the Civil Service College will implement and update the Civil Service College Sponsorship Programme to support Caymanian civil servants who have the potential to contribute at higher levels in the organisation, but who are currently limited because they lack the necessary qualifications. Learning pathways will be created with our adult part-time learners in mind, and would allow access to university qualifications from certificate level to the Master's level. This programme will build capabilities; support career development, and enhance our ability to make a positive impact in our community.

Lastly, but certainly not least, the Civil Service College will continue to embed access to the vehicle for core competency training—namely, LinkedIn Learning—while investing in a learning management system solution for bespoke Civil Service training that is critical for the Civil Service to minimise organisational risk and achieve our ambitious goals.

Elections Office

Mr. Speaker, as you and the Members of this honourable House are aware, 2025 is an election year. As such, the Elections Office will begin vital preparations in 2024, namely, carrying out voter registration drives and the review and update of the voters' list. During the first quarter of 2024, the Office aims to bring amendments to the Election Act; and then, in the first quarter of 2025, it will undertake the voter registration process in preparation for delivery of fair and transparent general elections in April 2025.

Wellness Committee

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight the work undertaken by POCS and our Wellness Committee to support our greatest asset in the Civil Service; our people. Taking care of our people continues to deliver many benefits to the organisation including improved health and well-being, greater productivity, higher performance, increased job satisfaction and organisational resilience.

In 2022, the Wellness Committee played a crucial role in promoting holistic well-being for civil servants and their families; their comprehensive approach covered physical, nutritional and financial aspects of well-being. Various events were organised for civil servants including forty virtual wellness sessions, weekly government administration Walk Run Club, Yin yoga classes, Earth Day activities, and senior health and retirement workshops. Key highlights of the Wellness Committee's work included:

- Heart health sessions;
- Psychological/mental health workshops;
- Financial wellness programmes; and

- The first-ever staff health fair.

Overall, the Wellness Committee's efforts have positively impacted the lives of civil servants by fostering a culture of well-being and appreciation in the workplace, thereby aiding our employees' mental and physical health so that they can give their best every day. I want to sincerely thank all the members of our Wellness Committee for their outstanding work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Premier for her leadership and partnership with the Civil Service, and I extend my thanks to Honourable Ministers who work closely with their Chief Officers to deliver critical services and initiatives to meet the current and future needs of the Cayman Islands.

Sincere thanks to all of my Chief Officers for their support and advice, especially Chief Officer Gloria McField-Nixon who works very closely with me—we speak every day. She works very hard to make all of the people in our Civil Service lives better, and I thank her and her incredible team.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I stand committed, with all of the Civil Service, to support the work of the elected Government as we continue to improve our organisation to make the lives of those we serve better. I want to thank the team in my office, Ms Rodrigues, Jodie; my PA, Tenisha; and the rest of my amazing team, who make my life better, for the work that they do.

I want to thank our Attorney General (AG). We all owe him a debt of great thanks for his—

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: — sage advice. I can tell anyone; if you talk to the AG and he gives you advice, just take it. He has saved us all on many occasions. The work that he and the Deputy Premier did to get us off of the 'grey list' is an outstanding achievement so, thank you, AG, for all that you do.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to close with my favourite quote about public service: **“My creed is that public service must be more than doing a job efficiently and honestly. It must be a complete dedication to the people and to the nation with full recognition that every human being is entitled to courtesy and consideration, that constructive criticism is not only to be expected but sought, that smears are not only to be expected but fought, that honour is to be earned, not bought.”**

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: It's that time of the year Mr. Speaker, so, I want to wish all of you Merry Christmas.

To everyone in the Civil Service, I'll send a special message to all of you; but I do want to wish all of my civil servants, Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas

and we are going to achieve some really great things in the New Year.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Deputy Governor.

We will now take the evening break. We will resume at 7:15.

Proceedings suspended at 6:41 p.m.

Proceedings resumed at 7:31 p.m.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Last lap time now, speak now or forever hold your peace. Would any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]*

The Honourable Deputy Premier.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce and Investment, Innovation & Social Development, Elected Member for West Bay South: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to provide a contribution to this budget debate. I am under a stern instruction from the Honourable Premier to keep it to no more than an hour.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: I said no more than an hour.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Madam Premier wants the Second Reading wrapped up as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker.

To keep myself on track, I want to cover three main areas in this contribution:

1. What our country's overarching challenge is at present— from my perspective;
2. What is on the horizon from the Ministry of Financial Services and Commerce's perspective that can help; and
3. What's on the horizon from the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development's perspective that can help.

The country's overarching challenge

To illustrate, Mr. Speaker, I will use two recent experiences that will lead into what I believe is our overarching challenge.

Last month, I spoke at the event of an asset management service provider that was celebrating a rebranding and expansion of services in Cayman. This particular service provider is largely Caymanian owned, managed and operated with projections to expand its presence in Cayman over the next twelve months; but

it also has branches elsewhere in the world, and some of that night's attendees had never been to Cayman until then.

As they mingled and socialised before my keynote, those visitors spoke about Cayman in such glowing terms of the business opportunities that they see, the prospects, the infrastructure, the regulatory framework... but because I wear two hats, I have a unique perspective, in that I hear and see all of those potential economic opportunities on one hand, from the perspective of financial services and commerce— but on the other hand, I also see deep-rooted challenges, particularly in the area of social development, so, I always view those conversations with sort of mixed feelings, Mr. Speaker.

As I engaged in the keynote, I told the attendees that I agreed with their excitement about Cayman's prospects, but on the other hand I wanted them to keep in mind our people's socioeconomic struggles on the other end, and to do what they can, in their roles, to uplift our people so that it's not totally a matter just for the Government, but little things that they can do in the community, also, to help us prosper— and I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that as I talked to people afterwards, I could see that those concerns are not specific to these Islands.

Last month, in the second recent experience I had, I spoke at the Cayman Captive Forum, which is one of the largest captive insurance conferences in the world and is held right here in Cayman. Approximately 1,500 attendees, mostly from overseas— to the Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman's point— going out, and spending money in the real local economy. They don't just sit at the Ritz, they go out for dinner, they go out on tours, they go to the Stingray City spending money in the real economy.

In my keynote address for the Cayman Captive Forum, I said to them [how] one of the interesting aspects of my role is that when you travel, you get to meet leaders in the region and elsewhere around the world; and it is beneficial not just because in certain cases, there is a certain celebrity star power that you get from being around other people. It is listening to the challenges that those leaders are talking about facing in their countries— and broadly speaking, it is the same: income inequality, cost of living, environmental concerns, spikes in crime, access to housing. Hence, Cayman is not alone in wrestling with these issues. It's a global challenge.

Former US President Obama probably captured it best when he said, "**The basic bargain at the heart of our economy has frayed.**" The former President noted that a combination of growing income inequality and a lack of upward mobility "**...is the defining challenge of our time.**" In his case, the former President asserted that the US government should take steps to reverse the *decades*-long trend that has widened the gap between the wealthy and everyone else. In other words, I told the Cayman Captive Forum that

the grassroots in our respective communities don't feel part of the success and [that], similar to Mr. Obama's analysis about the US, this did not come about in Cayman in just the last couple of years.

One might think from listening to the Leader of the Opposition and his Deputy's contributions, that some of these problems are not longstanding issues that require reform that have not really had serious attention. Someone could look at the litany of things that the Deputy Opposition Leader listed earlier and say, 'Well, the majority of that was on your team's watch too'; but perhaps, as the Opposition has indicated on several occasions, everything was going to be covered. That but for COVID, they had it all under control and it would all have been solved. Maybe, maybe not. Lord only knows, but I think our people are done with the blame game. I think our people are done. I think they're unmoved by the back and forth.

Mr. Speaker, since you are now in that role and you are limited, have not been eliminated but limited to when you invoke Shakespeare, one of us should help take up the mantle— I will try tonight. To quote Shakespeare, "*There is nothing so confining as the prisons of our own perceptions.*" [sic] Say it again, there is nothing so confining as the prisons of our own perceptions and what I mean by that is: *Stop dwelling on the past, stop the blame game* and, as the Deputy Governor said earlier, start a spirit of collaboration; because I think that's what our people want to see in here.

