



PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

THIRD MEETING OF THE 2025-2026 SESSION
Fifth Sitting

Wednesday
10 December, 2025
(Pages 1-35)

Hon. D. Ezzard Miller
Speaker

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PRESENT WERE:

Hon. D. Ezzard Miller
Speaker

MINISTERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP	<i>Premier</i> , Minister of Financial Services & Commerce
Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, MP	<i>Deputy Premier</i> , Minister of Tourism & Trade Development
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP	Minister of Health, Environment & Sustainability
Hon. Rolston M. Anglin, JP, MP	Minister of Finance & Economic Development <i>and</i> Education & Training
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, MP	Minister of Planning, Lands, Agriculture, Housing & Infrastructure
Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, JP, MP	Minister of Social Development & Innovation <i>and</i> Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage
Hon. Nickolas T. A. DaCosta, JP, MP	Minister of District Administration & Home Affairs
Hon. Michael S. Myles, MP	Minister of Caymanian Employment & Immigration

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. Eric Bush, JP	<i>Acting 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. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP	Elected Member for Newlands
Mrs. Julie J. T. Hunter, JP, MP	Elected Member for West Bay West
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP	Elected Member for Savannah

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, MP	<i>Leader of the Opposition</i> , Elected Member for George Town North
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, JP, MP	<i>Deputy Leader of the Opposition</i> , Elected Member for George Town Central
Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, MP	<i>Deputy Speaker</i> , Elected Member for George Town West
Mr. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP	Elected Member for George Town East
Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP	Elected Member for Cayman Brac East

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, CCI, JP, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town East
Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town West

APOLOGIES

Mr. A. Roy Tatum, Cert. Hon., MP	Elected Member for Red Bay
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OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
THIRD MEETING OF THE 2025-2026 SESSION
WEDNESDAY
10 DECEMBER, 2025
2:00 PM
Fifth Sitting

[Hon. D. Ezzard Miller, Speaker, presiding]

The Speaker: I call on the Honourable Minister of Social Development & Innovation and Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage, the Elected Member for East End to read prayers.

PRAYERS

Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, Minister of Social Development & Innovation and Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage, Elected Member for East End: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let us pray:

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

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

Let us say the Lord's Prayer together:

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

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

Amen.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Parliament is now called to order.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS OR AFFIRMATIONS

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Acting Deputy Governor, Hon. Eric Bush: I, Eric Bush, do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles III, His heirs and successors, according to Law. So help me God.

OATH FOR DUE EXECUTION OF OFFICE

Acting Deputy Governor, Hon. Eric Bush: I, Eric Bush, do swear that I will well and truly serve His Majesty King Charles III, His heirs and successors, and the people of the Cayman Islands in the Office of Ex Officio Member of Parliament. So help me God.

The Speaker: On behalf of this honourable House, I welcome the Honourable temporary ex officio Member and invite him to take his seat.

Please be seated.

READING BY THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF MESSAGES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Speaker: I have apologies from the Member for Red Bay for this sitting.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: None.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The Speaker: None.

URGENT QUESTIONS

The Speaker: None.

PREMIER'S QUESTIONS

The Speaker: None.

QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT

The Speaker: None.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT

The Speaker: I have received a request from the Premier to make a short statement and I have approved his statement.

Honourable Premier.

Honourable Premier Honorarium for Civil Servants, Seafarers, Pensioners and Long-Term Financial Assistance Recipients

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce, Elected Member for West Bay South: Good afternoon and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to announce a one-time honorarium of CI\$500 for civil servants, seafarers, pensioners and long-term financial assistance recipients. Throughout the year, the Cayman Islands civil servants and public servants provide the people of this country, as well as persons and institutions overseas who do business here, with incredible service that is becoming stronger and stronger as increasingly they live the principles of world-class service.

Specifically, during the first six months of this administration, they have worked hard, contributing significantly to the agenda for a stronger, fairer Cayman. Consider the pace at which they have facilitated the advancement of key legislation and implemented projects — they delivered results swiftly. Their professionalism, forward-thinking, and can-do approach has been a tremendous asset to the NCFC Government, resulting in strong performance overall.

For our beloved seafarers, pensioners and long-term financial assistance recipients, Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to boost their Christmas spirit during a time of economic challenges and to help them experience the joy of the holiday season.

The NCFC Government is delighted to have approved the honorarium, Mr. Speaker, and we thank the Acting Deputy Governor, the Portfolio of the Civil Service (PoCS) and the Ministry of Social Development for unanimously supporting these proposals. The civil service will provide details of the timing and details of distribution later this week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and God bless the people of the Cayman Islands.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

The Speaker: None.

OBITUARY AND OTHER CEREMONIAL SPEECHES

The Speaker: I have received a request from the Member for George Town Central to do an obituary.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town Central: Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

I want to say how delighted I am to have heard that quick announcement by the Premier, taking the recommendation by the Opposition through Finance Committee. We appreciate them listening to us and acting on good faith for good of the country.

The Speaker: Obituaries, obituaries, obituaries. We don't want no...

Mr. Hank McField

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer on behalf of myself, my constituency and on behalf of the Official Opposition, my condolences to the family of Mr. Hank McField who unfortunately passed away three days ago.

Mr. McField leaves behind his two daughters, his loving wife, a host of brothers and sisters, and many family members: cousins, uncles and aunts; and friends. He comes from a strong McField family. It was a hard-hitting blow to the McField community and I ask that everyone in the sound of my voice continues to pray for the family, particularly his wife and his two daughters as they go through these difficult times.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Member for Cayman Brac West.

Hon. Nickolas T. A. DaCosta, Minister of District Administration & Home Affairs, Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, just on behalf of the Premier and the entire NCFC Government, especially myself, I just want to echo the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's sentiments to the McField family on the passing of Mr. Hank McField.

For those who do not know, my personal assistant in the Ministry is Ms. Tamika McField, who is one of Mr. Hank's daughters, so we have definitely been feeling this loss as well. While I have only had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Mr. McField once since taking office, his being in this community will certainly be missed. The impact that he has had on many

lives, hearing the stories even in Caucus this week as we discussed, was truly special.

Just before coming to Parliament, we visited with Tamika and we gave her our best wishes. I know that we will continue to support each other, [along with] the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, certainly, as the representative for that constituency. With such a large family, the McField family, and their impact in George Town as a whole, they will continue to be supported.

Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity and on behalf of the entire Government, we offer condolences to the McField family. Thank you.

The Speaker: Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, Elected Member for Bodden Town East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to send my public condolences to the McField family on the passing of our schoolmate, Mr. Hank McField. His daughter Tamika [and] her sister; Mousie and Sue — I worked with Sue for 16 years at Cayman Airways. I know the family well. Hank was a quiet guy, good guy. I don't think anyone can say that they even saw him smoke or drink, he was just that type of guy. In school, no one could run the long distance like Hank, and Larry Seymour. He will be missed.

Thank you.

RAISING OF MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: None.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS

FIRST READINGS

SUBMARINE CABLE (TELECOMMUNICATIONS RESILIENCE) BILL, 2025

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

IMMIGRATION (TRANSITION) (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2025

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

SECOND READINGS

ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS TRIBUNAL BILL, 2025 (Withdrawn)

The Speaker: Honourable Attorney General.

The Attorney General, Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin: I thank you, Mr. Speaker; and good afternoon, colleagues.

Mr. Speaker and colleagues, remember that this Bill was given a first reading at a previous sitting. I am made to understand that some honourable Members might require some additional time to familiarise themselves with the provisions of the Bill, and as a result, I am moving a motion that the Bill be withdrawn and be brought back at a later date.

The Motion is that the Bill be withdrawn.

The Speaker: The Motion is that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal Bill, 2025 be withdrawn.

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

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Administrative Appeals Tribunal Bill, 2025 was withdrawn.

SUBMARINE CABLE (TELECOMMUNICATIONS RESILIENCE) BILL, 2025

The Speaker: Honourable Minister of Planning, Lands, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, Minister of Planning, Lands, Agriculture, Housing & Infrastructure, Elected Member for North Side: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I beg to move the Second Reading of the Submarine Cable (Telecommunications Resilience) Bill, 2025.

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

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to the table the Submarine Cable (Telecommunications Resilience) Bill, 2025. This is a focus Bill with a strong purpose and it speaks directly to the resilience and the future readiness of this country. The Bill establishes the legal foundation for the Cayman Islands to secure a new subsea telecommunication cable connection, a system designed to strengthen our digital backbone, improve redundancy, protect the network and support our people, our business and our economy.

Mr. Speaker, reliable connectivity is not a luxury, it is essential to public safety, to education, to businesses and the daily lives of the real people, real families and real communities across our island.

This legislation defines every part of the system, from the submarine cable to the landing station, to the beach manhole, to the fronthaul and the backhaul. It ensures that the entire system operates under strong regulatory oversight through the Information and Communication Technology Act (2019 Revision), the ICT Act; and the Utility Regulation and Competition Act (2024 Revision), the URC Act. It empowers Government to enter into an agreement with a qualified commercial partner. It requires that any such agreement contains protections for our country, describes the continuity of services and defines the handover provisions, proper risk allocations, and step-in rights so that the Cayman Islands will never be left vulnerable.

The Bill requires transparent selection through the Procurement Act and it requires financial discipline through the Public Management and Finance Act ensuring that any expenditure is fixed, authorised and tied to performance milestones.

I would like to talk about how this achievement is specified in the clauses.

Clause 1 of the Bill ensures that the legislation is immediately enacted to allow us to move forward promptly with this important work.

Clause 2 clarifies and defines the elements of the submarine cable system that this Bill addresses.

Clause 3 contains the key power the Government needs as the legal foundation for moving forward with this initiative. It also sets out the key safeguards that must be included in the partnership agreement to provide the nation with essential legal protections and to ensure the continuity of operations of the new critical national infrastructure through its life.

Clause 4 makes absolutely clear that the initiative will follow all procurement legislation and regulatory legislation, namely Information and Communication Technology Act (2019 Revision), the ICT Act; and the Utility Regulation and Competition Act, the URC Act.

Clause 5 addresses the special regulatory treatment of the assets made available to the initiative by the Government as part of the commercial agreement, requiring the commercial partners to assume the regulatory burden associated with these.

Clause 6 makes clear that the fixed financial contribution to be made by the Government to the contract of the commercial partner is made in accordance with the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision).

I should emphasise that this is a single fixed-phase contribution made during this project under the construction phase. No further payments to the partner are permitted. It's a once-and-for-all system expected to have a lifetime of 25 years. The Bill therefore provides a firm legal foundation for this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill completed the required 28-day public consultation, and the views received from the public, the industry and the stakeholders were taken into account. This is enabling the Bill. It does not

commit the Government to a specific route, it does not award the contract, it does not set the commercial terms; what it does is create the legal space for Cayman to move forward responsibly, strategically and with confidence and confidentiality.

It therefore provides the foundation for my Ministry and its expert technical advisors to seek out the very best that the telecommunication industry has to offer for our nation, to take advantage of the industry's knowledge, expertise and resources. This is an approach which will tap into investments already being made into the world class of connectivity and into the region by ensuring that the Cayman Islands are included into those plans.

This partnership approach will balance the costs, risks and benefits between the Government and the industry to deliver the best possible outcome for the people of the Cayman Islands. My Ministry has already held detailed discussions with many potential commercial partners to understand the market and the possibilities. We have also worked to develop a stringent set of requirements to ensure any solution is fit for purpose as a critical national infrastructure and to ensure that the Government's commercial partner will have the strength and stability to match the reliance that will be placed on them. All this will be done while working with the spirit of the telecommunications market in the Cayman Islands.

The approach we are taking is a proven one. It has been used extensively in the United Kingdom and Europe to bring the benefit of telecommunications and the internet to those who would otherwise be excluded, while at the same time achieving excellent value for the public investment.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is about resilience, national strength and preparing our Islands for the future. I hope I get full cooperation from all our colleagues to advance this legislation. This infrastructure that benefits every Member's constituency and every person who calls these Islands home.

This has been something that we have been working on for quite some time, even from the previous administration — I think it went through two administrations, maybe — and now we're here today putting in the legislation for the next step to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the Submarine Cable (Telecommunications Resilience) Bill, 2025 to this honourable House and I look forward, if I could say, [to] a swift passage.

Thank you.

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

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

I rise to say that the Official Opposition, having had some consultation with the Minister and his team,

have no real issue with the Submarine Cable (Telecommunications Resilience) Bill, 2025 and we look forward to hearing more details on the proposed project and the attached possible public-private partnership. Until then we reserve our right to comment on it but support the advancement of this important matter.

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

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Bodden Town East and I have discussed this Bill and we are basically in support.

We'd also like to thank the Minister for bringing this Bill, because we believe that large projects such as these should be brought to the House at a minimum for some kind of input. We have seen the disasters that have taken place with previous large projects, such as the ReGen, where we didn't quite get where we were supposed to get with it, but these kinds of Bills give everyone an opportunity to say what they need to say with regard to such a large project.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I do have some concerns, but it is not with the Bill; it is why we are here. When we look at the amount of revenue (data which is available to the public) that is generated by the ICT sector in Cayman... Just to put it in context, between 2023 and 2024 the ICT sector, as per information provided on OfReg's website, generated over CI\$300 million in revenues — that's over a 2-year period.

When we consider Mr. Speaker, that the Cayman Islands currently has two fibre optic cables that serve it, the Cayman-Jamaica fibre system that was commissioned in 1996 and the MAYA-1 cable that was commissioned in 2000, with both cables literally having a 25 year useful life, we are now in a situation where we have a financial industry, a tourism industry and everything else dependent on this international connectivity; and we are now at the end of 2025 with two sub-sea cables that are pretty much past their economic useful life.

Mr. Speaker, the question comes up, with all the money being made by the private sector entities in Cayman, why does the Government find themselves in a position where they need to drive this? I raise that to say that people have this tendency of always complaining that when Government does something it is inefficient or if Government gets involved, it is wrong. It is initiatives like these why the Government needs to get involved, because if the private sector don't see where they can make a profit from it, they basically don't want to do it. We are finding ourselves in the circle where we keep privatising profit and socialising losses.