What is concerning them is [that] they see the private jets flying in; they know people are going on expensive vacations; they see high salaries and large homes in gated communities and— real or perceived— feel left out. I told the Cayman Captive Forum that all of us, globally, need to try to tackle this because:

1. It's the right thing to do; and
2. More pragmatically—for those of a business mind—because the more frustrated people get, the more they'll begin to advocate for policies that may ultimately derail the economic opportunities that could assist with improving their lives in the long run.

What one of my sociology professors used to say twenty-something years ago, when he was thinking of the US economy in the 70s going into the 80s, '*That's how some folks inadvertently end up voting against their long-term interest*'. The central challenge is a more inclusive economy because, even if we achieve sustainable growth, as the Leader of the Opposition put it, if our people aren't participating in such growth, it may be sustainable, but it may not advance our people. Therefore, we need to include our people at every step of the way.

Financial Services and Commerce

What's on the horizon from Financial Services and Commerce perspective that can help?

First of all, thanks to my partner in crime fighting, the Honourable Attorney General and all relevant public and private sector entities for Cayman being removed from the 'grey list'. In recent weeks, Mr. Speaker, everywhere I go— whether it's formal conferences, gala dinners, Christmas functions of financial services firms, social gatherings with constituents— the positive effect of the de-listing is tremendous. There are new transactions coming in from longstanding existing clients that were waiting for this moment.

There are new instructions coming in from brand new clients who are now turning to Cayman as their financial services' centre of choice. There are growing areas of business that at one time or another had eluded us, which are now really taking shape— insurance and reinsurance, family office arrangements, tech-related business, intellectual property; and that's on top of all of our strong traditional services such as investment funds, fiduciary services, structured finance, aviation and shipping registration.

That's why I'm excited to outline some of our plans, a flavour of what we plan to do in 2024 and 2025:

- In financial services, we will continue to sharpen existing products and introduce new products;
- Enhancements to the Companies Act to have clarifying provisions to the statutory scheme to wind up companies, [and] enhance the provisions to have efficient mergers, consolidations and conversions;
- A revamped Merchant Shipping Act to modernise our ship registration and ship international obligations framework.

Madam Clerk, I think that Bill is already down here so this is not pie in the sky, it has already been gazetted. It is here.

- Virtual Asset (Service Providers) amendments;
- Disapply the rule on perpetuities for our existing and future Cayman trusts, which the the Society of Trusts and Estates Practitioners (STEP) are excited about;
- We'll have more legislation to enhance what we can do, and even modern treaties to really get re-insurance business going in the Cayman Islands;
- Enhancements to our Exempted Limited Partnership Bill to make it even more competitive than it is now. This is the main tool used for private equity funds, so we owe it to them— after the registration of private funds— to enhance that tool and make it even more attractive; and
- Develop a sustainable Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) finance framework to enhance this sector for private and investment funds.

In addition, there will be legislative amendments to regulatory laws to enhance revenue of all regulatory laws—and this will include the banks.

Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks, many of our people have been agitated by the transactional fees that have been popping up from the retail banks. Some of them have done so and have advanced, when asked, that, *'Wait a minute, this is really just being broken out now whereas it used to be a lump sum, so you're not really paying anymore, it's just that you didn't see it all'*; but in this climate of high interest rates, I think it's not going down so well.

Either way, even if they are right and there is no effect, when I asked the Ministry and the Monetary Authority about it, they said, *'Well, the Monetary Authority wasn't set up to regulate for this purpose. They are set up to regulate for international standards and prudential regulations, but not this sort of consumer protection.'* However, we can't just not acknowledge that there is a gap. We have to get to grips with it because, even if it's proven that the banks are right this time, what if they're not right next time and the gap is there again?

Hence, I have asked the Monetary Authority and the Ministry to get on top of this with a working group [and] come back with some proposals for how we're going to regulate and fix this gap for the consumer. Even if that's not enough, Mr. Speaker, we'll also be moving legislation and updates to regulations to enhance our regulatory compliance and tax information frameworks to be proactive for the FATF fifth round, upcoming OECD assessments and the European Union (EU) Code of Conduct evaluations.

Speaking of the EU, Mr. Speaker, a good friend of mine who represents a key stakeholder in financial services, laughed out loud when we were on the phone this morning at the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition that our efforts in Europe were insufficient. Now, there are a couple of ways I could handle this, Mr. Speaker. I could invoke Shakespeare again and say, **"I'm disgraced, impeached and baffled here, pierced to the soul with slander's venom'd spear."** No, I won't go down that road. It could lead me down the road that my friend, the Member for George Town West was headed, and you helped stop him.

I could pounce and go to town on the gratuitous remark about stopping the overseas offices' plan to tie them up with audits and inquiries. Suffice it to say, all that did, with the ultimate and true aim, was to end up with new rules to bolster the Civil Service in an area that was grey, where there was an unwritten practice and now there's a solid policy—thank you, Deputy Governor—because all of that is in the past, Mr. Speaker. Re-raising it and hashing it and throwing out cheap shots only creates division and tension over collaboration, so instead of Shakespeare, I will invoke a more modern approach, and invoke hip-hop artist Jay Z and just, *'brush my shoulder off'* as the record speaks for itself.

Mr. Speaker, while we are on overseas offices, Cabinet recently signed off on the launch of the Cayman Islands Government Asia Office in Singapore and we will also be planting a Financial Services Officer in the Cayman Islands' London Office to engage both London and Brussels, which is just a two-hour train ride away from London.

We also have to, and must, enhance an exciting area of our local intellectual property registration. It came as a bit of a surprise to me, Mr. Speaker, as part of an exploratory trip to Singapore, where I attended the International Trademark Association (INTA) Conference—which is the world's largest conference on intellectual property—to see with my own eyes what Cayman practitioners have been saying: This is a huge growth area where Cayman is already leading, and on top of that lead, we still have exciting developments to modernise the IP regime. This will include amendments to Design Rights Registration legislation, the Copyright Order and the Trade Marks legislation. This will strengthen IP protections for business, both local and international.

Turning to Commerce, (that covers many financial services), I want to acknowledge my new Parliamentary Secretary for Commerce, the Member for West Bay North, Mr. Bernie Bush. I commend the Member, as it cannot be easy, in the middle of a cycle, to relinquish and sacrifice a ministerial post. I think we should all applaud that effort because not many people would have done it.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: I want to specifically pause to let him know—he's not here, but you tell him—[that in this area] we are going to keep him busy because I'll need assistance in terms of streamlining the licensing framework for local businesses.

The commerce framework will involve synchronising the legislative and policy framework; organisational re-structuring to cultivate a business-enabling environment at the grassroots level; facilitate sustainable commerce, and enhance the Department of Commerce and Investment's (DCI) efficiency and effectiveness. This will include amendments to the Trade and Business Licensing legislation, the Local Companies (Control) legislation, the Liquor Licensing [legislation], and Music and Dancing legislation. Collectively, this will boost and, more importantly, make local commerce much more efficient.

Our Small Business Incentive Programme will continue, as I can confirm [that], as noted earlier by the Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman, the Cabinet has extended the Small Business Incentive Programme and that should be published shortly.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: However, I'm happy to work with the Member. You know the programme, because it's been around since 2017; having seen it, if you think more work needs to be done with the Sister Islands, I am happy to take your call, sir, or meet with you, as well as the Honourable Premier, to see how else it could be enhanced. You always have my ear.

[Laughter]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Even if substantially most of what is in train comes to fruition, it will still have to be balanced with strategies to ensure that Caymanians are feeling it, either in conducting their affairs or getting jobs; which is why part of the Minister for Border Control and Labour's revenue package includes balancing new work permit regimes to help get in the appropriate foreign talent that we need, while ensuring that a balance is struck so that Caymanians are uplifted—and I look forward to working with the Minister in that regard.

Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development

What's on the horizon for the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development that can help? Mr. Speaker, it has taken a comprehensive approach so far to re-imagine the space to develop, support, and uplift the most vulnerable with new and revamped services by:

1. Advancing digital innovation capacities in the country; and
2. Facilitating investment opportunities to support social development and facilities in the community;

We plan to commence the Financial Assistance Act, 2022, [so] in October and part of November we completed a series of Town Hall [meetings] to explain the new system. We gathered feedback which we are going to incorporate and begin to roll out the reforms.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition mentioned internships, but I want to mention the slight difference with apprenticeships because it has the additional training aspect that he was talking about. We have got a bank of partners in the private sector, NGOs, and public service that are willing to help so that those who are able have a chance to get a job.