Now you look across the globe, Mr. Speaker, the bulk of the subsea cables are now being built by Facebook, Amazon and different companies; it is not the telecoms companies.

There was a recent announcement where the MAYA-1 cable was being "upgraded" from its current capacity. Mr. Speaker, the new MAYA-1.2 will be running four terabits per second, and it's doubling the current two terabits per second that we have. Mr. Speaker, that is not something that we should be praising, and I'll tell you why. You're going to double to four terabits per second. Do you know what the new cables are running now, Mr. Speaker? Over 200 terabits per second.

Cables are now being upgraded to understand the amount of bandwidth that will be required for AI and everything else. Coming here and telling us that you're going to update something to four terabits per second as if that is supposed to make us excited, when all our competitors are running cables that are 100-200 terabits per second; it will still leave the Cayman Islands backward. This is the reason why we can't sit down and constantly trust the private sector to do what needs to be done for people and this is why the Government needs to step up and do it.

I'm really sorry that after all the hundreds of millions of dollars that the ICT sector made in Cayman — and I can tell you this from experience because in my previous life I worked for both Cable and Wireless and Digicel. I know their numbers. I know what they make, yet they refuse to invest in our country.

This is the reason why I sit down, Mr. Speaker, and as I said in the last Finance Committee, why we need to start looking at the RCAM [rate cap and adjustment mechanism] model like what CUC has, because these companies are making money hand over fist. You go to the same OfReg report and you see the amount of capital investment that is actually included, it is minimal compared to the amount of money that they are making. They have literally left the Cayman Islands behind in this technological race.

An Hon. Member: Because we allowed them.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: As my colleague just said, because we have allowed them to do so.

Mr. Minister, I am happy that you have brought this Bill. I am happy that we have a chance to discuss certain things with this Bill and I am really sorry that we have now found ourselves in a situation where the country is left with two submarine cables that have now passed their economic useful life and this is what we have to resort to.

However, Mr. Minister, I really hope you don't stop there. I hope we start looking at the other utilities that we need to get involved with.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something, the world is changing. In case anyone hasn't realised it, the world is changing. Earlier this year, a major event happened in the United States that has had little media attention. The US Government, outside of an emergency or a financial situation, went out and invested in four companies. Those four companies that they invested in were basically designed to future-proof the United

States from a national security standpoint. They decided that they needed to invest in minerals, energy, the internet, and microchips — four sectors. Bernie Sanders praised Donald Trump for doing it.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at China, who's now literally the global leader in this situation, 71 per cent of the Fortune 500 companies in China are state-owned; they're owned by the Chinese government. The US has now come to the realisation that American companies can no longer compete with those Chinese companies that literally have state resources, so in a time and age when people believe that privatisation is the way to go and private is everything else, we're now seeing government stepping in. The UK itself is struggling with the same issues now whereby they privatised many things in the seventies and eighties — now they realise that for national security purposes, some of those things needed to have been in the public domain. They needed to have some level of ownership by the public.

I am anxious to see what the final initiative will turn out [to be]. I am expecting good things. The Minister already has a track record of delivering, so I expect nothing less from him. I know he has a good team led by a good Chief Officer, so from that standpoint, I will be watching it closely to see where we end up with this.

For now, like I said, the country needs this submarine cable; it is something I campaigned on before — and you can remember, Mr. Speaker, that from 2017 we have been talking about the same issue, so it has been going on for too long now. If we look at when we started this process to where we are now, in all that time, the ICT sector would have made well over a billion dollars in revenues still leaving the Cayman Islands vulnerable and backward in this standpoint.

Mr. Speaker, I needed to get that off my chest. I wish the Minister luck, and whatever we can do to help on this side, we will help.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak?
The Member for George Town Central.

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

Just [to seek] clarity and request confirmation through the Minister for this Bill. First, you heard from our Honourable Leader where our support lies in respect of the Minister's intent with the Bill, but I'm standing on a procedural matter.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Government has to start mandating their practise with a provision which it has accepted is good practise — namely the cost factor for all legislation, Cabinet Paper approvals, and Bills that come to Parliament. What are the cost implications of implementing any such Bill or change? Whether it's nil or not, it should be outlined in the delivery of any Bill because most times it's not factored in. We've seen through the Public Accounts Committee that it's un-

budgeted and therefore causes irregularities from a funding perspective.

I just ask whether the Government has done that, this being the first Bill we are dealing with since I've been made aware of it as well as since the Public Accounts Committee brought as a matter of concern to the Government, through its Deputy Governor and Minister of Finance, the obligation to ensure that those cost factors are outlined within the Cabinet approval before coming to Parliament. Were those factors laid out, because they were not sent to Members; and I know the former Premier, the honourable Wayne Panton would know exactly what I'm speaking of in order for us to consider in the realm of the decision to support [the Bill] or not. Not suggesting that's the case here, but I think it is time for us to start practising that as we will shortly have another Bill before us for which I also recognise the implementation cost factors have not been offered in the submission to Parliament for Members to consider for approval within the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put that on record not only as a contribution to this Bill but as a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, for accountability of any legislation implementation and the cost factors it has on the country's overall governance. I hope the Government will register such and take it into consideration in all their future proposals and Bills, so we can appropriately deliberate on those factors. Even if it says nil, the contribution to the Hansards will protect the Government as well as inform the public as to the realities of any legislative changes to the country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Does the Mover of the Bill wish to exercise his right of reply?

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Minister.

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Official Opposition for their full support; my other Opposition, the Bodden Town twins — the East and the West for their full support. Taking on the Member for George Town Central's recommendations and hearing his concerns about the cost factors — when we go out to procurement, we will know better what those cost factors will look like and will be able to bring them back to put them into the final business case and then go into Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I want to promise the honourable House that I will keep it informed step by step as we continue to move along with the undersea cable because it's a large investment for the country and I know there is a great opportunity for us to get this done. I've

been working on it myself for almost four years now; I came and found it on the desk and I continued to push it along and we're here today and going to the final stages of it. I know my colleague for Bodden Town West is well versed in the telecommunication sector. Whenever I need to, I always call him to run something by him or to get his expertise, because I know it is one expertise in his wheelhouse.

I want to thank everyone for the full support. I want to thank the previous government I was with for their full support when we were pushing it forward; for not shelving it and just saying that it was started by the other government, because you know, sometimes new governments do have the opportunity to say, well, it was started by another government and they don't want to continue it. Everyone wants to do something over and have their own fingerprints all over it and say it's theirs.

As the Member for Bodden Town East likes to say, sometimes some people sow, some people water, some people reap. That's how this undersea cable legislation has been working, so I want to thank everyone again.

The Speaker: The question is that a Bill shortly entitled the Submarine Cable (Telecommunications Resilience) Bill, 2025 be given a second reading.

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

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Submarine Cable (Telecommunications Resilience) Bill, 2025 was given a second reading.

IMMIGRATION (TRANSITION) (AMENDMENT AND VALIDATION) BILL, 2025

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Caymanian Employment and Immigration.

Hon. Michael S. Myles, Minister of Caymanian Employment & Immigration, Elected Member for Prospect: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the Second Reading of a Bill entitled Immigration (Transition) (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2025.

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

Hon. Michael S. Myles: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today I'm proud to lay before you and the Members of this honourable House, the immigration reform Bill. It has been 15 years since meaningful immigration reform was passed; today we need common sense, the next step forward of this approach. This Bill is the first in a series of reforms to address the

injustices and inefficiencies experienced by our people and guest workers; the strains on the government systems and budgets, [and] the unnecessary hurdles and excessive time frames that businesses face in our immigration system.

This Bill is our opportunity to protect workers in our country, to create and enforce employment opportunities for our people at all levels to get a job and progress with priority. The Bill is our opportunity to close the loopholes used far too long by bad employers or workers looking to game our systems.

I would like to provide some context for our debate around the current reality, the case for reform, and why we must act now; how we have ensured a fair approach including public and private consultations, common objections and the cost of further inaction.

Eighty per cent of this Bill aligns with the White Paper submitted to Parliament in January 2025 by the previous government, 20 per cent of the Bill is comprised of new proposals to benefit our people. An example of this is the term limit for guest workers in the civil service. This alignment exists because our immigration challenges are not new. The solutions are neither new nor radical; they're just overdue.

The challenges of immigration are also not unique to Cayman. Across the globe, we are seeing countries struggle with the same impacts of unfettered immigration on their culture, employment, housing, infrastructure, laws, et cetera. Specifically comparing Cayman to the United Kingdom, when we look at the rate of growth of our Caymanian population, which in 2024 was approximately 40,000 people with a growth rate of 3.55 per cent, this is 11.83 times faster than the UK's growth rate of 0.3 per cent, and they have a population of nearly 70 million people, a much larger land mass, more infrastructure, and a much bigger revenue base from which to pay government services.

This growth rate caused so much alarm in the UK in May 2025, that they published their own immigration reform White Paper which can be found at <https://immigrationbarrister.co.uk/uk-immigration-rules-2025-white-paper-summary/>.

According to an article by Paul Richmond, Managing Director of the firm Richmond Chambers, a firm of immigration barristers, "**The UK government's White Paper Restoring Control over the Immigration System, presented to Parliament in May 2025, outlines the most sweeping changes to the UK's legal migration framework in over a decade. Framed as a response to record-high net migration and a perceived overreliance on international recruitment, the White Paper sets out a detailed and ambitious policy agenda aimed at reducing migration, tightening UK visa eligibility, and embedding migration policy within broader labour market, skills and integration strategies.**"

Based on our local and global challenges, it is apparent that it is time for reform. We cannot afford to delay this further.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: I am looking forward to meaningful debate, and I have no doubt that the Opposition will provide it today. Today, I hope that members of the Opposition will not delay its progress by abstaining from the vote when we have a solution available for immigration reform. Today, there is an opportunity to choose to work across the aisle for the betterment of our people, and to pass the Bill with “Yes” votes in unity for our country; and I look forward to that.

[Desk thumping and cross talk]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: Our current reality: Mr. Speaker, before we talk about where we're going, we must be honest about where we are. Today, we stand at a crossroads. Not the kind of crossroads that appears suddenly, no; this has been building for decades.

I'm speaking about the crossroads that every Caymanian has been shouting from their dinner tables, in their living rooms, at community meetings, and yes, on the campaign trail during the 2025 Election, when immigration was one of the biggest issues on the minds of our people. This reality is uncomfortable to acknowledge, but it's necessary if we're going to help our people. Successive administrations paid lip service to implementing a Workforce Development Plan to ensure that the current and future generations are provided with employment opportunities and have the necessary training and skills to climb the ladder of success.

We have grown the infrastructure of this country, Mr. Speaker, expanded the population rapidly with no plan, and celebrated economic growth; yet, Caymanians continue to be displaced, marginalised, discriminated against in our own labour market and successive Governments have seemingly consistently bent the knee to big business, granting millions of dollars in concessions in exchange for the false promise of trickle-down economics. Meanwhile, our immigration, labour and pension laws have been weakened in favour of higher fee revenue from the private sector.

Each budget year, tens of millions of dollars are poured into secondary and tertiary education yet our graduates still struggle to find meaningful employment in what is by all accounts a strong and thriving economy. The social consequences of imbalance are profound: families under strain, young people disillusioned, and communities fractured by inequality and dependency on the government for survival. I have countless stories from throughout my 35 years as a social worker, youth and family advocate, and a workforce development and employment readiness trainer to many of the most vulnerable Caymanians.

This picture, though, isn't just for those who struggle. This picture encompasses highly educated and experienced Caymanians. It encompasses business owners who want to do the right thing. It also encompasses the average Caymanians who, for far too

long, have felt lost in our own country. They felt like strangers in the land their grandparents built with their own hands. They have watched with growing fear and frustration as the promise of opportunity in our own homeland slipped further and further from their grasp and completely out of reach of their children and grandchildren. In my short nine months in office, I regularly receive phone calls, text messages, and emails to this effect — I know every Member of this House will be able to share similar experiences. While that sounds bleak, as Minister Nickolas DaCosta said throughout the 2025 CINP (Cayman Islands National Party) campaign: *Better days are coming.*

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: Today is an opportunity to start rebuilding the trust our people have in us as leaders. Caymanians are pleading, *who's looking out for us, who's protecting us, who is ensuring fairness in the labour market.*

Mr. Speaker, this Immigration Bill is our answer to the question. This is what the NCFC Government is saying: *We hear you, we see you, and we are acting on your behalf.*

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: The case for reform: Where do we go from here?

The Bill is not revolutionary in its content or approach. This exact effort has been campaigned upon by all sides during and after the 2025 Election. It has been the subject of many reports at significant expense. Let me be crystal clear: We know that immigration reform is not a one-size-fits-all solution or a quick fix. We know this immigration reform is not going to be the only change that is needed.

Education and training, as well as social and community development, are equally critical parts of the equation. I have full confidence that in the months ahead my colleague, the Minister of Education, will bring forward complementary reforms that will prepare our people, equip our workforce, and ensure that when opportunity knocks, Caymanians are ready to answer. This is about building a Cayman where every Caymanian — whether by birth, generational, married to a Caymanian, or having received Status through the Permanent Residence Point System — can fulfil their potential. Where prosperity is not for the privileged, reserved for some, but an opportunity available for all of us.

Here are a few areas where this immigration reform Bill will make a difference, Mr. Speaker. Businesses, particularly our small businesses, the backbone of our economy, struggle when they invest to employ someone on a work permit and pay to bring them from another country only to have that person leave within a few months to work somewhere else. They're

left spending money over and over again. This immigration reform creates accountability for the privilege of working in our Islands so that guest workers who do not want to engage in the job for which they have been hired will have to leave before seeking further employment. The cost of job hopping to businesses and the system is way too high.