Not in the traditional sense, because the salary that they're getting is already the benefit that they get as financial assistance; but in exchange to be able to participate in those businesses with the sincere hope that those businesses will take the person on to full-time employment, thereby reducing the amount that is going to those who are able, so that over time we can

increase the amount that's going to those who are unable to earn anymore and on long-term financial assistance.

There will be amendments to the Children Act. This is long overdue. It's a massive piece of legislation originally enacted in 1995 which has had minimal revisions since about 2012. We will have to emphasise the involvement of the child, enhancing the child's voice as aligned under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which the Cayman Islands is a signatory. We will be increasing the advocacy of children through the involvement and hopefully set out the framework for the establishment of a Children's Commissioner, which is coming out of the work of the Safeguarding Board which the Deputy Governor alluded to.

We are also going to repeal and replace the Adoption of Children Act. It is out of date. It takes too long. Anyone who has been involved with an adoption knows that the process is just too arduous, too tedious and needs to be streamlined. The legislation was initially enacted in 1967 and there has never really been a serious overhaul since. Our intention is to also become a signatory of the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, through this legislative reform. The best interests of the child are, and should be, at the forefront of this process, and we need to make that felt by those trying to [pursue] adoptions.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the Older Persons Act, 2017— a fantastic achievement. Very good step, but, as he alluded to, it's an unfinished project. It needs to be strengthened. It needs to have teeth in terms of identifying safeguarding issues, with enforcement to do something about it via secondary regulatory legislation.

While that is happening, we will also re-evaluate the programmes and services delivered by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). We plan to do a scoping exercise to see what's working, what's not, and what can be innovated.

Same goes for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Great idea; 1.0, good step— but I think it's about time for 2.0. Look at what is not working and strengthen it. Good idea in principle, [it] breaks down the silos but it has deficiencies, and where those deficiencies manifest themselves are in the stats that show the abuse, domestic abuse, that is rising in this country that we have to curb.

We will be undergoing the design and build plan for a new Sunrise Adult Training Centre. I think the Minister of Planning has a swap of land in mind that will keep it in Town— is that correct? Yes; and we will hopefully be able to, at least, get that in the design and build phase in the next budget cycle because it has been talked about for too long, and we need to be able to show that segment of the population that we are serious in this matter.

Speaking of facilities, the Minister of Sports and Member for East End will chase me down after the

speech and won't give me the plate of turtle he promised me for Christmas if I don't mention that we will also be planning the design of a new older persons' care home in East End.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Now, Opposition, you won't have to guess which capital budget line item it is, because if you have any questions the Member for East End will be answering them before me. He knows exactly which line it is, and he's got his lines up to protect it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Thank you; thank you, Member.

I think it was a central theme, in most of the contributions I heard, that we also have to ensure that eGov and Computer Services Department (CSD) have increased staff for all of the digital projects that you've heard everyone around the Chamber wants. It sounds easy; it sounds like [a] good tagline, *we'll digitise this, we'll innovate that*, [but] it doesn't happen without the resources in CSD and eGov. They have not had— and still may not have after this cycle, but we hope to add— more resources to get it done so this isn't just about the budget for the Deputy Premier. It is to help all the other Ministries with all the projects that they wish to innovate.

We will also be launching our pilot programme to roll out the national electronic Identification (eID) [Card], as a priority, for young persons and, particularly, older persons, who were our strongest advocates for it when the Bills were successfully published and then passed; some of whom never had an ID and struggle through the banking system and government services. Some of them can't wait to get their hands on it because it cuts through some of the banks' know your customer (KYC) processes, and I hold the view that when people see that ease, it'll have organic take up.

Cayman Finance had a digital tech forum a couple of weeks ago [featuring] an exciting overseas guest speaker who, coincidentally, helped New York with their eID, and she planted a thought in my mind, Mr. Speaker, when she said, *"Look, I understand Ministries and governments will try to do everything at once; maybe, knowing that they've been working on a project and this is their opportunity, if they have an elected official who is going to help them champion it— and they've been waiting for years for it— to try to do all of it at once"*; but she made the case that sometimes it is just not practical, and used the word "experimentation".

"Sometimes, just think of experimentation. Get it to those who have been asking for it, who've been begging for it, and let the community see how it made their lives easier. That way, you reduce the workload of

the relevant agencies that are trying to produce it [from] a target that might not be achievable, to a more reasonable target to get it into people's hands, so that you build momentum for others to take it up"— and I think that's the strategy that we are going to follow; to do it in phases, starting with the younger and older persons.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition mentioned prisoners coming out who have done their time; they, too, struggle to make it through the system. Get it into their hands, and we think that, eventually, the momentum will build for future phases where it goes into the hands of civil servants, public servants, financial services, commerce folks who will want nothing more than to have it in their hands yesterday.

Centre of Business Development

In the area of investment, Mr. Speaker, I really marvel at the work of the Centre of Business Development, a small but mighty unit that runs many programmes that probably don't get enough airtime. I'll go through them quickly.

They have a Grow your Business Programme that helps those start-ups that have made it through the start-up programme and teaches them how to expand and get to the next phase to grow their business. They do a Small Business Expo event which covers small businesses and gives them the opportunity to showcase their products and services to the public, and to share their experience with others who are starting out.

They organise a Raise Capital Forum, where the centre is acutely aware of the challenge to access capital when you're a micro or small business and they put you in a forum where they bring investors and financial institutions to the table, Mr. Speaker, and give those business owners an opportunity to spot talent, to spot an idea, and help a small, budding business, get going.

We will also be adding money to the budget, Mr. Speaker, for a business development grant programme where the Ministry, too, will have a modest sum which we will disburse when we see an idea and we want to help a micro or small business get started because, ultimately, that's the type of investment that we're looking for and aiming for in the community— to help our people participate more in the economy.

There are a few tools that we'll also try to experiment with. I brought a paper to Caucus recently to establish a working group for a so-called hybrid fund. Now, in a nutshell, it's a fancy term for a smaller version of a joint public-private partnership where you identify small projects, perhaps, for example, where Government owns Crown land and needs access to have transitional housing. This isn't affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, but [rather] where any of the social services departments has an emergency, either a domestic abuse case or a family squabble, and the person needs to get out and not to be homeless immediately.

The existing framework that the Needs Assessment [Unit] uses, which relies on private landlords, doesn't move that quickly. We need to ensure that there's transitional housing, particularly, Mr. Speaker, for those same prisoners who are coming out, who also find it difficult to rent property. We need to start thinking of innovative tools to work with the private sector so it isn't reliant just on government, to form those partnerships and be able to start transitional or social housing in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had separate conversations with a few folks who are retiring. One is a civil servant, another is a retiring investment-funds director, and a couple are retired corporate lawyers who are still interested in volunteering to make a difference in the community, and strengthen the safety net. Even though these conversations were separate, they had the same theme; that innovation isn't just about the creation of a new device or gadget, it is [also] modifications to existing items in more creative, user-friendly ways for this decade.

They offered to create a working group that would look at items that may be smaller, not as topical, but [which] may need a revisit. They raised, for example:

- The Workmen's Compensation Legislation;
- The Limitation Act— whether certain time bands for claims are still fit for modern purpose;
- The Landlord and Tenants Act— whether it needs to be strengthened for more protections for tenants.

All the Acts I just mentioned were last touched on in the mid-to-late 90s, and I know that the Premier is working on a new tenancy Bill to actually improve that sector because there is a gap. It needs a revisit, particularly, because the Needs Assessment Unit is working with private landlords now.

[Taking] all those things together— on the one hand, the economic opportunities that I see for the country from financial services and commerce; and all the things that need a revamp which are long overdue from an investment, innovation, and social development standpoint—we have the tools to reshape this country. Maybe we won't get it all done in one budget cycle, Mr. Speaker, but the framework can be laid, victories can be won; and I can't do it alone, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Members of Cabinet and Caucus, and Members of this House. I thank the Chief Officers in both Ministries; all of the staff; both of my PAs, and all of the authorities and departments for which I have responsibility— and DG, I want to make a particular point here.

In either Ministry team, whenever they hit a snag or a setback, they always look down and worry about whether they will disappoint me, whether it will be upsetting; but I try to remind them, that for some of these projects no one's ever gotten this far— ever— so,

don't think about it in terms of disappointment. What will matter more, is how we are going to analyse those setbacks and snags and overcome them, and keep moving on to keep the country moving forward... and DG, I couldn't be prouder of both teams.

The Deputy Governor, Hon. Franz I. Manderson: Excellent, thank you.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, turning very briefly to my constituency of West Bay South, I've said it before in many different arenas: It is the honour of my life to represent them.

It gives me joy to press whomever, whenever I can, to get things done for them. There are a few issues that I cannot wait to see resolved in the coming months, in the next budget cycle— hopefully some of them are done before the end of the year, such as the Saint Mary's Cemetery on Willie Farrington Drive. Another unfinished project; beautiful parking lot, terrible cemetery. Needs to be fixed.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Now, with the help of my colleague, the Minister of Home Affairs and her very able Director, Richard Simms, the plan is in place, capital has been transferred, and hopefully, it has a much-more dignified look for when our people bury their loved ones at that cemetery.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Yes, PWD.

Where I really need them is where you said, Minister of Planning: Morgan's Harbour dock, and like you said— I was glad you said it— we don't want the old wooden rickety one that could blow over with the next Northwester. Our local operators want that beautiful concrete one you got in North Side. We want one in West Bay.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Thank you, and...

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: And hopefully we see it this week, or next week, the paving of Powell Smith Drive.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: That's correct, it is on the work order?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: Thank you, those are some pain points for our people.

I'd like to thank the staff of my constituency office. They, just like for many of us, I'm sure, take the brunt of calls [and] visitors while we're off busy with policy, legislation, and other duties. I couldn't do it without them, and I thank them.

At this point I want to give a very warm Christmas holiday greeting to the constituents of West Bay South. I'm looking forward to an expeditious Finance Committee, so I can spend as much time greeting as many of you in person as I can.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to give a quick shout out to my old man, who is in aftercare in Health City. He needed a surgery, which was performed brilliantly at HSA, but needed a bit more care in terms of rehabilitation. He's probably not listening, he will probably listen later, but I want him to know that I'm thinking about him

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I will leave Shakespeare alone. I did two, should be enough. I am on time, Madam Premier.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: I will go to a historical figure whom I quote more often—I never really use Shakespeare—who has numerous witty quotes, maybe not as many as Churchill, but close. I'm going to end with Abraham Lincoln who said, speaking about the United States, of course, *"If this nation is ever destroyed, it will not be from without, but from within."* I'll repeat that: Abraham Lincoln, former US president: *"If this nation is ever destroyed, it will be not from without, but from within."* The central challenge is in our hands, colleagues.

I give the current Honourable Premier full marks for completing the presentation of a budget in highly compressed fashion. We should all thank her for it. This would be a different place—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier: —if we were past the 31st December— thank you, Ma'am; but the past is the past. Let's reach across the aisle, Mr. Speaker. Let us find compromise and let us, per the title of the Honourable Premier's Budget Address, lay the foundation for our people's well-being.

Thank you, and good night, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Deputy Premier, and thank you for keeping it so brief. Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]*

The honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West: "The people of the Cayman Islands", Mr. Speaker, are the [first] six words' preamble to the Cayman Islands Constitution. Six words that can be summarised into three words: *We, the People*.

Mr. Speaker, as it stands, our Constitution is broken down into nine parts:

- Part I, deals with the Bill of Rights;
- Part II, deals with the Governor;
- Part III, deals with the Executive;
- Part IV, deals with the [Parliament];
- Part V, deals with the [Judicature];
- Part VI deals with the Public Service;
- Part VII, deals with Finance;
- Part VIII deals with Institutions supporting democracy; and
- Part IX is Miscellaneous.

My focus tonight is not just on part IV, where we are gathered, but also on what is required in part III, with the Executive.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I have to give much credit to the Honourable Premier for what she has produced and what she has put out there. I can tell anyone that I have worked with her and I know where her heart is. I also know of her capabilities and, as I said the last time I spoke in this Chamber, for the first time in months I have a sense of optimism— and Mr. Speaker, my optimism was enhanced even further this evening, when I could text one of my constituents to say, *"Your prayers have been answered."*

One of my constituents reached out to me earlier, Mr. Speaker, asking if there was any uplift or anything for pensioners who didn't receive anything. Shortly after getting that constituent's message, I messaged the Honourable Premier. At the time she said she could not make a commitment, she first had to see when the numbers came out which, I will admit, is the responsible thing to do; but then, it gave me great pleasure to text that person to say her prayers had been answered and she is very grateful for that little \$250 for this Christmas.

You see, Mr. Speaker, I listened to the tone and the theme of many speeches in this Parliament, and something I want to touch on when I mention those three words, (we, the people), are the three pillars that make up any society. I have said before in this House, Mr. Speaker, that most countries started out at a community level and, as they started trading amongst themselves and did business amongst themselves, they created an economy and as the community grew and the economy grew, they created a political system, so the three pillars are:

- Community;
- Economy; and
- Politics.

That has been the genesis, or the birth, of most nations. What has been happening around the world, Mr. Speaker is, well, several events, but one particular thing has happened which had not happened before in the history of human civilisation and that is, that this is the first time that we have four generations working together side by side. Now it is not uncommon, to find an 18-year old working alongside an 81-year old.

As such, Mr. Speaker, I'm reminded of a story that my son put in our family chat group a while back that, while it didn't originate on this side of the world but in the Middle East, has been brought to this side about a guy who went to visit his coach who said to him, *"My grandfather walked ten miles to work; my father walked five miles; I'm driving a Cadillac; my son is driving a Mercedes, and my grandson is driving a Ferrari; but my great-grandson will be walking again."* He also said, *"Tough times create tough people; tough people create easy times; easy times create weak people, and weak people create tough times— and that is why we need to create warriors."*

It basically takes four generations, Mr. Speaker, for that cycle to happen and now we are living through the fourth generation, in some cases. About two weeks ago, a friend of mine sent me a video where this young person, a millennial, or I don't know the new name they have for them, was basically complaining why they don't want to work, and it's not that they are lazy, but they don't see where they are being properly compensated for their labour, for what they are doing— basically working forty, fifty, sixty hours a week and still can't afford to live, can't afford to own their own place, et cetera. She went on to lament the fact that the previous generations or the early generations, which in essence would be my parents, are getting all the benefits.

I thought about that video for a while, but then something clicked for me. That generation fought for what they had, they fought for the unions— I mean, you can go back to where people can remember the days of Jimmy Hoffa, the Teamsters and all that. Regardless of what they say, they fought for the rights that they have. They fought for what they wanted; they made noise, and built institutions that came out of them fighting with that noise. Then, as times go on and new generations emerge... I'm old enough to remember when my parents basically had to tell me to come off the street, now I have to beg my kids to go out of the house. Things have changed.

You know, the conversations that I had with my late father are the same conversations that I have with my son, *"Oh, dad, you live in a different time. You just don't understand what's going on. The world is different now,"*— and he's probably right. Then I remembered what Reagan said when a young person in one of those college campuses said to him, *"You wouldn't understand the world that you live in now because we got instant communication, you can microwave food, you*

can do this, you can do that..." Listing out all the technological stuff, and Reagan said, *"Yeah, I understand where you're coming from. That's why we invented it."*

It's the same thing now in the sense that, as a people, we need to sit down and ask ourselves, *"Where do we stand with each of those pillars?"* Everyone here spoke about economic growth (which is good); about governance and about politics, but where most countries are falling and continue to fall is the investment within the community, and if we are not careful we, too, are going to fall— and Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go off on a side note right now and say something people may not like.

One of the underlying tenets that made our community strong were our churches. They did the bulk of the legwork in the community. They were running after school programmes and doing all of these things before everyone was springing all of these different initiatives that are making all of this money, the church was there; and we sat, and just as the church has been undermined, the community has been undermined.