The issue of capacity and the cultural fabric of our country is also impacted by permanent residents and Cayman Status grants. We have historical data on both sides, but let me share data with respect to the recent 10 years. From 2015 to 2025, Mr. Speaker, we've granted permanent residence across all types to 9,084 individuals — 4,025 individuals qualified through marriage to a Caymanian, and 2,971 individuals qualified through the point system, with the remaining 2,088 grants spread over the other pathways to PR (Permanent Residency).

Another shocking statistic is Caymanian Status grants. Between 2015 and 2025 we've granted Cayman Status to 7,098 persons. This breaks down as follows:

Right to be Caymanian on grounds of naturalisation:	2,629
Right to be Caymanian on grounds of marriage:	2,254
Right to be Caymanian by continuation at age 18:	1,674
Right to be Caymanian by continuation after age 18:	233
Right to be Caymanian as surviving spouse of a Caymanian:	29
Right to be Caymanian Governor in Cabinet:	22

In 2024 alone, Mr. Speaker, the status grants approved were 1,518 people. What this data suggests is that the Residency Certificates and the PR Point System are a major gateway to persons obtaining Cayman Status. A key element of this Bill is to ensure that through the annual declarations, individuals who are getting PR by marriage to a PR holder, or marriage to a Caymanian are doing so in a true marriage, not one of convenience and that such marriage stands the test of time throughout the period of PR and, in due course, Caymanian Status. Where the marriage is in question or dissolves, this Bill has provisions which give the Director and the Board the authority to investigate and revoke status when necessary.

PR by point system is governed by regulations, not legislation, and is under review with updates to be shared in the first quarter of 2026. Both Permanent Residency and the right to earn Cayman Status are important to our Islands, Mr. Speaker. We do want to continue to ensure that there's a path to stability, to residency, to citizenship; however, we cannot continue with the parameters as they are currently, as they are un-

sustainable for our infrastructure and are creating barriers for Caymanians to live and work in our own country.

Mr. Speaker, this reform is not just a smart policy — it is the right thing to do. Every government's first responsibility is to protect its people; not some of its people, not the loudest voices, all of us, and that means ensuring that Caymanians in our own country have a fair shot at building the best possible life. This is about dignity, this is about respect, [and] this is about saying that being born Caymanian or earning the right to call yourself Caymanian means something. It means that you are not pushed aside. It means that you will not be forgotten or overlooked or ignored.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: The economic argument: Let's talk brass tacks, Mr. Speaker, let's talk economics because this reform isn't just about being morally right. It's economically smart.

For Caymanians: Fairer opportunities for employment and advancement in our own country. Greater protection against persons who would take advantage of individuals. No more having to resubmit documentation for confirmation of status, streamlined and efficient, and being respectful.

For employers: Greater protection against job hopping that undermines investment in employees; more efficient processing of work permits; no more year-long waits and the provision of a reliable express service; greater clarity about what is expected in relation to employment and immigration; clearer rules and predictable outcomes.

For residents: More checks in place to ensure that people have the means to support themselves, more safeguards to ensure that our community welcomes people who want to contribute to our people and our culture and not exploit us.

For our society overall: More checks in place to ensure that we are welcoming people who want to be part of our communities for the right reasons; closing the loopholes and gaps for persons who are looking to shortcut and take advantage of the benefits that we offer; better data-sharing across government departments leading to more informed database decisions.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you a couple of real-life examples of the impact of not doing anything at all. I want to introduce you, Mr. Speaker, to a Caymanian young man I will call Sam. Sam is 47 years old. He is a father of two school-age children, a husband, and his family's main breadwinner. Sam is an Information Technology (IT) expert. He has about 15 years' experience, along with many certifications. Sam's position was made redundant eight months ago.

He has applied to over 70 jobs since being made redundant. No one has called him back despite him applying through the JobsCayman portal and being assigned an Employment Service Unit Officer.

Sam has spent all his savings and is unable to support his family. He's desperate to work and support his family. Sam feels shame, guilt, and he's angry. He feels abandoned by us. Sam told me he thought about ending his life and by the grace of God, he did not. He feels that he has failed his family and is less than a man. Out of desperation he applied for welfare benefits and is currently receiving welfare payments as an able-bodied Caymanian who wants to work. I'm pleased to be able to report to this honourable House that our Ministry has assisted Sam to find full-time employment in IT.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: I want to introduce you, Mr. Speaker, to Kylie.

Kylie is a young Caymanian who has a passion for serving others through medicine. She received a government scholarship for about 2.5 years which equalled about \$50,000 in investment in her. She attended Middle Tennessee State University and earned her Bachelor of Exercise Science degree. Upon graduation, she stayed in the US to sit her board exams and earn the prerequisite experience to become a fully certified registered nurse. While away, she fell in love and married her American partner.

Always wanting to return home, and cognisant of the commitment of her scholarship terms, Kylie and her husband made plans to return to Cayman in September 2024. Ahead of their move, Kylie applied for countless jobs at major health care facilities and private clinics. She received no reply from any of them. Through a family connection she was able to speak directly to a possible employer she had applied to, gaining an interview in November 2024, and securing a verbal offer in December 2024.

On that basis, her husband sought employment on the island in his field of work — IT. By contrast, he was contacted by several employees immediately and secured an offer to start in February of 2025, inclusive of a relocation package.

Despite Kylie's qualifications, contractual obligations to return home, her desire to return home, and a job offer, Kylie only received her approval to work from the Nursing Council a full year later, on October 10th, 2025 [through] what seems to have been based on a family connection who spoke directly to her employer. This scenario exists because our antiquated laws, our policies, required three years' experience for anyone with an overseas nursing licence. At one point it was suggested to Kylie that she should go back to the US, gain the experience and then return to Cayman.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Hon. Michael S. Myles: Mr. Speaker, imagine telling a young Caymanian that she cannot gain experience in her own country; making her jump through hoops for

more than a year knowing that she was on a scholarship with expectation to return home while her expat partner found a job to begin within three months. That is red tape at its finest and it drove Kylie away from her home country.

Thankfully, through a community connection, family support, innovation and determination on the part of her new employer and assistance from my colleague, the Honourable Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Minister of Health, we assisted Kylie through a system that does not prioritise Caymanians. Today, Kylie is working as a Registered Nurse and has a bright future with the goal of working in maternity care as a midwife. Minister Ebanks-Wilks is working to ensure that regulations are updated and the data-sharing provisions in the Immigration Law will ensure that we the government aren't the barrier to our own people's success in our country, but rather the conduit and the protector of their prosperity through planning.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: These aren't abstract policy problems. These are real people; real families facing real discrimination, real delays, and much despair. We should no longer allow time to pass in helping experienced Caymanians like Sam, and newly qualified Caymanians like Kylie, and the many more Caymanians like them. We must act now.

The cost of further inaction: Mr. Speaker, let's explore the cost of further inaction. What happens if we continue on this path and change nothing, not just for Sam and Kylie, but for our country as a whole? Why? Because we spend approximately \$39 million on tertiary scholarships each year to educate our people. We currently have approximately 1,800 students enrolled in tertiary education on government scholarships as of Fall 2025. The Department of Financial Assistance spends approximately \$60 million a year in welfare. The increased Ministry of Health Indigent Health Care Insurance is approximately \$75 million a year. If we continue on this path, we will have an overburdened infrastructure in public services; increased difficulty for Caymanians to access jobs, housing and land ownership, loss of cultural balance, and loss of our identity.

I reiterate that the rate of population growth, in particular the rate at which people are becoming permanent residents and the rate at which people are becoming Caymanian is simply financially unsustainable. Beyond the economics of this problem, we also have a socio-cultural problem. The answer is simple and devastating: We are losing our identity. We are losing our people, and we are losing the very soul of what makes us and makes these Islands our home. We cannot allow this to happen and no longer on our watch.

How do we address legitimate concerns? Even if we agree today that our reality is no longer acceptable, if we agree that there is a case for reform and we agree that there is a need to act now, there will still be

questions and legitimate concerns. Let me address head-on those I'm hearing most frequently, or urgently. They are in no particular order.

1. This will make Cayman unwelcoming to expatriates.

Response: Not at all. We still very much welcome the labour we need to fuel our economy. We have more jobs than we have Caymanians so we need labour, but mutual respect is required on both sides. To quote the distinguished Dr. Roy Bodden in a speech from June 2023: "Guest workers should never forget that they are guest workers in another person's country." [UNVERIFIED QUOTE]

We owe guest workers a fair immigration process, and we owe them safe and fair working conditions. We do not owe them a fast track to residency or a guarantee of the same privileges as our people. The policy changes and legislative amendments in the Bill are based on data and the Committee Stage Amendments are based on consultation and feedback, the data reviewed and feedback received from across our community support that these proposed changes are fair, necessary and long overdue. They are not changes intended to divide.

2. Businesses need flexibility to access labour quickly.

Response: And they will have it. I do not expect local businesses to hire Caymanians who are not capable of filling the roles. All I am asking is that the suitably qualified or experienced Caymanians are given a fair chance to be considered for jobs and that where the Caymanian's skills, experience, and qualifications line up with the role, as it is required within our current laws, they are given the priority to fill the role.

We're not stopping work permits. We're simply saying to apply for a work permit grant rather than clogging up the system using temporary permit applications for jobs that aren't temporary. Yes, we know that the onus is now on the government to dramatically improve the turnaround time for processing work permits. We know that we have to improve workflows. We have to automate and innovate and give businesses the evidence of an efficient, predictable turnaround on the work permit application which actually gives the businesses more stability and protection from job hopping concerns.

3. We need a balanced approach.

Mr. Speaker, this is a concern that I have heard frequently in the last few months from different arenas. It is one that comes across like a catchphrase because I have not heard it stated with any clear description of what balance means in this context nor have I heard it conveyed with any substantive solutions.

To ensure that we have struck the best possible balance, my team and I have thoughtfully and thoroughly engaged key stakeholders, including the public businesses across industries, including the Opposition.

For public consultation my team and I conducted three Town Hall meetings: one at Mary Miller

Hall, one at Layman E. Scott High School, and a third at the Craddock Ebanks Civic Centre for residents of North Side and East End. Attendance was modest but we did not stop there. We recorded two of the three presentations and made them publicly available on YouTube and social media so that anyone in our Islands could access them at any time. We also provided multiple channels for feedback through our website, phone lines, and email submissions. We're also on a number of radio and television interviews where the public could call in with their questions and get the answers from me or a member of our ministry's team.

Business consultation: I'm proud to say that we received valuable and constructive feedback from the business community; feedback that is helping us shape a better, more transparent and more efficient system for everyone who lives and works in these Islands. From day one, this Government committed to reengaging both the private and public sectors, breaking down the silos that have plagued us from receiving tangible feedback.

Over the past six months, the Ministry has hosted a series of eight stakeholder meetings on immigration reform. The stakeholder meetings were overwhelmingly attended by approximately 80-plus company representatives across every major employment sector — construction, retail, hospitality, finance, small business and professional services. Stakeholder groups included the board members from Cayman Islands Tourism Association, Cayman Finance, the Cayman Islands Society of Human Resources Professionals, the Small Business Association, Chamber of Commerce and representatives from legal and insurance industries, just to name a few.

Consultation with the Opposition: Our team held two sessions with the Leader of the Opposition and its members on October 27th and 31st to walk them through the proposed changes and seek their feedback. Our goal in all parts was to be transparent and collaborative, and we have used that feedback to shape and adjust this Bill as needed. For the avoidance of doubt, where balance is offside, my view is that it should always be grounded in fairness and legality in favour of our people, whether they are business owners or employees.

4. Jobs will disappear or companies will not be able to recruit.

Mr. Speaker, in 2024, according to the Cayman Islands General Registry, 8,928 companies either left our jurisdiction or closed their doors. It's nearly 9,000 companies ceasing operations. Michael Myles was not in power, and immigration was not on the table.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: There are many factors that businesses have shared during our stakeholder sessions that impact their decision to do business in Cayman, as well as their staffing complement on the island.

Many of these factors are beyond the scope of this Immigration Bill, like global regulatory changes, impacts in digitisation and AI, and cost of living, which impact our guest workers as well as Caymanians. If hiring Caymanians and protecting the pathway to citizenship means that some companies want to close shop or off-shore jobs, then I expect this will be as a result of many complex considerations and also, hopefully, conversations with the government.

My NCFC colleagues and I will work hard to grow the economy and create other jobs. Jobs with employers who respect our people and the necessity of our laws. I accept that this is not an exhaustive list of questions or concerns, but I also do not think that any of these concerns substantiate a position where we do not move forward with the Immigration Bill today. We cannot afford to do nothing anymore. Caymanians have to be more in a favourable position than they were yesterday and are going to be tomorrow.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: The vision: A Cayman that works for Caymanians and continues to support a diverse and growing, modern economy.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with you what my team and I think success looks like. Mr. Speaker, let me paint for you a different picture now, not the picture of where we are, but the picture of where we are going. What a more favourable position looks like.

Let's imagine a Cayman where Caymanians are given a fair opportunity to apply for and secure employment in our own country. Caymanians supply the important human capital to large and small businesses. Caymanians are the prized and sought-after employees. That Cayman as a thriving economy exist, where the labour force is prepared and ready to work; where guest workers are necessary for business, they are able to be hired without significant delays and within a fair and objective review process. A future in which the rules are clear, the application process is efficient and the decisions are fair and predictable. This immigration reform Bill 2025 advances all these goals.

The Bill: Mr. Speaker, the Bill is broken out into 37 clauses. I will now seek to outline the key amendments included in the Bill.

The first significant proposal, Mr. Speaker, relates to the renaming of the Immigration (Transition) Act (2022 Revision) to the Caymanian Protection Act.

Clause 2 amends section 1 of the principal Act by changing the short title. This change reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring immigration policies align with national interests.

Clause 3 amends section 2 of the principal Act by revising the definition for "worker" and introducing definitions of various terms including "civil servant", "commercial farmhand", "developed real estate" and paid-up [amount].