If you look at the United Kingdom right now, they are converting churches to apartments now. People stopped going, you know? That is where everyone met in this country, whether you were rich, poor, black, white, brown; everyone met at the church. We are now losing that, and if we are not careful, we are going to go the same road as everyone else; we will build those two pillars, and leave the community behind. I will say this, colleagues, and the Honourable Deputy Premier said it: When people feel like they cannot participate, they go out and elect people who tell them what they want to hear and—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I will say this: While those countries have the ability to go in a back room and print money when things go sideways and pay themselves, printing their way out of trouble, we do not have that luxury. No country which has been in the position we are in and fallen, has ever returned. None. Zero, *zilch, nada*; and as such, it is to the community level of caring and sharing that we need to get back to.

You know, going through some of the numbers, et cetera, with the Honourable Leader of the Opposition during the break, I reminded him that, while we depend on the numbers to some extent— and here I want to say upfront that the ESO staff is very hard working, and they do their job to the best of their ability, therefore I say to the listening public: you need to co-operate with the Economics and Statistics Office. They produce the numbers for policymakers.

I want to touch briefly on something from the 2022 Compendium of Statistics, Mr. Speaker, just to give an example. We are talking about the Labour Force, Caymanians versus non-Caymanians, but I am only going to focus on the Caymanian numbers.

2015	19,575
2016	20,774
2017	20,774
2018	21,747
2019	21,269
2020	21,249
2021	21,298
2022	35,691

We have basically gone from 21,249 in 2020, to 21,298 in 2021, to 35,691 in 2022— and that is just the Caymanian numbers. What happened between 2021 and those numbers? We had the census, where we actually went and added a proper count in terms of what the population was?

Outside of a census, the team relies on the public's cooperation to provide them with the information; and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that even during the census, we had people within our own community who outright said, "*we are not giving you any information*" despite the protection, and I am going to be honest with you, I actually wanted to prosecute some of them just to send a message, because the law does allow us to do it; but there was no appetite for it, so I left it as is.

However, the point I'm making is, and I say it to the public, for us to do our job and make an informed decision, we need the information from you, and it cannot be a situation where only half of you are responding—

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: —and just putting the stuff out there. You need to provide the information because we make decisions based on it.

I can also tell you that when I looked at the unemployed Caymanians numbers, it went from 1700-something pre-census, to 800-something as per the census, so I sat back and said to myself, "*It's okay, it's only 800 Caymanians unemployed.*". At least it gives us an idea. I can tell you that the ESO does a wonderful job, because you can look at the different years in the Compendium of Statistics and see which industries are growing, which industries are moving. The point is that we need the information, and as you can see from the material jump, it cannot be that every ten years when we do the census is when we get the correct information. That is two and a half political terms right there, that we cannot run the risk of having misinformation.

Mr. Speaker, part of building our community is building institutions. Cayman is not the only place that has been based on individual politics. When institutions are first being built, they are very unpopular, until people understand their significance. The Premier and the Member for West Bay West can tell you the political licks that they took, back in 2002/2003, when they were creating the Cayman Islands National Insurance Company (CINICO). Almost twenty years later, Mr.

Speaker, if it wasn't for CINICO many Caymanians would not have insurance, but many licks came with setting it up, and the reason for it is, Mr. Speaker, and I'll give you a quote from Machiavelli, since the honourable Member for North Side mentioned him.

More than five hundred years ago Machiavelli said, "*The most difficult challenge in the history of human affairs is to change the established order of things because those who will be disadvantaged by the change are certain of their loss, while those who benefit from the change are uncertain of their gain.*".

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Speaker, colleagues and listening public, I will say this much.

After I completed my review of the budget last weekend, around three-something Monday morning, I sent the Honourable Premier a message saying that I had some technical concerns with it, but rather than raising them on the Floor, I would send her a letter after the budget process for her to meet with her team and the technocrats to go through them. I do not want to get into the technical side as I think some of them we need to focus on more from a policy standpoint.

What really triggered it for me were NGS 55 and HEA 2; for the 2024 and 2025 budget, the total amount, for those two years, is \$57 million for both of them. Equally, the actual forecasted spend for NGS 55 and HEA 2 for 2022 and 2023, was \$158 million; so in short, Mr. Speaker, for two votes over a two-year period, where we spent \$158 million, we have a budget of \$57 million. That's a difference of \$101 million. Why did that jump out? The combined surplus for both years is actually \$94.5 million.

In short, Mr. Speaker, those two healthcare votes alone, can impact the country severely, so I was very happy to hear the Honourable Minister of Health speak about reforming the HSA, because there is no doubt the HSA does very good work. I can tell anyone that I can't see any situation, or any universe, where the HSA will not be the primary healthcare provider in the country but, at the same time, it must be efficient. The reason I raise it, Mr. Speaker, is because if you look at the current forecasted surplus for the SAGCs as per what was presented, they're actually showing a combined 2023 profit for all SAGCs but then, the budget for both years is actually showing a loss within the SAGCs.

What I've said isn't unique, but when you look at the HSA, 70 per cent of its revenues come from the Cayman Islands Government with only 30 per cent being external; and when we look at the administrative costs for that [external revenue] there is a serious mismatch. In short, Mr. Speaker, if memory serves me right, per the one analysis that we looked at based on numbers that were submitted to us, we had roughly \$60 million in administrative cost for the HSA to collect roughly \$30 million of non-government revenues. That is unsustainable. We are at a point where things are

tough, you know? We need to look at deficiencies, so I think the Minister is on the right path in the sense of moving it back to a public hospital.

There's no shame in saying that at the time the decision was made to create the HSA, it was based on the information available but now it's a different story; and nowhere is it more evidenced, Mr. Speaker, than on the recent pension issue when people said, *"Oh, if you allow people to take money out of their pension now, what's going to happen when they retire?"* What do you think is happening right now? On who do you think we spent \$158 million in the last two years? It's mostly on people who have already retired.

As the Honourable Leader of the Opposition mentioned, we have an ageing population [so] it is something that we really need to tackle. It's about creating structures while at the same time bringing back institutions and the more institutions we can create, they will remain when we leave this honourable House. The honourable Gilbert McLean, who hails from my constituency, will tell you that when he was creating the National Roads Authority (NRA), it was an issue. Look at what the NRA is doing today. Look at the Airports Authority, look at CINICO.

These are institutions that have remained, and the more institutions we can create, and move away from the individual, the easier. Look at the Cayman Islands Monetary Authority (CIMA); same thing. Going back to a monetary authority as opposed to a central bank. They do very good work there. Again, institutions that we have created; but where we need to start creating institutions now is within the community, and rather than reinventing the wheel, Mr. Speaker, let us re-engage the churches.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Let us get the churches back into our community, for the work they do. When I think about the possibilities that we have in this country...

Let me tell you something: the first person who told me, *"Chris, the Cayman Islands are blessed"*, was Michael Alberga. I remember seeking his guidance on something (way before politics), and he looked at me and said, *"Chrissy, you are young. Let me tell you something about Cayman. This place is a blessed place. With the number of prayers in the Cayman prayer bank from your forefathers... Chris, this country will never fail because [with] some decisions these people made, this country should have been worse than Haiti; but by the grace of God."* He said, *"All of these problems they are worrying about, God loves Cayman. I can tell you that, don't worry about it. God will take care of it"*—and it's fine, faith is good.

I was surprised when Mr. Alberga said it. I didn't expect it, truth be told. I just did not expect it. It has never been his personality; but it goes to show that even he recognises the power of faith. When people

bash the church, Mr. Speaker, I ask them—I worked with atheists before and I say to them—what is wrong with working with someone who gets up and says they want to be Christlike, they want to do good? Why do you want to take that from them? Why? Someone says I want to do good, I want to be kind, I want to be generous, I want to be clean. What bothers is it to you if someone says they want to live like that?

As the Honourable Deputy Premier mentioned a while ago, when he quoted Lincoln on being destroyed from within. The full context of that speech [was] him referring to the war in Europe with Napoleon Bonaparte, et cetera, and he said not one European country would ever be able to take a drink from the Ohio River, or walk one of its trails, unless the American people allow them to do so—and it's the same with us. The only people who can destroy what we have is us; and I say to the very new Caymanians who come and want to change our way of life: *"You left where you were and came here for better opportunities—why are you trying to change here into where you left? There's a reason you left. Let us work our magic; let us do our thing. Just come for the ride. If you are going to drink milk, drink milk—don't count cows."* That's what it comes down to.

Mr. Speaker, as I said to Madam Premier, I have concerns. I saw the civil service number and it frightened me at first, but I sat back and said, *"Chris, wait a minute. Back up; maybe it includes the salary increase you wanted for civil servants."* I will find out in Finance Committee and I really hope that such is the case, because if it is a situation of hiring people or growing bodies, I can tell you it is going to be a challenge; but if you are going to hire people, Madam Premier, I will ask that priority be given to returning graduates.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: There is nothing worse than our young people coming home, and cannot find work. They have worked very hard for three, four years to get that degree, only for some of them to come back home and sit there, losing their dignity.

Mr. Speaker, reminded me very early in politics, [that] there's no future in the past; the budget we have today is for 2024 and 2025, which is the future so, while I'm happy to hear what has happened, nonetheless it's in the past, as the Honourable Deputy Premier said. What we are about now, is the future.

Madam Premier, I have gone through the budget numbers presented and made a list, per Ministry, that I would like each [Minister] to look at and I will start, coincidentally, with the Minister of Social Development whose Ministry is charged with, more than anything, giving our people their dignity back—closing the dignity gap. I'm very happy to see the change he

has made in the financial assistance legislation, because nothing used to be worse than hearing the words “poor relief”.

I mean, the dignity it has taken from some people, from us as a community... We are a community of caring and sharing. It is not about poor people or rich people, but about everyone doing everything to help someone. I am, therefore, happy to see that progress has been made in that regard, but at the same time, we need to ensure that we make it much easier for people, so that they don't feel as if they're giving up their dignity.

I was very pleased when the Minister for Border Control and Labour spoke about the Select Committee on Pensions. That is important, Mr. Speaker, for the simple reason that we do not have a safety net in this country. The Minister of Financial Services will understand when we speak about international standards, because one international standard that we have not done a very good job with is bringing in [benefits] for employees so, as you push for more international standards, I would ask for us to take a comprehensive look at the international standard in terms of employee benefits which include maternity leave, minimum vacation leave, et cetera, but more importantly, to start creating that fund.

I guess we can hash it a bit more in Finance Committee, but we need to create a safety net for our people because 95 per cent of them make their living by providing a service, and God forbid anyone gets sick to the point that they cannot work. Most families are one medical emergency away from being bankrupt, and it is the kind of thing that keeps people awake at night; so, if we can work towards putting together a safety net... and it doesn't have to be overnight, because, colleagues, we don't need to score a goal every time we get on the field.

Our job as a Parliament is to keep moving the ball closer and closer to the goal so that eventually we get there. It doesn't have to be a magic pill. The good news is that every one of us here has something in common: We all trust the public. Why? Because they voted for us over our opponent, so, as we trusted them to do the right thing by sending us here, let us trust them in that regard. I can tell you [that]:

1. They see the new problem;
2. Our plan to fix the problem; and
3. Tomorrow is going to be better.

People want hope. They don't want a bad news bearer. I know you have seen many people rejecting negativity—no one wants it.

Moving on. To my good friend, the Minister for Tourism, Mr. George Town Central himself, who came in with me into the Class of 2017, I will say: Activate the ability to dream big. The last time you and I spoke about tourism, you talked about a million stayover tourists by 2035. I was listening for that. I want that Minister back.

I remember his exact words when he said to his team, “Listen, what would it take for us to get a million by 2035? How many rooms do we need? Right now, we have what, 7,000 properties, 10,000 rooms, 20,000 beds. How many do we need to achieve it?” The next question is to the public: “Where do you want to put it?” Then you say to the Minister of Infrastructure, “What infrastructure you are going to put in between the room stock, the airport, et cetera.” That's the vision that we want, because at the end of the day Financial Services are nice and it's our bread and butter, but also, we all see what can happen overnight in some situations.

We have a very good tourism product and many passionate people in it so, as I said to him when he invited me to a Board meeting with his Cayman Airways people: If the people from the Middle East or the Far East do not want to come here the minute we extend the runway, well, get a 767 for Cayman Airways and go over there and develop the route. The minute they see that there is something here, they will come.

You know, Cayman Airways has taken much uncalled-for hate and negativity. Those of us who travel around the Caribbean and see what's happening, would say to people listening at home: If you are [ever] in Turks and Caicos, look at how much the flight from Miami to Turks and Caicos runs for—\$1,500- \$2,000; you complain about Cayman Airways' baggage fee for a \$300 flight to Miami, when someone in a different island is paying \$2,000 for the same flight in almost the same period of time?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yeah, yeah, but again, that is why we in here need to actually go out and have these conversations. What I said earlier about the stats, is for the media people to also do their work. They put all of these numbers around, and I can tell you that some of the analysis changed simply because of the census, and rather than reporting that, they look for sensationalism. Let me tell you something: it is bad news that sells news, you know?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: When was the last time you saw a positive headline? You know why? Because people feel miserable but—“Boy, things rough, you know, but my God, that one's life over there is worse than mine, you know; I wouldn't want to be him!” We need to get away from that.

I also want to say to my friend, the Minister of Tourism and Ports, look at how we can create more attractions. People give the Turtle [Centre] a hard time, but if you look at the Turtle Centre's subsidy, the last time I looked at the analysis, which was a while back, at the time the government was paying \$10 million a

year, \$6 million went to servicing debt, so the true subsidy was really \$4 million. What do we get for that \$4 million? A place that hires one hundred Caymanians directly, six hundred Caymanians indirectly, and hosts over 200,000 visitors a year. For \$4 million? That's a bargain for what tourism does.

Some entities can lose money if they are providing a bigger service because you can't put a price on the other benefits that they bring us. Same as Cayman Airways. Cayman Airways is an economic accelerator. If Cayman Airways goes down tomorrow what do you think is waiting on us?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: The \$2,000 flight—thank you.

Colleagues, if you go right now and study the airline business out of North America, they actually operate like banks, they are no longer in the transport business. They don't make money on a plane seat, they make money from the loyalty programme. Actually, they make more money from the loyalty programmes and lose money selling seats. As a small country, how can you compete with that?

Therefore, my friend, dream big. Give me that million by 2035. Maybe it's a private conversation, maybe you did not want to say it because someone would think you are crazy, but you know what? Dream big, that's what made Cayman what it is.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: That's all right. You will get it back now.

To the Minister of Health, I already touched on it briefly when I said that I think getting the HSA back to a public hospital is a very good—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I think going back to a government department it's actually a very good step, but there are two things I want to add:

One is free healthcare, because if we look at what we are spending—\$158 million over two years; at that cost, you might as well start looking at making it free and taking the stress off of people, because [for] \$30 million of non-government costs, you might as well look at it. You can start cutting down administrative costs, and it will pay for itself.

The other thing, colleagues, and the census revealed it more than anything, is to focus on our wellness. Our culture and our lifestyle have created issues for us, and it's kind of ironic that the things that are mostly not covered by the SHIC plan, are the ones giving our people the hardest time now; and it is one reason we actually want to expand CINICO. I'll come down

to that later but, again, focus on wellness. Take care of yourself.

Last week Wednesday, I was up by Health City and they stuck two needles in my throat testing for something. The week before, pain hit me so bad, really hit me, that I ended up at Health City. I literally thought I was getting a heart attack or something. First of all, when these things come, the first thing you think of is gas because, you know us Caribbean people, "*Maybe it is gas*. You did not eat anything hot all day." You know, you go through that, but after the pain hit me, I said, "*Oh no, this is not normal*," and I wasn't taking any chances, so I went straight to Health City in case it was cardiac-[related].

They ran tests and it turned out it was nothing like that, but I can say that the response from CINICO during that time was nothing short of phenomenal. I can tell you they have got a good team over there, with Michael Gayle, a good, decent CEO. This country is blessed to have Michael Gayle running CINICO, I can tell anyone that. His faith alone, which moves him, is really something commendable.

To my good friend, the Minister for Infrastructure and Roads, who is building a park, et cetera, I already got my video man working on that clip for all the stuff you promised me—you don't worry, it is coming out; but, the undersea cable is a big thing. I don't need to get into the politics of why we are where we are with it; all I can say is that the biggest problem that we had with the undersea cable has been removed so I expect progress on it. That's all I will say.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Exactly. I would say that.