Clause 4 amends the principal Act by inserting after section 8 a proposed new section 8A. The proposed new section 8A provides that the following agencies shall, on request, supply the Director of WORC, or a relevant Board, with information that is necessary for the exercise of functions of the Director of WORC or the relevant Board:

- The Royal Cayman Islands Police Service;
- the Customs and Border Control Service;
- the Director of Public Prosecution;
- the Department of Community Rehabilitation;
- the Department of Children and Family Services;
- the Department of Financial Assistance;
- the Health Insurance Commission;
- the Health Services Authority;
- the Portfolio of the Civil Service;
- the Department of Commerce and Investment;
- the Scholarship Secretariat; and
- the Employment Services Unit at WORC

This requirement is in line with data protection legislation and is subject to certain specified exceptions.

Clause 5 amends section 11 of the principal Act as a consequence of the proposed new section 49A which provides for Certificates for Commercial Farmhands.

Currently, the Act allows for a Certificate for Specialist Caregiver but not a commercial farmhand. This clause establishes a new certificate category for the commercial farmhands to support sustainability and bolster food security efforts. The applicant would be required to:

1. Pay the prescribed fee, and
2. Provide proof of their employment with an agribusiness enterprise that is registered with the Department of Agriculture as a commercial agriculture producer.

Thereafter, such a certificate shall be renewable for a period of five years and can be issued a maximum of two times or until the applicant reaches the age of 65, whichever comes first, on application to the Board or the Director of WORC and upon payment of the prescribed fee if the determined criteria remains satisfied.

Clause 6 amends section 13 of the principal Act as a consequence of the proposed new section 49A which provides for Certificates for Commercial Farmhands. The clause provides that among the functions and powers of the Work Permit Board is the power to process, determine, and grant applications for commercial farmhands.

Clause 7 amends section 20 of the principal Act to delete the reference to appeals in respect of student visas, as student visas are dealt with under the Customs and Border Control Act (2024 Revision). The

clause also amends section 20 of the principal Act by introducing prescribed financial standing requirements that an appellant under that section with dependants must meet to be allowed to remain in the Islands by the Director of WORC.

Clause 8 amends section 21 of the principal Act the effect of which is provided for appeals to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal by persons who are aggrieved by decisions of the Director of WORC relating to —

- (a) the loss of Residency and Employment Rights Certificates (RERCs) under section 40 of the principal Act;
- (b) a Certificate for Commercial Farmhands under the proposed new section 49A; and
- (c) the revocation of permission to reside permanently in the Islands based on the Director of WORC coming to the conclusion that the relevant marriage is a marriage of convenience or the relevant civil partnership is a civil partnership of convenience.

Clause 9 amends section 26 of the principal Act, among other things, to provide for another mechanism by which a person who believes that that person possesses the right to be Caymanian under section 26(1)(b), that is, Caymanian as a right, to receive formal confirmation of Status from the Director of WORC without completing the application process. An example of this is when a parent who is Caymanian as of right formally applies to WORC to have their child acknowledged in order to have them enrolled in school, and in the process provides all the information to prove their own immigration status. They could then simultaneously request to receive their own confirmation that they are Caymanian.

Clause 10 amends section 28 of the principal Act to vary the length of time for which certain categories of persons have to be legally and ordinarily resident in the Islands in order to acquire the right to be Caymanian under that section.

Currently, persons naturalised under the British Nationality Act, 1981 must be legally and ordinarily resident in the Islands for 15 years and legally and ordinarily resident for five years after receipt of naturalisation before they are eligible to apply for the right to be Caymanian. Clause 10 lengthened this time frame requirement to state that the person must be legally and ordinarily resident for 20 years and legally and ordinarily resident for 10 years after the receipt of the certificate of naturalisation or registration.

Persons who are British Overseas Territory Citizens with connectivity to another overseas territory must be legally and ordinarily resident in the Islands for 15 years before they are eligible to apply for the right to be Caymanian. Clause 10 states that a British Overseas Territory Citizen with connectivity to another overseas territory may apply if they have been legally and ordinarily resident in the Islands for 20 years.

Finally, persons married to or in a civil partnership with a Caymanian must currently wait seven years before they can apply for the right to be Caymanian. Clause 10 extends this time frame to 15 years before they can apply for the right to be Caymanian.

Additionally, the clause amends section 28 of the principal Act to provide for the requirement for a person who is granted the right to be Caymanian to provide an annual declaration containing prescribed particulars in respect of the person granted the right to be Caymanian and the person's dependants. This declaration is to be completed on the anniversary of the date of the grant of the right to be Caymanian or the date that the board may specify. This obligation is proposed to last for a period of seven years after the person is granted the right to be Caymanian. Failure to provide the annual declaration is an offence and a ground for the revocation of the right to be Caymanian.

Additionally, clause 10 amends section 28 of the principal Act by introducing prescribed financial standing requirements for the surviving spouse or civil partner of a marriage or civil partnership who has dependants where the marriage or civil partnership has not subsisted for at least seven years as part of the person's application for the right to permanently reside in the Islands.

Clause 11 amends section 33 of the principal Act to provide that the holder of the right to be Caymanian by entitlement may lose that right where, after reaching the age of 18 years, the person resides outside of the Islands for a period of five years and the person fails to notify the Director of WORC accordingly.

It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that a Committee Stage Amendment has been drafted to delete clause 11B from the Bill as the Ministry was reminded, during the extensive consultation period, that the current section 33(1)(b) of the Act already provides for the ability to revoke the right to be Caymanian from persons who have obtained the right to be Caymanian after reaching the age of 18 should the holder ordinarily reside outside the Islands for a period of five years and can no longer be said to be settled in the Islands.

The clause also amends section 33 of the principal Act to provide that the right to be Caymanian through marriage or civil partnership with a Caymanian granted by the board may be revoked if the person fails to make the annual declaration required to proposed new section 28(6A).

Clause 12 amends section 36 of the principal Act to clarify that a person shall pay the relevant prescribed fees in respect of the person, the person's spouse or civil partner and a person's dependants for the grant and the continued approval of the right to reside permanently in the Islands.

Clause 13 amends section 37 of the principal Act to provide, among other things, that the spouse or a civil partner of a permanent resident may apply to the Board or the Director of WORC for an RERC which, if granted, will be for a period of 15 years. The clause also

provides that where the spouse or civil partner of a permanent resident who was granted an RERC continues to hold the RERC, the spouse or civil partner may, no more than one year prior to the end of a 15-year period, make an application to the Board or the Director of WORC, accompanied by the prescribed fee, for the RERC to be renewed indefinitely. Then, after holding the RERC that has been renewed indefinitely for a period of at least one year, the spouse or civil partner or a permanent resident in respect of whom the RERC is renewed indefinitely may apply for a certificate of naturalisation or registration issued under the British Nationality Act, 1981.

Mr. Speaker, since individuals become eligible for British Overseas Territories passport upon being naturalised, and this occurs before they apply for the right to be Caymanian, the intention is to create a better alignment between the point at which someone becomes naturalised and receives a Cayman passport and the point at which they obtain the right to be Caymanian.

Clause 13 also amends section 37 of the principal Act to provide that where a non-Caymanian civil servant is granted permanent residence, the non-Caymanian civil servant may work within any occupation in the civil service without the requirement for the RERC to be varied by the Board or the Director of WORC in order to specify that particular occupation.

Further, clause 13 amends section 37 of the principal Act to provide for the repeal of subsections (18) and (20). These provisions relate to the discretion of the Board or the Director of WORC to revoke the right of a spouse or civil partner to reside in the Cayman Islands on the death of the holder of the RERC or the dissolution of the holder's marriage or civil partnership. The repealed provisions have been amended and are proposed for insertion in section 40 of the principal Act by virtue of the amendments in clause 15, which relate to the loss of an RERC.

Clause 14, amends section 38 of the principal Act to make clear the entitlements and rights of the non-Caymanian spouse or civil partner of a Caymanian. Among other things, the clause sets out the steps to be taken by the non-Caymanian spouse or civil partner of a Caymanian in order that the spouse or civil partner may reside or be gainfully employed in the Cayman Islands. The spouse or civil partner of a Caymanian may apply to the Director of WORC or the Caymanian Status and Permanent Residency Board for permission to reside in the Islands and if the application is successful the Director of WORC or the Board, as the case may be, shall grant to the applicant an RERC which would be for 15 years.

Where the spouse or civil partner of a Caymanian who was granted an RERC continues to hold the RERC, the spouse or civil partner may, no more than one year prior to the end of the fifteen-year period, make an application to the Director of WORC or the

Board, accompanied by the prescribed fee, for the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate to be renewed indefinitely. Then, after holding the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate that has been renewed indefinitely for a period of at least one year, the spouse or civil partner of a Caymanian in respect of whom the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate is renewed indefinitely may apply for a certificate of naturalisation or registration issued under the British Nationality Act, 1981.

I'm tired too, just so you know.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: Clause 14 also provides that the spouse or civil partner may continue to work under the terms and conditions of a work permit until its expiration where a work permit is in effect on the date of the marriage or civil partnership.

Additionally, clause 14 provides that a person who is granted permanent residence under section 37 prior to entering into marriage or civil partnership with a Caymanian may apply for a Residency and Employment Rights Certificate under section 38 of the principal Act as the spouse or civil partner of a Caymanian.

Further, the clause amends section 38 of the principal Act to provide for the requirement for a holder of a Residency and Employment Rights Certificate issued under that section to provide annually a declaration containing prescribed particulars in respect of the holder, and the holder's dependants on the anniversary of the date of issue of the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate or the date that the Board or the Director of WORC may specify. Failure to provide the annual declaration is an offence and a ground for revocation of the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate.

Clause 15 amends section 20 *[sic]* of the principal Act to clarify that the rights of the holder of a Residency and Employment Rights Certificate who is the spouse or civil partner of a Caymanian or has obtained the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate as a result of marriage to or civil partnership with a holder of a Residency and Employment Rights Certificate may be revoked by the Board or the Director of WORC on a number of grounds.

These grounds include where —

- (a) the marriage or civil partnership with a Caymanian or the holder of a Residency and Employment Rights Certificate is dissolved or annulled after seven years but before fifteen years of the marriage or civil partnership taking place;
- (b) the holder of the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate ceases to be legally and ordinarily resident in the Cayman Islands;
- (c) the holder of the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate and the spouse or

civil partner are living apart under a decree of a competent court.

The clause also sets out the steps to be taken by an affected person to apply for a Residency and Employment Rights Certificate where the Board or the Director of WORC exercises the discretion to revoke the original Residency and Employment Rights Certificate.

Furthermore, clause 15 amends section 40 of the principal Act to clarify that where a person who is applying for a continuation of a Residency and Employment Rights Certificate on the basis that the person is or was the spouse of a Caymanian and that the person has a Caymanian child, the Caymanian child must be a child of both parties to the marriage or civil partnership with the Caymanian. The hope is that making this change will assist with discouraging the birth of children outside of a marriage or civil partnership with the sole intent of legally relying on the child as a reason to remain in the Islands.

The clause also amends section 40 of the principal Act to provide that where a person applies under section 40(2) for a continuation of the Residency and Employment Rights Certificate, the person shall provide the Board or the Director of WORC with proof —

- (a) of whether the person is able to support himself or herself, and whether the person meets the prescribed financial standing requirements to be able to support the Caymanian child and any other approved dependants;
- (b) that the person is financially supporting and contributing positively to the life of the person's Caymanian child and approved dependants;
- (c) that the person is of good character; and
- (d) that the person is in good health.

Clause 16 amends section 42 of the principal Act to provide that an applicant for a Certificate of Permanent Residence for Persons of Independent Means must satisfy the Director of WORC that at the time that the application is made the applicant has invested the prescribed sum in developed real estate in the Islands and the paid-up amount of the investment or the amount that has been paid toward the purchase price, mortgage principal or development cost by an applicant at the time of a relevant application and which is free from any outstanding financing obligations satisfies that prescribed sum.

The clause also amends section 42 of the principal Act to provide that a Certificate of Permanent Residence for Persons of Independent Means, if granted, will be for a period of ten years.

Further, the clause amends section 42 of the principal Act to provide that a Certificate of Permanent Residence for Persons of Independent Means may be renewed indefinitely at year nine, on application accompanied by the prescribed fee. Where the Certificate

of Permanent Residence for Persons of Independent Means is renewed indefinitely, after continuing to hold that Certificate for a period of at least one year, the holder of that Certificate may apply for a certificate of naturalisation or registration issued under the British Nationality Act, 1981.

Currently, a person holding this facility only has to wait five years before they are eligible to apply for naturalisation under the British Nationality Act, 1981.

Clause 17 amends section 47 of the principal Act to provide for a requirement that the holder of a Certificate of Direct Investment issued under section 47(3) provides an annual declaration in respect of the holder and the holder's dependants.

Clause 18 amends section 49 of the principal Act to include an age limit in the list of eligibility criteria for a Certificate of Specialist Caregivers.

The clause also amends section 49 of the principal Act to provide that such a Certificate may be renewed for one further period of five years.

Further, clause 18 amends section 49 of the principal Act to provide that a Certificate for Specialist Caregivers ceases to be valid on the holder of the Certificate attaining the age of sixty-five years.

Clause 19 amends the principal Act by inserting after section 49 proposed new section 49A which introduces a Certificate for Commercial Farmhands. A Certificate for Commercial Farmhands permits a person to work or continue to work with an employer at an agricultural enterprise named in the Certificate in the capacity of a commercial farmhand or in another capacity where the person is caring for a farm or cultivating land.

The proposed new section 49A provides that the employer or former employer of a person who is registered with the Department of Agriculture as the commercial agricultural producer may apply to the Director of WORC or the relevant Board for the grant or renewal of a Certificate for Commercial Farmhands in respect of that person.

Further, the proposed new section 49A provides that a Certificate for Commercial Farmhands ceases to be valid on the holder of the Certificate attaining the age of sixty-five years.