Another thing I want to touch on, Mr. Speaker, which is under the responsibility of the Minister of Housing, are the houses that are being built. To the credit of the Deputy Leader of Opposition, who brought the Motion in the prior sitting, about incentivising developers to get stuff done—it is something the government can't and, frankly, shouldn't be doing, to some extent. I mean, we have people in the banks who can actually qualify to get it done.

Like I said, if we have the land and we can give it to people to say, you know what, let's build on it, let's work something out with the developer where we subsidise the cost of land or something. It needs to be done. Yes, I know, as the Minister mentioned, there's red tape in terms of the procurement process, but guess what? There's a Procurement Law, and the last time I checked, laws are made in this building—and it's fine. Listen, that's the beauty about democracy, if you put something in and it's not working or it's not working for the benefit it should, we change it. That's what it's there for, you know.

The next thing that I want, which you can focus on now because the biggest impediment is gone, is the Government discount store.

[Inaudible interjection and desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: You understand? I expect to see some progress with that now.

[Inaudible interjection and desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Ok, thank you very much. In terms of the road network, et cetera, I have to say well done. I really have to give him props there.

Regarding the Minister of Heritage and Sports, et cetera, something that I am always arguing, is that the secret of Cayman's success has never been immigration, but integration—the ability for people to come here and integrate with us. I'm old enough to remember when oxtail was something that Caymanians would not consider their own. Now, not only is oxtail something big for us. We started it here. Granted, we cannot afford it but, again, this is where culture comes in.

Something that we need to focus on is selling people on our heritage, getting people to feel a part of the community, because that is how it used to be and it's funny (and maybe I shouldn't say it), but a friend of mine in an overseas territory sent a WhatsApp to me by mistake. In a nutshell, they wanted me to look at something; but, I was surprised to find out that in that Overseas Territory, people who are getting status [still] have to put their picture in the newspaper and basically say, you know, “*I, so and so, am applying for...*”—and I'm looking at it like, “*What?! You guys still do that? Here we took it away because they said it was some human rights' issue or something.*” They're still doing it.

It goes to show [it is] part of being in the community, in the sense that, you don't even know who is who anymore and you see, because we have changed our housing design where we have gone from the front porch to the back porch, you used to stay in your front porch and see who was passing by, now you do not know who your neighbours are.

Also, I will say to the public, sometimes you complain about politicians not keeping enough events. When we spend money to do events, many of you do not show up—and it takes up much time; and worse when you bring public servants to do a presentation, and no one shows up. Of course, for us as politicians now, you know, you have your political opponents out there, the minute no one shows, first thing they are like, “*Hmm, he nah gah no support, the seat starts looking different.*” People look at that, those are natural behaviours. However, this is people's time, people's money, you know.

Something else I invite the Minister of Sports and Heritage to focus on, is to find some money to get more Caymanians to write. I would love to see Dr. Steve McField write a book with all his knowledge.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Those are the kinds of things...

I mean, I've sat down and listened to people's stories sometimes and wished I had a tape recorder to record them. These are the kinds of things that we need to start getting—even if you don't want to write, record them and get someone else to write it; but we can't allow some of these people to just transition, without recording their history. It is, as the old African Proverb says, “**Every time an elder passes, a library burns down.**”. You know what I mean, so don't wait till it is too late. Pay to get it done. Roy Bodden, I love his books. I love the way in which he writes and I wish all of them would be part of the school curriculum for people to understand from whence we came.

Colleagues, we are a small island, but we have come very far in a very short time. We have much to be proud of, but if we are not careful 40, 50, years from now, someone will rewrite our own story. Let us write our own story, because I guarantee—I think Churchill said it best, “**history is going to be kind to me for I intend to write it myself**”. Let us do that for ourselves. Let us be kind to our own Caymanians. Let's write our own story.

To my good colleague, the Minister of Sustainability, I got to be honest with you right now. I still don't understand that Ministry, I'm going to be straight up. When it was created, I understand what they wanted in terms of focus, but I think it has to be properly defined, you know.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Well, we all know why it was created, I'm not going into that; but I will say that sustainability has a place that we need to get to, and much of it has to be through public education and so forth.

Something I know is going to be a big project is ReGen, which I know other people are looking at. I wrote a letter, I think about five or six pages, to the Honourable Attorney General, on ReGen, and I'm hoping that before the Christmas [season] is over or early in the New Year, he could at least answer those questions for me. I gave him a pass the last time because I knew he was busy getting Cayman off the grey list, and it's Christmas time now, but at least early in the New Year. I will still have some questions.

Minister, I'd be more than happy to share that letter with you, and if any of your colleagues want it, you have my permission to share it with them also, because the public's business can't be done in private. I will say—and this is for the environmentalists and everyone out there—we always talk about banning plastics, et cetera. It's hard for some people to take it seriously enough because when people talk about banning plastic they also talk about—and I'm going to say it—

banning Styrofoam. No one ever wants to touch the Styrofoam or the “S” word. I don’t want to say it, and we all know why.

What I would really like is for the Minister—and I have full faith and confidence in you as I have worked with you before—to take that Ministry now, and define it properly. It has potential, but I think much of its time was spent hindering development. I can tell you right now, that per the last census, 15 per cent of our workforce is employed in the construction industry, that’s the largest employer. We run a consumption-based society; if people cannot work, they cannot eat and if they’re not eating our revenue is going down too.

Minister, I know your bat is new; any assistance that I can offer you, in terms of redefining it, I’d be more than happy to. I think it has much potential. It’s the youngest, newest Ministry, it’s barely over two years old, but I think it’s something that can be done, because, at the end of the day, it is one of those Ministries that will become almost a backbone as with the Ministry of Finance.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: No, that isn’t happening. I like my freedom, you know.

To my colleague, my neighbour for Bodden Town East and the Minister of Border Control and Labour, the immigration and pensions reforms are already being worked on, but as I mentioned earlier, we need to get labour up to international standards. We can’t have people working, not being paid a proper wage and in some cases being treated very, very poorly in the workplace; and I’m going to say something colleagues. People don’t like when I say it, but I’m going to say it—and I’m speaking to my Caymanians.

The way some of you treat your domestic helpers, you all need to stop. Pay them on time, they have family back home to feed, stop letting them pay back for their work permit, et cetera. No one wants to talk about it because we’re going to have something with voters, but I can tell you something guys, this is what you call ‘blessing-blockers’. When you treat people this way, things happen to you or other family members, and you wonder, it is Karma. Karma exists, it is real. Some of you take advantage of the domestics, you need to stop it. Minister, as we mentioned before, when we were putting together the Minimum Wage Committee, to carve out the domestics because many people are worried about the cost we mentioned.

Equally, Madam Premier, one black mark we’re going to have on ourselves is: that is a group of people who do not pay any pension and it is disgraceful that some of them go back home with nothing after 30 or 40 years caring for our loved ones, giving us their best years. I am going to ask the Government to consider taking the funds that we make from work permits on domestics, and put it in a special fund and let us see what we can do with some of these people, especially

when they reach a particular age and they are going back home.

The number of people who have worked, helped us to reach where we are, our children benefited from it, and have returned home and some are living in really bad conditions. I know some people who are still sending money to their helpers back home in their old age, but it is something that we need to look at as a people and as a country. They are the ones we leave with our loved ones and they allow us to be in here to all hours at night and other Caymanian families to go out and provide for their family.

We need to do a better job of that. I would really and truly like for you to look into something like that, Minister, because I would say some of the conditions are probably on a human rights’ basis. I’ve heard some stories, and some of the people who are doing it—I’m ashamed; I’m ashamed of them. I look at them and pass them like I don’t see them. I’m just ashamed. They smile at you and laugh with you like upstanding citizens, and the way they treat their helpers is really bad.

Last but not least, my good friend, the Honourable Premier. Madam Premier, you have been in this House way longer than I, for certain. What I am about to say is not new, but one thing I would say to you with the new UPM Government is: the special interests. If we are not careful, the special interests will continue to do much more damage to this country. I shouldn’t even mention it because I know you don’t go to their cocktail parties—as a matter of fact, you know what? I’m not going to worry about it. You can scratch that.