Clause 20 amends section 50 of the principal Act to provide for a requirement that the holder of a Residency Certificate (Substantial Business Presence) issued under section 50(3) provides an annual declaration in respect of the holder and the holder's dependants.

Clause 21 amends section 51 of the principal Act to introduce additional grounds on which a person's permission to reside permanently in the Islands may be revoked by the Board or the Director of WORC, including where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that a marriage or civil partnership is one of convenience or that the person is not financially supporting, or contributing positively to the life of, the person's Caymanian child.

Clause 22 amends section 52A of the principal Act as a consequence of the introduction of Certificates for Commercial Farmhands. The clause provides, among other things, that an employer or former employer who applies for a Certificate for Commercial Farmhands shall provide the Board or the Director of WORC with a vaccination certificate or other specified health information relating to the vaccination status of that employee or former employee.

Clause 23 amends the principal Act by inserting after section 52B proposed new section 52C. The proposed new section 52C provides that for the purposes of certain specified sections of the principal Act, the reference to “special circumstances” shall be taken to mean instances where the child remains involuntarily either wholly or substantially dependent on the holder of the relevant certificate as a result of a physical or mental disability.

Clause 24 amends section 53 of the principal Act to remove the exemption from the application of Part 7 of the principal Act that applied to persons employed by the Government of the Islands, as a consequence of the introduction of term limits in respect of non-Caymanian civil servants except for judges, magistrates and persons employed by the Parliament Management Commission.

Notwithstanding this, the clause also amends section 53 of the principal Act to identify those provisions under Part 7 which will not apply with respect to the employment of non-Caymanian civil servants.

Further, the clause amends section 53 of the principal Act to provide that an exemption of any person from the provisions under Part 7 may be unconditional or subject to conditions as may be determined by the Cabinet without the conditions having to be prescribed and published in the *Gazette*.

Clause 25 amends section 55 of the principal Act to make it clear that persons employed as civil servants may carry on gainful occupation in the Islands, including gainful occupation in respect of any restricted area of employment.

Clause 26 amends section 58 of the principal Act to make it mandatory for prospective employers, unless exempted by the Cabinet, the Board or the Director of WORC —

- (a) to pay the prescribed non-refundable fee to register a vacancy to which an application for a work permit relates for the vacancy to be posted on an electronic portal established and managed by WORC for a period of twenty-one days before the submission of the application; and
- (b) advertise the vacancy to which the application relates in a local newspaper or other prescribed media for a period of twenty-one days before the submission of the application.

The clause also amends section 58 of the principal Act to provide that among the matters that are to be taken into account in respect of an application for the grant or renewal of a work permit is whether the resources or the proposed salary of the worker, are able to support the worker and, if applicable, the worker's spouse or civil partner. Where there are dependants, it will also be taken into account whether the resources or the proposed salary meet the prescribed financial standing requirements to be able to support the dependants.

Clause 27 amends the principal Act by repealing and substituting section 64. The substituted section 64 provides that generally work permit holders are not permitted to change their employer within the first two years of the work permit being granted. This is subject to the exception where the person holding the work permit is a domestic helper seeking to be employed as a domestic helper by another employer or persons who have been made redundant within the first two years of the work permit. The clause further provides that unless the work permit holder satisfies the Director of WORC that there are certain prescribed circumstances which resulted in the work permit holder terminating employment within the first two years of the work permit granted, the former work permit holder shall leave the Islands for at least one year before any other prospective employer is able to apply for a work permit in respect of the person.

Clause 28 amends section 66 of the principal Act to, among other things, deal with non-Caymanian civil servants who become workers as a consequence of the introduction of term limits in respect of non-Caymanian civil servants.

Clause 28 also amends section 66 to assist with dealing with marriages of convenience amongst work permit holders. A new provision section 66(10)(a) has been inserted to clarify that should a work permit holder marry or enter into a civil partnership with a person who also is the holder of a work permit, the term limits for both persons will become that of the person who has the less time remaining until expiration of the term limit.

Clause 29 amends the principal Act by inserting proposed sections 66A, 66B and 66C.

The proposed section 66A provides that the Cabinet may make regulations exempting a class, or categories of a class, of workers from the term limit requirement under section 66.

The proposed section 66B provides for the introduction of term limits for non-Caymanian civil servants.

The proposed section 66C provides that where an exemption relating to the appointment or reappointment of a non-Caymanian as a civil servant is granted under the Public Service Management Act (2018 Revision), that exemption shall be treated as an exemption from the term limit requirement under proposed section 66B for the period of the exemption granted under the

Public Service Management Act (2018 Revision). Proposed section 66C also provides that where such an exemption is granted, the relevant appointing officer shall notify the Cabinet in writing of the exemption within thirty [working] days after the decision to grant the exemption is made.

Clause 30 amends section 67 of the principal Act to empower the Director of WORC, after consultation with the Minister, to prescribe, by notice published in the *Gazette*, the fee for a work permit or temporary work permit in a case where an occupation for which a work permit or temporary work permit is being sought is not prescribed. The fee prescribed by the Director of WORC shall not exceed the highest annual work permit fee prescribed under section 72(2)(f).

Clause 31 amends section 70 of the principal Act to provide that a marriage officer, a Registrar, a Civil Registrar or a civil partnership officer shall request prescribed information from the parties to an intended marriage or a marriage, or an intended civil partnership or a civil partnership for the purposes of determining whether there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that the marriage or civil partnership is one of convenience.

The clause also amends section 70 of the principal Act to provide that the failure to comply with any such request shall be taken into account by the marriage officer, Registrar, Civil Registrar or civil partnership officer, unless there are exceptional circumstances that have caused the non-compliance.

Clause 32 amends the principal Act by inserting proposed new section 71A. The proposed new section empowers the Director of WORC to re-issue certificates and provide duplicates of any licence or permit granted under the Act on the application by the person to whom the original was issued or granted and on the payment of the applicable fees.

Clause 33 amends section 72 of the principal Act to empower the Cabinet to make regulations to prescribe the information which may be requested in order to determine whether there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that a marriage or civil partnership is a marriage or civil partnership of convenience.

The clause also amends section 72 of the principal Act to provide at subsection (2)(f) that regulations may prescribe, among other things, the fees payable in respect of the reissue of a certificate or a document and the provision of any duplicate of a licence or permit. The clause provides further at proposed subsection (2)(fb) that regulations may provide for the refund, waiver or reduction of those fees and may prescribe the circumstances under which the fees may be refunded, waived or reduced.

Further, clause 33 amends section 72 of the principal Act, by way of the insertion of subsections (3) and (4).

Proposed subsection (3) provides that regulations made under the legislation may prescribe that the contravention of the regulations constitutes an offence

for which the person is liable on summary conviction, to a fine of twenty thousand dollars or to imprisonment for a term of two years, or to both.

Proposed subsection (4) provides that the power to make regulations under subsection (2) includes, among other things, the power to provide for such exceptions, limitations or conditions that the Cabinet considers necessary or expedient.

Clause 34 amends the principal Act by inserting after section 75 proposed new section 75A. The proposed new section provides for the offence of submitting false information concerning one's financial standing. The proposed new section also stipulates that the provision of false information in relation to one's financial standing is a ground for revocation of the relevant Certificate or work permit.

Clause 35 amends the principal Act by inserting after section 83 proposed new section 83A. The proposed new section 83A provides for various transitional matters as a consequence of the amendments proposed under the legislation.

Clause 36 provides for the validation of fees collected by and paid to the Director of WORC without statutory authority for the re-issuing of certificates or documents and for the provision of duplicates of licences and permits prior to the commencement of the relevant provision this legislation.

Clause 36 also provides for the validation of certain fines imposed by the court without statutory authority prior to the commencement of the relevant provision of this legislation.

Clause 37 provides that this legislation does not affect any order or determination made by a court relating to fees collected by and paid to the Director of WORC for the re-issuing of certificates or documents and for the provision of duplicates of licences and permits prior to the commencement of the relevant provision of this legislation.

Clause 37 also provides that this legislation does not affect any order or determination made by a court relating to fines imposed by the court on persons convicted of offences under regulations made under the principal Act prior to the commencement of the relevant provision of this legislation.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, honourable Members, my fellow Caymanians, we are no longer standing at the crossroads. The decision today is about putting politics aside, speaking truth to power, prioritising our people and having an unapologetic courage to do the right thing for our country.

We can continue down the road of abstaining from progress, overwhelmed systems and Caymanians feeling like strangers in our own country or we can choose a different path. We can choose the path of reform that inspires hope. We can choose the path of courage. We can choose the path that says, *our people matter, our people come first and our people deserve better*.

When I think about this Bill, Mr. Speaker, I think about every Caymanian who has ever been told that he or she was not qualified enough, wasn't experienced enough, wasn't connected enough. I think about parents who have been and are worried about their children's future. I think about every young person who has wondered if there's a place for him or her here in the land that our ancestors built.

Mr. Speaker and honourable Members, the work that the Ministry has begun is only the start. By modernising our immigration and labour systems, reforming our pensions legislation and strengthening the enforcement against abuses, we are laying the foundation for a more equitable, efficient and sustainable future for all Caymanians.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael S. Myles: These reforms are more than about policy. They are about ensuring that people have real opportunities to thrive, that our seniors can retire with dignity and that our Islands remain a place where our Caymanians feel seen and valued.

In the months ahead, we will continue to build on this foundation guided by the broad outcomes outlined in the Strategic Policy Statement and united in service to our people. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the work has already begun — no sleep for us — as the Ministry's team has been collating the comments received at the many stakeholder meetings, public consultations including consultations with the Official Opposition, as well as other groups and individuals who have offered a contribution, anticipating a successful outcome at this juncture. I have in my possession the first draft of the new Cabinet Paper which will seek support for drafting of the next round of immigration reforms. This will encompass suggestions and recommendations from our varied and diverse entities.

My Ministry is also working on the regulations, and so, in quarter one (Q1), we will be inviting Members of the Opposition to have the first look in the spirit of collaboration before progressing it to Cabinet.

The journey ahead will require commitment, collaboration and a continued vigilance, but I am confident that with the right measures, we can create systems that are both fair and effective and that truly put Caymanians first.

I therefore urge this honourable House to support these initiatives as together we build a stronger, more resilient Cayman for today and for generations to come. This Bill embodies our values, integrity, innovation, respect, responsibility, courage and cohesion. This Bill is evidence-based decision making.

Today, is the opportunity for every Member in this House to revolutionise politics, break the cycle of intentions and replace it with outcomes that serve our people. I know that Caymanians who collectively voted for us deserve action; they deserve protection, and they

deserve employment opportunities. The Bill is a response to the call for action we can no longer ignore. Our Caymanians, our guest workers, residents, and visitors deserve the best this country has to offer: unity, prosperity, and hope.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker; thank you, honourable Members, and thank you to the people of these beautiful Cayman Islands. This is for you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Member for George Town West.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker, Elected Member for George Town West: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to advise this honourable Parliament that I am not in a position to debate or vote on any amendments pertaining to the Immigration (Transition) (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2025 because of a business conflict; but I do want it noted that I commend the Minister and his team for working very diligently on these amendments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: So recorded in accordance with Standing Order 49(6).

Does any other Member wish to speak?
Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, James Baldwin once said that, **"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced"**. Mr. Speaker, I think that quote aptly captures both the Bill and the Government's determination to drive it through Parliament in the middle of the busy Christmas season. Perhaps, it is a good political move, Mr. Speaker; most people are too focused on the holiday season, wondering whether they will receive a bonus or a little more than a \$500 honorarium to help with the Christmas expenses rather than paying close attention to what we are doing in this honourable House.

For the record, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition has no objections to reforming immigration. All of us in this honourable House campaigned on it in one form or another; some in a more forceful, Trump-esque language, others in more measured and conservative terms. Either way, Mr. Speaker, we all agreed that updates to our laws were long overdue. The reality is that some in our community will breathe a sigh of relief and say the changes are not as drastic as originally feared. Others, however, will say that the Bill has not gone far enough and then, of course, there is a growing number of small Caymanian businesses that are deeply worried about their future because of the cumulative impact of recent policy shifts from the minimum wage increases

to higher fees to boost government revenues and the now fundamental changes to the immigration laws.

Mr. Speaker, while one can acknowledge that the Government has at least confronted the issue, the question remains, will the Bill before us today achieve what is intended or will the law of unintended consequences far outweigh the desired outcomes. It's often said, even in this House, that no piece of legislation is perfect, but as President Barack Obama once observed, **"A good compromise, a good piece of legislation, is like a good sentence; or a good piece of music. Everybody can recognise it. They say, '[Huh]. It works. It makes sense'."**

Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition had hoped that more time would have been given to properly review the 17 amendments before us, and while we thank the Government for circulating them yesterday afternoon, that simply was not enough time. Also, Mr. Speaker, many of those in the private sector who participated meaningfully during the consultation period have expressed that they were also looking forward to reviewing the amendments. I would go as far as to say, Mr. Speaker, that there were Members on the Government's own side who felt it would have been sensible to defer this Bill until January, but Mr. Speaker, the Government has the numbers and so the Bill will proceed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, before the rhetoric starts, before the speeches about who loves Cayman more and the history lessons and the casting of blame, I wish to reiterate clearly that the Official Opposition supports immigration reform and intends to be as cooperative as possible; however, 24 hours to review 17 amendments and their implications to such an important and critical Bill is simply not enough for us nor the general public.

Mr. Speaker, let me also state this plainly. Those on the other side may claim to love Cayman and its people as much as we do, but they cannot claim to love them more than we do. Our seating arrangements in these chambers have nothing to do with our love for our country, particularly for those of us who have been elected multiple times in succession.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to a few points of principal concern with the Bill and, in particular, to some of these amendments. The Government has presented this Bill as an exercise in modernisation and efficiency. The Opposition sees something very different. A Bill that expands executive power without adequate safeguards, introduces legal ambiguity, and bypasses proper public consultation, and elevates wealth above longstanding national contribution.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, we raise grave concerns with clause 4, which grants sweeping information sharing powers to the Director of WORC. This provision seems to contain no meaningful guardrails. It fails to define what information is necessary, from whom it may be obtained, or under what objective criteria. It opens the door to access highly sensitive data from agencies

such as the health services, children and family services, and the civil service without a clear conflict resolution mechanism, and without proper reconciliation with the Data Protection Act or the continual right to privacy. This is not balanced government, Mr. Speaker; it is, and could be considered, unchecked administrative intrusion.

Mr. Speaker, clause 9 which purports to address the Caymanian Status, creates confusion rather than clarity. The insertion of the words "where applicable" introduces unnecessary ambiguity into a section that was already precise. More troubling is the exclusion of Caymanians as of right from the acknowledgement framework. The law now appears to recognise a class of Caymanians whose status exists in theory, but may lack administrative recognition in practise. This is a dangerous legal gap and the Government has offered no coherent justification for it.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to a matter that strikes at the heart of parliamentary democracy itself. Clause 16 *[sic]* and the amendments to clause 10 introduce a substantive amendment at Committee Stage that was never part of the published Bill and never subjected to public consultation. This amendment affects the rights of persons entitled to Caymanian Status, [yet] the people of this country and, indeed, this Parliament were denied the opportunity to properly scrutinise it. Mr. Speaker, I ask: Since when do we legislate fundamental rights by surprise?

Of concern is the fact that this provision deals with, amongst other things, people who are Caymanian by entitlement and this amendment seems to want to curtail and put significant obstacles for such categories of persons to obtain their Caymanian Status. What is the Government trying to address in this, Mr. Speaker, as it does not look proportionate compared to what was there before?

Mr. Speaker, I'm also deeply troubled by clause 11 of the Committee Stage Amendments, which references a section 29(3) that does not exist in the current law. The 2022 Revision contains no such subsection; the 2025 Bill does not amend section 29, and the committee amendments do not create section 29(3) — so Mr. Speaker, this is not a minor drafting error. It introduces statutory uncertainty and undermines legal coherence, and if the Bill were to pass in its present form, it would invite confusion, litigation, and administrative paralysis. Another example of rushing these amendments through.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps one of the most profound and far-reaching concerns arises under section 42 which deals with permanent residency for persons of independent means.

Unless I am wrong, under these amendments, a person with a \$2 million investment may after 10 years, obtain permanent residency equivalent in the effect to Caymanian permanence followed by a pathway to British Overseas Territory Citizenship. The physical residency requirements remain unclear, and the long-

term demographic, political, and economic impacts have not been transparently assessed — but Mr. Speaker, what message does it send to our people? That money carries more weight than decades of service? That those who built this country through labour, sacrifice, and community are less valued than those who can purchase entry? This policy risks creating a two-tiered society, one for the globally mobile wealthy and one for everyone else.

It reminds me of a case I hope the government will help me out with. I'm already speaking to some of the civil servants about a young lady who grew up in Cayman; moved here as a baby, and when she approached 18, the gentleman she thought was her biological father had to do the paternity test, and it came back negative. Notwithstanding that when the young lady was younger, she had to have a bone marrow transplant and perhaps that could have thrown off the testing.

Needless to say, this is the only home she knows. She had 12 O' level passes: 11 at Grade I, and one at Grade II. She recently received the Department of Education Services, Cayman Islands Government Congratulations, for the John Gray High School's 2025 Regional CSEC Merit Scholar. Mr. Speaker, she is in school in Jamaica and her father will be going to court next week for her overstaying. If she had \$2 million it wouldn't be an issue.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to those of independent means, let us speak plainly. These residency by investment provisions are revenue mechanisms. They are quid pro quo arrangements, and while some beneficiaries may truly wish to make Cayman their home, many do not. They are tax mobile, jurisdiction mobile and globally unrooted; yet, this Bill accelerates their path to permanence while long-serving residents, including those married to Caymanians, face ever-narrowing routes to belonging.

Speaking of Caymanians, Mr. Speaker, I go to the introduction of the fees. The original explanatory note for clause 67 [sic] stated that the Amendment was to empower the Director of WORC, after consultation with the Minister, not the Cabinet, to prescribe, by notice published in the *Gazette*, the fee for a work permit or a temporary work permit in a case where an occupation for which the work permit or temporary work permit is being sought and is not prescribed. The fee prescribed by the Director of WORC shall not exceed the highest annual work permit fee prescribed under section 72(2)(f).

Mr. Speaker, it is highly unusual that the Minister would be the one setting the fees, but Mr. Speaker, that is just a technical aspect of this section; it is the Committee Stage Amendments that go beyond the original contemplation for the Amendment published in the Bill for public consultation, and has now added additional categories of fees. One could argue whether these [are] substantive changes and to what extent

they should have been put out for public consultation but nonetheless, here we are.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the new fees: application fees, work permit fees, and identification card fees, are simply revenue measures; and the concern with this provision is that the government has taken numerous bites off the same cherry at the expense of the ordinary Caymanian and local businesses to the extent where one must ask, is this unjust enrichment?

Mr. Speaker, we've always had a work permit fee which traditionally encapsulated the cost of the work permit and subsumes the administrative work carried out by the staff. Now we have a new application fee. Now we are saying there is a separate application fee, which we presume is the fee to cover the administrative costs of processing the application. This fee increased from \$100 to \$500. We also have the work permit fee, Mr. Speaker, so let us agree that the segregation of work permit fee is the fee for the privilege of obtaining a work permit, so let us call that, I guess, a royalty fee.

Then you have the identification card fee, Mr. Speaker. This is aimed at bringing back identification cards and we don't know at this time what the fee is, but the question I have to ask the government is: Will the fee be proportionate to the cost of taking the photo and printing the card; or is the proposed fee going to have any bearing on the cost of the card, or is it an inflated fee that is purely to generate revenue? A fee that is a revenue measure, as opposed to having a regulated identity card for work permit holders.

However, Mr. Speaker, it is the application fee and the work permit fee that are of most concern. The *Cayman Compass* article on 15th November, 2025 entitled "Anglin announces massive fee hikes" stated that **"the work permit admin fee increased to \$500 from \$100 while temporary work permit fees will increase by up to 200 per cent depending on the income band. Anglin said that the immigration fees are expected to earn an extra \$15.4 million in 2026 and [around] \$17 million in 2027."**

Mr. Speaker, we are a country of under 100,000 people with a work permit population of around 38,000. Again, that is as of December 2024 according to the *Cayman News Service* (CNS) report of March 31st, 2025 entitled, "Work permits climbed to almost 38k at end of 2024" but, Mr. Speaker, the question is: Who does the government think is paying these 38,000 work permit fees? In deciding to hike these fees to what could be considered nose-bleed levels... What data analysis has the Government undertaken to advise the various demographics of the Cayman population how these fees will impact them?

I would ask the Government a few questions. How many individual persons' work permit applications were made in 2024? How many Caymanians made work permit applications in 2024? How many small or micro local businesses in Cayman applied for work permits in 2024; and in comparison, Mr. Speaker, how

many medium-sized businesses applied for work permits in 2024 and how many large-sized businesses applied for work permits in 2024? Mr. Speaker, we feel these are important statistics to publish by the government to allow everyone to see the landscape of fees and how they will trickle down in the economy because at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the majority of the work permits are from Caymanians or Cayman businesses.

Mr. Speaker, many are concerned, and I have received numerous messages from persons wondering how they will make it next year. Local restaurants who claim they will have to increase the hamburger to \$15 or \$20; concerns of minimum wage, which we all appreciate it had to go up, but as well as increasing their liquor licence, increasing the work permit applications, increase in the administrative fee for the work permit applications or any amendments to the work permits...

These are troubling questions our small and medium-sized businesses have. Yes, the hotels can manage it. Yes, the law firms can manage it. Yes, the accounting firms can manage it — but once again, like in our budget, Mr. Speaker, where is the relief for our small and medium-sized Caymanian businesses? Like in our budget, Mr. Speaker, where is the relief for Caymanians? Show me where these fee increases are going to put Caymanians at work. Show me where these fee increases are going to help support small and micro businesses.

In the absence of any mention of exemptions, Mr. Speaker, show me where these fee increases are going to help the average Caymanian family trying to survive, who are working long hours and require assistance at home. How will they survive the minimum wage increase? How will they survive the \$600 driver's licence fee? How will they survive the \$500 administration fee? How will they survive the increase in the work permit? These are the questions we want answered.

Mr. Speaker, I won't belabour the situation. As I said, the Government has the numbers and they will advance the Bill as they please, but what we see — certainly what I see — across this Bill, is a clear pattern where power is expanded without sufficient restraint, where rights are reshaped without proper consultation... because I will ask the Government: Was there a human rights analysis done on the provisions of the Bill? Legal clarity sacrificed for administrative convenience, Mr. Speaker, and wealth elevated above contribution.

Mr. Speaker, I often said I wish that this Bill had come out as a White Paper first. Then, after the hard work the Minister and his team did in the consultation period, become a Bill we could all have time to review and digest, because Mr. Speaker, I don't think this legislation is ready; I think it is rushed, it is internally inconsistent, procedurally tainted and socially divisive.

Mr. Speaker, immigration reform in this country should not only be efficient but also lawful, fair, and genuinely Caymanian in its priorities. Again, I want to

support this Bill, however, I'm afraid that many aspects of it will not stand up to legal scrutiny. I am afraid some aspects of the Bill will have a negative effect on Caymanian families and Caymanian small and micro businesses so, Mr. Speaker, I will listen intently to other Members and their contributions and look forward to the response from the Honourable Minister at the end of it all.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and may God bless these three Cayman Islands.

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

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Speaker, many people or many Members are hesitant to speak on the Immigration (Transition) (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2025. I will start by saying good evening to my colleagues in this House, listeners by way of television or radio, YouTube, Facebook.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this is probably my first speech in the Opposition, as I've always been on the Government side when having to do so. I don't think it's that dangerous to have me on my feet; nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I am here representing the good people of Bodden Town East and the entire Cayman Islands. I am committed, Mr. Speaker, to continue being the voice of the voiceless and the face of the faceless. Mr. Speaker, without my Bodden Town East constituents, my "spoke" wouldn't have been possible today. I pray that my contribution is more helpful than hurtful.

Mr. Speaker, most of the times when MPs or Members of this honourable House start writing, they end up with two different speeches. It depends on the mood of the day. This is my first speech and—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: —English was my strong suit in school.

Mr. Speaker, we are here to debate this Immigration [Bill] presented to this honourable House and everything is game in an immigration debate, or as far as you'll allow me. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that very few countries have operated without immigration and as a small country with a small cohort of politicians, I've decided that this country is too precious for me to play games; to toy with the status quo and opposing for opposing sake.

I was the former Minister who put out the White Paper and as the current Honourable Minister rightly said, much of what's in this, some 80 per cent, was there when he got there; but there is a reason you put out a White Paper — to outline official policy, propose legislation, seek debate and input looking to solve complex problems. The main thing is to get feedback to ensure that you understand the magnitude of the problem as much as possible, and how to attack it.

I mentioned there are very few countries that operate without immigration. I will give context.

Out of 186 countries, Mr. Speaker, three countries stand out. The number one country in the world is Guyana — the only country in the world that achieves full food self-sufficiency across all the seven major food groups. Though little to no imports are needed in this area, Mr. Speaker, Guyana still needs to employ [from] outside with some 14,000 work permits. One of the other two countries that meet six of the seven major food groups, China still has to employ 845,000 work permits and Vietnam 100,000 work permits — so what do we produce to make ourselves so self-sufficient that when some of us speak it appears we don't need the world? Although I know that the Agriculture Minister is trying his best with food security and is very serious about making this a reality, at present, you can't pretend we do not need the outside world.

I think we can all agree on these thought-provoking but true words — [and] I must state, Mr. Speaker, I am not in the business of hate: *We can be hateful or we can be grateful*. I will mention, for example, there are two ways to serve food. You can place it down in front of a person, or you can fling the plate at the person and scream, “eat!” Two ways of serving, but one will definitely go down better. I am sure about this, Mr. Speaker, and we ought to be careful, as elected politicians, how we serve our words.

Now, I've never heard anyone say when they get elected, that they want to remain in politics forever, but for the ones who are gratefully returned every cycle, we need to ensure that the words we serve don't hurt the ones who still have an interest in continuing to serve in this dog-eat-dog profession. Some may say who or what you are alluding to.

No, I say it's for all of us to be responsible, even through our own dislikes or abominate attitude when we are representing this country. This is not 50 years ago, with no internet. Now we have a machinery that moves faster than wildfires and can destroy all that we built in a second. I am sure we want to build on what we started and to always ensure that Caymanians benefit in the most meaningful way from what we create. We can't rule with hate; transient workers are people we need. Hatred brings all the things that you dream would never happen, and I definitely agree, we need to slow it down in all areas, but we need to fully understand and study what slow it down means.

I'll tell you a story, Mr. Speaker. When baboons and monkeys heard that the farmers who used to chase them from the cornfield had died, they celebrated with joy, but the next year there was no corn at all. Mr. Speaker, that's when they painfully realised the farmer they thought was their enemy was actually the farmer who grew their food. People may not understand the value of your actions today, but they will recognise your importance when you are no longer around.

Mr. Speaker, I want this Government — and this is my government and all of our government — to

succeed at all times; because we are not sitting over there is not enough for us to be argumentative and jostling all day long for some space with the notion of trying to be the next Agrippa. Not me, Mr. Speaker, but we need to discuss some thought-provoking things that, just in case we are going down the wrong road, we can quickly amend as nothing is ever perfect, but we all have good intentions, I believe. I pray I am correct on this, Mr. Speaker.