The other thing Madam Premier, is the Civil Service management. Now, I want to preamble that by saying this: in our system of government, the Westminster system, the civil service is charged with the continuation of government. In the United States it is the Senate. How do they do it? At every US election, only a third of the Senate goes up for election at a time; two thirds of the Senate are always in session, never facing the polls, and that is where their continuation of government is charged.

When a new government comes in, it is the civil servants who are there to bring them up to speed. Now, I’ve been blessed or I’ve been lucky in the sense that I had really good Chief Officers who gave me a big binder with everything that they were working on before and gave me a chance to catch up, but I know—

The Speaker: Honourable Member, I’ve been trying to wait for you to catch your breath so I could intervene, but it doesn’t seem you’re going to do that. I wonder if you could indicate how much longer you think you might be because you are not the shortest man I know.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Ten to fifteen minutes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Ok, I’ll hold you to that.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Sorry, I was wrapping up. I was right on the Premier so I was coming on to the last part.

[The Civil Service] is charged with the continuation of government and that is important to some extent. It's one of those situations where I know the Civil Service has its own programmes and workshops and so forth to prepare Chief Officers, Deputy Chief Officers and Ministry staff, but I can tell you that the time I was there, I saw it as a challenge. The reason I mentioned it is [because] there was a time in our history—you can go back to the 1990s for example, the National Team—where 12 of the 15 Members elected in this honourable House were former civil servants. We had a tendency before of electing former civil servants, people who understood how government operated.

Many of us in here also used to work in government at one point to have an idea, so you come with a working knowledge; but when you're a Minister focusing on policies, et cetera, a better job needs to be done. I won't get into the specifics, but there's one example that really brought it for me. I'll speak to you about it offline, so you can understand the point that I'm making because if I give the example, it will identify the individuals and I don't believe that I should be using this forum to make it easy to identify anyone in that regard. Nonetheless, it is something that we need to work on.

I'm also glad to see, Madam Premier, that you have CINICO. The whole idea of CINICO's expansion, if you go back to the SPS that is in effect, of the ten broad outcomes listed therein, CINICO's expansion is in three of them. One of the purposes of insurance is to spread risk, and what we don't have, and we are seen it now more than ever, is that from 16 to 65 (49 years) you can work in the private sector and have private sector insurance; but the minute you retire, at the time in your life when you actually need insurance the most, that's when you have to turn to CINICO.

While the Government made it mandatory for people to have health insurance, it didn't make it mandatory for people to sell health insurance, thus the reason we had to create CINICO, but it has now reached a point where it has become a burden to the taxpayers of this country. Colleagues, to put that in context, 20 years ago, when CINICO was created, they [also] created something called the Segregated Insurance Fund. At that time, the total cost for indigents was roughly \$6 million a year and the Government used to collect \$3 million from that fund—which is the fee that most people would pay on their health insurance plans—to cover half the indigent cost.

Today we collect around \$5 million from that fund, but we are spending roughly \$75 million. I mean, I think that in itself says that some real structural reforms are needed at this point. While that was the idea back then, and it looked like it made sense based on information and events back then, I think it's something that we need to re-evaluate now, 20 years later, to see if there is a current approach; but it can't be a situation

right now where, what we're spending on health care—and this is not even civil servants' health care, this is people out there who struggle with health care—is going to be a challenge.

Another thing, Madam Premier, is the Caribbean Development Bank. One institution more than anything that every country needs in order to move forward is credit and capital. We have not done enough, and banks are not designed for what we need. We need more people. We need to encourage and incentivise more entities, more organisations to provide capital and credit. You do not need a licence from CIMA to lend money. You only need a licence from CIMA if you're collecting money from the public.

If you look at the United Kingdom right now, for example, one of their cheapest mortgage rates is 4.29 per cent. Mr. Speaker, to put that in context, if you have a \$500,000 loan at 4.29 per cent over 25 years, your monthly payment is \$2,700 a month. Just even at prime, that same mortgage is \$4,000 a month, \$1,300 more a month; over a year that's \$15,600, over 25 years you're talking about \$400,000 in difference. These are the kinds of things affecting people's pension when they go to retire and that's just on mortgage.

If I do that with light, groceries and insurance by the time a Caymanian goes to retire compared to someone in North America and Europe, they can have \$600,000 to \$800,000 less when they go to retire. These are the kinds of things that affect people in terms of the quality of life and as we're looking to close the dignity gap.

From that standpoint, those will be the main things. As I said, Madam Premier, the other technical stuff, whatever questions and other issues I have, I will send you a letter with that separately after Finance Committee, and if needs be, I'd be more than happy to meet with your team to hash out those issues.

Last thing I wanted to touch on, Mr. Speaker, with your permission. I really want to give the Honourable Leader of Opposition credit for his presentation. He raised some very significant points which sent me to update some of my calculations, but one of the things that he touched on that really jumped out for me was productivity.

I basically did the work on it and I shared it with him during the break. The reason I want to touch on productivity is that you measure productivity by taking the GDP of the country divided by the total hours worked in the country. I'm raising that as productivity because, again, being a service-based economy with 95 per cent of our people making money from service, too many people are spending too much time in traffic. If you factor in the one to two hours a day and carry it over the years and put in 40,000 working people, it impacts our productivity in terms of service. There's a possibility for us to actually increase productivity and in the process even get more government revenues from being able to provide more services to people, et cetera. Those are pretty much the issues.

I just wanted to congratulate him for the work that he did. I'm a very technical person and I can see that much work went into preparing what he did. I would ask the Members opposite, if he has a copy of his speech, to take a look at it, because he raised some valid points as did other Members on this side. I wanted to single that out to you, Mr. Leader, in terms of your presentation. I was actually quite moved, and they say that leadership in the 21st century has got to be inspirational and motivational and your presentation met both of those criteria, so I wanted to thank you.

I also want to thank the Honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman for his delivery this morning. He also touched on some valuable points in terms of what we need to look at.

I think the Member for George Town South's passion when it comes to education has always been there and she has built a reputation for that. The Member for George Town West, I can tell you straight up guys if I'm ever going to battle in this House, the one person that I would want beside me more than anyone, would be the Member for George Town West, because I'll tell you one thing, he's loyal and fiercely protective of Cayman, and has always been, even before politics, so you can't take that from him; and of course, the Deputy Leader of Opposition in terms of the work that he has continued to do.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Which one?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: You told me you're a lover, you're not a fighter. That's the last thing you told me.

To my constituents of Bodden Town West, Mr. Speaker, outside of my family achievements in terms of marriage and kids, et cetera, the honour to represent the hard working, aspirational people of Bodden Town West, there is no greater honour than that. I can tell you I just love interacting with them. I'm really hoping that we can get Finance Committee done by this Friday because I need to go out and visit every single house. It's my time of year, I go to every house, although there are one or two houses I'm definitely not setting foot in. I don't need to get into that, don't worry about it, they're not going to see me in their yard.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Don't worry, I'll bring yours for you this week. I've already got some so I'll bring for Members this week. One thing I actually look forward to is seeing the people and meeting them.

Colleagues, it's a big departure. I didn't get a chance this morning to stop at Spotts Dock on the way in because it was raining, but I can tell you that every time I sit in this Chamber it's an awesome feeling, but it also comes with an awesome responsibility. You know, we do what we do, whether we are friends, but each one of us has a job to do and we would not be doing our jobs if we didn't help and, in some cases, make suggestions where we think something needs to be done.

As the Honourable Deputy Premier said, *the past is the past*. Mr. Speaker, you always said, *there is no future in the past*. It's about us working together because at the end of the day when we all ran, we knew every problem this country had and had a solution for every problem, we campaigned on it. Of course, when we got here we realised what social planners call a "wicked problem" but what I can say without a doubt, is that the things that are wrong with Cayman can still be fixed with the things that are right with Cayman; and if there's one [set of] people who we can depend on, [it] goes back to those six words, "**The people of the Cayman Islands...**".

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

Honourable Member for West Bay North, how long do you anticipate being?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: We'll do that tomorrow morning, *Rasta grow weary*.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Madam Premier, may I invite you to move the adjournment until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning?

ADJOURNMENT

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the adjournment of this honourable House until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The Speaker: The question is that this 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 9.22 p.m., the House stood adjourned until 10 a.m. Wednesday, 13 December, 2023.