These Islands that once were forgotten in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, tucked away between two of the region's largest islands, just discovered 522 years ago as low-lying Islands, and only formalised our English control in 1670, via the Madrid Treaty along with Jamaica — and I am glad I mentioned that and I'll come back to it — only settled in 1730, some 295 years ago, and became the dependency of Jamaica and administered by an appointed Commissioner 162 years ago, but administered some 96 years by Jamaica and only adopted a Constitution in 1959. This small place, this gem, this beloved isle, this God-blessed place that most who come here do not want to leave. What a place. Thank God for your many blessings, and for leading our forefathers and mothers to instil prayer, love and faith in our people so we can reap the benefits for years to come.

My public thanks to our Government who responded to the Jamaican crisis caused by the hurricane that didn't want to leave named, Melissa. You responded quickly bearing great gifts and the world saw the display of leadership from an Honourable Premier from this little, tiny speck of a dot who practised what we preach from the Bible in Mark 12:31; and the commandment, *love your neighbour as yourself*, which is the second of two of the greatest commandments, as it comes directly after *loving God with all your being*. This command calls to act with kindness, compassion, and generosity towards others similar to how you would act towards yourself and is often linked to the golden rule that you know so well: treat others as you wish to be treated. Thanks to the Government.

Mr. Speaker, some would suggest not to trust us as politicians. **“Politicians are the same all over,”** Nikita Khrushchev said, **“they promise to build a bridge even when there is no river”**; and just like the wolf that told a flock of sheep, if he got elected, he would become a vegetarian, too. Yes, these sentiments are out there, but we need to do our best to still ride on the tide of that good old Caymanian politics where we always try to be true and deliver for our people.

Mr. Speaker, this leads me to speak about our dying culture and heritage that needs a fighting chance. Our forefathers must be turning over in their graves to know the great relationships we have forged with many visitors, transient workers, their children who attended our same schools, and transient workers who came here to help build this country and care for our children; and the great relationship we still hold with them and — oh, how things have changed, where it appears like it's

them against us and the appearance that a professional transient worker can come here and retire in a short period, while our own Caymanian professionals have to work like a dog until they're dragging.

Mr. Speaker, before I go any further I ask: what is the real white elephant in the room; because somehow, only some, Mr. Speaker, some of our people, our own Caymanians, think that if we eradicated every foreigner, Cayman would be just fine [like] in the good old days. That very same comment, Mr. Speaker, "good old days" is causing some of our problems. While yes, they were good days, and you and I loved them, they are never coming back, my friends, they are not. The mosquitoes, the smoke pots, the outside toilets, are not coming back and not many of us would want it and with every step of progress, there is the possible eradication of one's culture, but who is to blame for this, Mr. Speaker?

We have to accept some responsibility and take some blame as we control the movements of people in this country, but we have some mentalities where we dislike each other too much. We can't dislike each other and then expect to work with each other for the good of this country. We need to start practising loving our own people first, before we can fix our own problems. Speak to staff and see where the most miserable HR managers are from — right here. Speak to staff and ask them which HR managers tried to elevate them in the company — foreigners. Speak to staff and see who are more likely to try kissing up their foreign bosses to receive big bonuses at the end of the year. Is it our own people, I ask?

Mr. Speaker, yes, we do have a culture that has been set by those bad-intentioned persons who come here with one thing on their minds: to make a bunch of money, retire early, bragging to the world. Mr. Speaker, many of our managers fall right in the trap because they are scared to lose their bonus or sometimes jobs, and continue being nice employees following Massa's plan. Too many Caymanians are still sitting on the porch and we expect to come in here and pound the heavy maul, not even a hammer, a maul, and everyone else is the problem beside us. We have displayed some irresponsible behaviour towards each other, and we should be practising 1 Thessalonians 5:11, **"Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up."** We have to all work together for the benefit of all of us Caymanians.

Mr. Speaker, most of what is being presented is what all of us want. Stop people taking advantage of our men and women and using us for convenience. No one wants that, but who is marrying whom? And are we now deciding who loves who? We don't get into that business. It's a tough job we have here, but Caymanians have been marrying foreigners for over 100 years and there is not much we can do about that, but ensure it is a decent time set for when citizenship can be claimed. Even if married, ensuring it is a fit and proper marriage, and if we are saying that's fine, then we need

to ensure if you're in love and want to remain together, that means you can wait a bit, but Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure persons who are here married can work and operate to assist their families.

If it's about us growing too fast as a country, I think we're all on the same page. What are the effects of its slowing? Have we done a study? Will this kill Caymanians in the rental business market and then turn them towards financial assistance needs? Have we forgotten the pandemic, Mr. Speaker? Working from home, working from far, working from anywhere? Do they need to come here, is the question?

Are we repeating the honourable [Sir Lynden Oscar] Pindling's mistakes? How did it work for our neighbours — or did it work? Throw-everyone-out mentality and where is the money, who has it? We ought to know that we are right in many of our assumptions, but are we creating further problems? Did we contact our stakeholders and did we do our economic impact studies? These are questions we need to ask ourselves, Mr. Speaker.

What people will be bold enough to say to me, they will not to you, because they feel some don't care and there's an old adage, Mr. Speaker: *No one cares to know what you know until they know that you care.*

Mr. Speaker, we see what's happening around the world. The great USA and the UK itself are having immigration problems. Yes, they were very liberal and it's now caught up with them and now everyone wants quick actions; and how does this happen when we are dealing with people and courts, so I agree we have to take stock now, but we must also recognise we are not them nor have the latitude that they have.

I want to touch on companies and Caymanian employment. We have what I call a good problem in having more jobs than we have Caymanians. This in itself brings its problems, but we will ask for companies to do their civic duty; to ensure our Caymanians are getting the necessary training that whichever Caymanian wants to work they can do so. The government can't afford it alone; we need the private sector's partnership.

Yes, we know, we have some companies who refuse to hire Caymanians; also refuse to hire additional staff, which is causing immense stress for our mothers, in particular, who have to work late evenings leaving their children unattended, all because it's impolite, and you're not being a good team player by leaving on time at 5 p.m. as assigned. It is an immoral act to do so, and you are frowned upon. I heard about it; I see the pain and frustration on these parents' faces. In my belief, it is for some of those partners to collect as much end-of-year bonus as possible. If that's not correct, they need to educate me on why.

Mr. Speaker, I will preface this about civil servants by saying that I have not spoken to my good friend, the Deputy Governor, about it, but I know he will investigate. I get to understand, Mr. Speaker, there are non-Caymanians in certain departments of the civil service

who are over 72 years old and still working in government, but that was not the part I was most concerned about because sometimes these mature workers are your best. As I understand it, the person is given extended contracts and allowed to draft their own job descriptions, taking away responsibilities from Caymanians. If this is so, Mr. Speaker, we need to start there. These are the things, my good friend, that I pray are not happening that will need to be nipped in the bud immediately. Talk to the staff; they have much to say, but I always tell them, always try your best to balance all.

Mr. Speaker, we all need some growth. Growth is the most important goal of any government. There is always some talk of degrowth and managed retreat. It's an academic fiction elites and globalists love to discuss. It works in theory, but not in practice. Growth pays for everything: security, health care, education, environmental protection — everything. I believe Government should switch the incentives away from investing in property to investing in people. The property market is going very well, it doesn't need any further government initiatives for growth. Cayman has done a great job of creating Caymanian employees, but to continue to thrive, our government needs to focus on creating Caymanian employers. You can't love the employee and hate the employer, because the most important thing you can give someone is a job.

Caymanians who can create jobs for other Caymanians. Many talented Caymanians can create jobs, but lack access to capital. Economic growth requires both labour and capital. Caymanians have the labour, but don't have access to capital because banks don't lend to new businesses. The immigration reform should change the incentives away from investing in property to investing in people. For example, Caymanian entrepreneurs employing Caymanians, the more the merrier, the more jobs, the more points towards becoming Caymanians. Also, companies who employ Caymanians are the ones prioritised to get work permits or along these lines.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Government in whatever they do, do not do it with hate. Embrace prosperity or we can reap poverty. I remember an old African proverb whereby out of hatred for the cockroach, Mr. Speaker, the ants voted for the insecticide. You know what happened? They all died, including the house flies who didn't even vote. It serves as a cautionary tale about how hatred clouds judgment leading to choices with devastating unintended consequences for all members of the community not just the intended target.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it's not the needy in the world that's the problem; it's the greedy. Mr. Speaker, I have seen the problem that we have with Caymanians not working in certain areas *en masse*. I was involved in a scene where tourists who came to Cayman were quite disappointed they hadn't met a local. I had tourists at a hotel once, who, upon hearing I was a Caymanian ran up to me and wanted to hear my accent, which I don't apologise for.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: The local colloquial.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: I was alarmed at how they had been here for five days and hadn't met a local and proceeded in a jovial manner.

The Speaker: Member for Bodden Town East, is this a convenient time to take a break because the Standing Orders require that we suspend for 30 minutes at 5 o'clock?

The House is suspended until 5:30pm.

Proceedings suspended at 5:01pm

Proceedings resumed at 5:30pm

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Member for Bodden Town East, continuing.

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

I will continue with my presentation on the Immigration (Transition) (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2025. Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I had an experience at a local hotel, at the Kimpton actually, where tourists, upon hearing I was a local Caymanian, ran up to me and wanted to hear my accent. I was alarmed that they had been here for five days and didn't meet one local. They proceeded in a jovial manner, Mr. Speaker, to touch me to see if I was real. I kid you not; so I definitely understand we need to get this under control.

Who are we to blame for that? Fifty years ago, our forefathers worked in that industry, but when the banks came everyone wanted to dress up in a necktie and pretty clothes and our very parents didn't want us to work in those industries. *Go be a lawyer or an accountant*, they said. My good old friend, Mr. Deputy Premier, tourism minister; and my good old brother, the Minister of Culture need to work together as they do now and build on what is in place, create programmes and find a way to ensure that persons arriving here meet a local — and not only at the airport for 10 seconds and a smile, but in their whereabouts on these lovely Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognise that in the Honourable Minister's presentation, he spoke about the story of Sam. Mr. Speaker, Sam is very real. I know a lot of Sams and Samanthas, but it was very impactful.

I want to say this for the listening public. When a Bill comes to Parliament, it is brought by the relevant Minister, but not every item that is in that Bill is sent to Cabinet by that Minister or Ministry. Caucus weighs in very heavily and every Member has input on what is actually sent back from the Ministry to Cabinet. Some people may look at the Minister because the Minister is

bringing this amendment and validation, but every Member of Caucus has input into what the finished product is that comes down to Parliament. I say that because people need to understand how the business of politics and government works when they see a Bill arrive here at Parliament and it's being debated.

What comes from the Ministry is what the Minister and the Ministry agree on, which is sent then to Caucus, debated, discussed and then amendments go back. The Minister is charged then with things, whether he agrees or not; that is what the whole Caucus voted on to send back to the Ministry to be formalised, to be sent back to Cabinet. I wanted to mention that.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister mentioned something about 8,000 companies that departed Cayman, and I was baffled to know where these 8,000 companies were and who they employed, because we only have 1,000 people unemployed, so I guess many of these companies had no one working for them.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about immigration. Our seamen left these Islands in search of work and opportunities we didn't have, and the money they sent home was not Caymanian money, it was money from a foreign land. Lest we forget. Yes, I am as pro-Caymanian as you can get, but the commonsensical approach is that we need to be forever grateful. I know the Parliament will call me and ask me how to spell that word. We need to be forever grateful as [that is how] we built this country, and the women stayed behind, fed our children and schooled them.

When we hear Caymanians make mention of *who we are building for* or *too many people are here*, we need to appreciate that we have grown faster than any other country in the world. [This is] not necessarily a bad problem, but is still stressful for those who call Cayman home. Now, how we do this? I don't fully know, Mr. Speaker, but our people are asking for us to slow things down. I agree with them wholeheartedly because we are losing grip as the majority of the minority, and it is worrying.

If you have come here, please try to inculcate yourself in the local community, as staying here may very well depend on this social spirit. Some of our expats feel empowered and need to be put in check. I've seen that personally. I hope the LLCs [sic] are dead. Find yourself a Caymanian. Yes, if our actions are completely wrong, the chickens will come home to roost.

Are we thinking deeply about AI [artificial intelligence], Mr. Speaker? We know it is coming. We should have seen this from the pandemic. We still have Caymanians overseas five years roaming around, still working and being paid. No need to be in Cayman. Amazon, cutting 14,000 jobs; Target, Google, cutting 30,000 jobs, all because of AI. Will people need to come here, Mr. Speaker? We shall see, but we can't stop the coming.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues, we did have some good people who came to this island, and I think most would agree.

Does anyone remember a gentleman named Haym Salomon? A Jewish immigrant from Poland who arrived in the USA in 1775, he loaned a new-born nation, the United States of America, \$650,000 to survive its darkest hour. In 1781 the continental army was starving, soldiers were deserting, Congress couldn't pay its own members. General George Washington sent an urgent message to Congress — without money for food, clothing and ammunition, the war is lost. Congress had no money, the States had no money, and the French allies were hesitant. That's when Robert Morris turned to a Jewish immigrant from Poland named Haym Salomon. Revolution requires someone to do the math, balance the books and find money that isn't there. Haym Salomon did that math, and when the numbers didn't add up, he wrote a cheque himself. An immigrant!

America never paid him back, but America wouldn't exist without him. He gave everything for a country that would forget his name. He died penniless so a nation could be born free. He repaired it at great cost.

Mr. Speaker, then there was a man named Dutty Boukman who was brought to Jamaica as a slave. He was a maroon and was considered Jamaican. He eventually ended up in Haiti where he became the leader of the maroons and served as a catalyst of the 1791 revolt in the Haitian Revolution. You know what the revolution was named? Bois Caïman. I like history. He provided the crucial spark and leadership for the enslaved people to begin their fight for freedom, which ultimately led to Haiti becoming the first free black Republic — an immigrant. This led to Haiti's independence..

I'm sure you don't want me to bore you to death with the story of Florence Nightingale, who went to Crimea.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's a lot of stress. What we do...we certainly don't want to do what the soca artist Ravi says in the chorus of his song *Prescription*, just to relieve stress — you all will have to Google that — but we have to continue fighting.

Mr. Speaker, speaking about growth, which every country needs. As the subject matter about immigration, we need it, but we have to manage and monitor closely. We have to protect our people at all costs.

Let me just tell you about a study done. This is food for thought. I'm an Independent Opposition [Member]. That's where I sit now. Food for thought is best to help us make the right decisions. This is food for thought. It was a true experiment done that still haunts scientists today, Mr. Speaker.

In the late 1960s, an American ethologist, Dr. John B. Calhoun built what he called a mouse paradise — a perfectly controlled world with unlimited food, water and shelter, no predators, no scarcity, no fear, only abundance. At first, it was heaven, the mice thrived, multiplied and built their tiny cities, but when the population swelled past 600, something began to unravel.

The strong claimed the best nesting areas, weaker males were bullied into corners, mothers stopped caring for the young and some even turned against them. Violence erupted, mating ceased and gradually the colony lost its will to live.

Though the food never ran out, purpose did. The final generations grew passive and detached, grooming endlessly, avoiding contact, showing no interest in survival or connection. Calhoun called this stage, the “behavioural sink”, a collapse, not of body but of spirit. When the last mouse died, the habitat still overflowed with everything they could ever need.

Calhoun repeated this experiment 25 times, and every time the outcome was the same, Mr. Speaker. His conclusion echoed far beyond the cages. When a population loses purpose, meaning and social bonds, it dies long before its body does. We don't want this, Mr. Speaker; we don't, so I understand what we're here fighting for.

Politics is so deeply emotional and personal, and my people are somewhat suffering. Mr. Speaker, not only do I have great friends and family on the Government side, but the close proximity that I stand and sit [in] every day as a social butterfly, hearing the sad stories of families who are failing to feel the joy the Cayman dream once promised: a piece of the rock, a home, a car, business opportunity; a safe place to eat, live and worship; time for family, time for friends, love for neighbours as God prescribed. Let us not be fooled to think that we can't achieve this for our people, ladies and gentlemen.

Yes, this Immigration Bill debate from me is quite different, because if we get this wrong, it affects everything right for Caymanians and it will metastasise.

Mr. Speaker, as I've always repeated, we are too small to fail. We are too small in size to fail our good people who are depending on us. They are listening right now. They want the joy, but at the same time, they depend on us to get the stats, to do the research and plow forward with opportunities for them.

Point blank. Let's cut the fat and ensure we have meaningful direct programmes to uplift and enrich our people. We have a good problem in more jobs than people. Let's ensure we win from our success and not watch the visitor come in and pluck the golden cherry and depart with the fattened calf. I want my piece of the cherry. I want my piece of the fattened calf.

Let's all live in unity just as the world saw us during the pandemic, as a bubble. They saw and they were envious that we could move about freely during the time of the worst health crisis remembered in history. I am not ashamed to say I am pro-Caymanian with respect for all who come here just as my grandfather did, but I want the same joy and success as we shared in that horrible, lying pandemic. I won't have any hesitation in rejoicing that my people are winning.

People, let us love each other more, work cohesively, and bind the resources and network for the good of our success. We need to be more so badly.

Let's be happy for each other and compliment one another, because no matter what laws or policies we approve, if we don't have unity in the Cayman Islands, we still fail big time.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that bees hold a hidden wisdom. When a beehive loses its queen, the one life giver and unifier of their intricate society, it faces a quiet catastrophe. The rhythm of the colony slows, no new eggs means no future, and within weeks extinction looms. However, the bees don't fall into chaos, they don't wait for rescue, and instead they act swiftly, intelligently, and instinctively. What follows is one of nature's most remarkable responses to crisis. It begins with an unexpected decision. From among the countless ordinary larvae destined to become ordinary worker bees, a few are chosen. They aren't special, they weren't born different, but their destiny is about to change. These chosen few are fed something extraordinary — royal jelly, a potent, nutrient-rich secretion from specialised nurse bees. It's more than food, it's a signal. A biological switch. Fed exclusively on this substance, one larva's body begin to transform, it grows larger and stronger. Its lifespan extends nearly 20-fold. It will no longer serve; it will reign. The queen is not born, she is made.

This isn't about superior genes, it's about nourishment, care and environment. If humans could do the same — take any child and with the right support, cultivate greatness — imagine the possibilities, Mr. Speaker. Crisis doesn't end life, it creates leaders.

The larva's transformation doesn't just save her, it rescues the entire hive. As a new queen, she restores the colony order, fertility and rhythm. A future once threatened is rebuilt, stronger and more resilient.

A quiet lesson in resilience. In their silence bees teach us, when everything seems lost, what's needed isn't panic; it is vision, choice, compassion and leadership. Their world reminds us that greatness isn't born, it is nurtured; that even in the darkest times, with the right support, someone ordinary can become extraordinary because sometimes the most powerful leaders rise from the most uncertain moments.

Mr. Speaker, 1 Corinthians 3:6, **“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow”**. Have faith continually. Keep God first place and don't think it's you who is so mighty.

I pray the Government has looked at this carefully. There are many people I really trust over on the Government bench, but I also know how busy each Minister and Ministry is at budget time and around this time of year. The public is nervous, and Caymanians in particular are nervous and are hopeful at the same time. They have always wanted policies and laws to seem to weigh in their favour, but not upsetting the apple cart to the point of destruction. We do not need any class action law suits.

Mr. Speaker, I intend to support what I started and I pray that everyone recognises that we all want the same thing. We want Caymanians to benefit from our success. If we are not doing that, then we may as well pack it up. We come here to this honourable Parliament, Mr. Speaker, to make lives better for our Caymanians, for our constituents, and many of us do our best to do that. We need to ensure that we don't continuously do the things that are not working, to drill down to reach our people to ensure that things that are important to them like cost of living are thought about very seriously and drilled down deeply to try to make a difference for people.

Mr. Speaker, I will end my contribution at this time, turn it over to another bidden soul. I hope that my contribution was something worth the public's time in listening to and realising that we are not here to hate anyone, we just want the best for Caymanians and we want to benefit from any success that this country has.

God bless the people of these Cayman Islands. God bless this Parliament. God bless the Honourable Premier and his team.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Minister of Tourism.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: The Minister of Tourism has been recognised. Continue.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism & Trade Development, Elected Member for George Town South: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this debate on the Immigration (Transition) (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2025.

I rise not only as the Minister of Tourism and Trade Development, but as a Caymanian who deeply believes in the promise and potential of our people. I fully support the amendments before us today because I am deeply committed to ensuring that Cayman remains a place where Caymanians can build their lives, pursue meaningful careers, raise their families, and fully participate in the prosperity of their own country. I therefore welcome this debate as an opportunity to speak frankly about why I believe the amendments to this Bill are critically important to our nation's future.

Mr. Speaker, the impetus for reform is clear; our labour market, in particular, needs to be rebalanced and refocused so that Caymanians are not featured somewhere as part of the workforce but are prioritised within it. Our systems and institutions have spent far too long focused on, *can a Caymanian do this job*, rather than questioning, *are qualified Caymanians getting the jobs, and if not, why?* I note, Mr. Speaker, that I said *qualified* Caymanians, because I am not suggesting

that Caymanians be hired if they are unqualified or unsuitable for a particular role. What I am suggesting and advocate for is that we do more, holistically and deliberately, to prepare our people to compete and succeed in their workforce.

This Bill addresses that discrepancy. It restructures our systems, streamlines our data, and reflects the policy direction of this government which is a policy that places Caymanians first in opportunities, in access, and in advancement. While I regard these amendments as being long overdue, the fact that this NCFC Government has prioritised immigration reform highlights our willingness to tackle problems head on and find solutions to the issues that have been plaguing this country for years — decades in some instances, sir. We are not a government that procrastinates, and I am proud of the fact that we will not continue kicking this can down the road. I mentioned in my budget statement that change is coming, and this Bill is just one example of real change. Change that our people have been asking for.

Before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I want to make one thing clear, and I say this with honesty, warmth, and sincerity. These reforms are not about creating division between Caymanians and non-Caymanians. Many of us work with expats, many of us are related to non-Caymanians. In my case, I have been married for 31 years to a wonderful woman who originally hailed from Texas—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty: She was attending the University of Texas and I was home. I said, pack up your stuff; I can teach you everything you need to learn in life.

[Laughter]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty: She came and finished her schooling at ICCI [International College of the Cayman Islands] and she's probably one of the smartest women that I know — not just because she married me.

An Hon. Member: The smartest.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty: The smartest.

All my life I have welcomed people from other countries just as warmly as I welcome people from our own districts.

It goes without saying that the expat workforce in Cayman is valued and appreciated. Expat teachers taught me in school (was not an easy job). Doctors and nurses from many other countries took care of my family, all your families; and when we were sick, expats also helped me raise and care for our children — they weren't "domestic" to us. They were part of the family and treated as such. You can come to my home; you can find a Christmas stocking with my helper's name on it — my family's name on it; you can find an Easter

basket. When we go away, she gets a little gift bag. That's family, that's not just help.

They helped us get to where we are today, so from a personal perspective, and as a Member of Government, I can confidently say we are grateful for the talent and hard work that expats have instilled in our homes, our hospitals, our schools, as well as our financial services and tourism sectors. While that is true, it is equally true that our labour market has become tilted too far in one direction, so this Bill is not about creating division. It is about rebalancing opportunity and placing Caymanians at the front of the line in their own country, not because of policy, but as a reflection of reality and sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes Caymanians being qualified has not been enough. Our people are being passed over even when they are competitive candidates and I hear these types of stories constantly from young people, mid-career professionals and even experienced Caymanians in senior positions. This Bill will help to correct injustice by ensuring that Caymanians are not left on the side-lines, at the back of the queue, or at the bottom of the ladder, but are considered first for employment opportunities. The new immigration amendments also strengthen enforcement, which is a vital component of this legislation.

In many instances, the laws were in place but enforcement was lacking, and eventually, abuses were allowed to persist virtually unchecked. This Bill contains mechanisms to strengthen enforcement and remove silos so that information can be shared openly and collaboratively between relevant government Ministries and departments. This will remove the rocks people used to hide behind to avoid detection when they were not in compliance with the law. Going forward, compliance will not be optional. Employers and employees will be held to account; and as I said before, the playing field will be levelled so that Caymanians will be considered first for job vacancies allowing workforce planning to become strategic and national, rather than reactive and fragmented.

Mr. Speaker, I also welcome the renaming of this legislation as the Caymanian Protection Act because Caymanians do need protecting — from marginalisation, tokenism and the glass ceiling that too many of our people feel, but cannot see.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty: When the Caymanian Protection Law was first introduced in the early 1970s, our population was just 10,000, yet Caymanians thrived and had greater access to opportunities. In the time since that law was repealed, our population has ballooned, growing from 10,000 in 2003 to over 88,000 by 2024. That's 100 per cent increase in just two decades, but opportunities for Caymanians have not kept pace. How many times have we heard our people complain that they applied for a job but never heard back; or they had

to train their supervisor or their manager; or that a work permit was renewed instead of hiring a local.

Renaming the Bill is an attempt at recalibrating the system by reminding employers that Caymanians are not spectators in the workforce. They are the MVPs — our Most Valuable Players.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken at length about employment because our tourism industry is reliant on imported labour, and we cannot operate effectively without it. Visitors come to our shores expecting to receive the world class service they have paid for, and we have an obligation to give them the best experience possible. We cannot deliver that standard of service without a dedicated workforce, so we welcome and appreciate the persons who leave their homes and their families behind to work in our tourism industry; but equally, we must ensure that Caymanians are also welcomed into the industry and are able to make a good living through defined career pathways.

Mr. Speaker, there was a time when Caymanian families built this industry from the ground up. I remember, as I'm sure many of you do, when Caymanian hospitality was not only legendary, it was our brand long before they started calling it Caymankind.

Just a few weeks ago in this honourable House, I made a history connection with all 19 Members and how we got our start from tourism and helping grow what we enjoy today. Caymanians were hotel managers, dive masters, front office supervisors, restaurant owners, pilots, flight attendants. You name it, we did it; and we excelled at it too. Tourism was something our people owned and were proud of. Somewhere along the line that changed.

Our economy grew stronger, foreign labour became more accessible, academic aspirations shifted, and tourism became something Caymanians stepped away from — and that hasn't been good for the industry. Our visitors constantly ask, *where are the Caymanians?* They crave a more authentic Caymanian experience, which means we need to get more serious about providing opportunities for Caymanians to work in the tourism industry, where they can interact with visitors at every touch point. I was asked time and time again, *Where are you from, because we haven't heard anybody talk or sound like you*, and I proudly say, I'm from a little place between North West Point and Spot Bay and for those of you who don't know, you need to know your geography when it comes to Cayman.

My goal as Minister for Tourism is to restore Caymanian pride in tourism, but I can't just demand that Caymanians be hired and tick the box. I, along with my colleagues in government, have to prepare our people to compete and succeed. This is where the coordinated workforce database within the Bill comes in. As legislators, we are doing everything possible to ensure Caymanians have the training, credentials, and confidence to step into roles currently occupied by expatriates. We

are focused on creating opportunities, and we are putting our money where our mouth is by investing in Caymanians, not just rhetorically but financially.

My Ministry has increased the allocation for scholarships and training in the 2026-2027 budget to \$1.45 million annually. Department of Tourism has done the same allocating over \$2.5 million per year. We are funding certifications, internships, apprenticeships, skill-building programmes, and career placements. The Ministry of Education is also spending \$37 million annually during 2026 and 2027 on local and overseas scholarships. Taken together, it equates to more than \$81 million over the next two years to fund scholarships and training, highlighting that this NCFC government is playing its part when it comes to workforce development. This is an investment into our people and our country.

We are training our people to be more competitive. We are equipping them to be preferred and one day, hopefully soon, I want to read headlines announcing the appointment of the first Caymanian General Manager at one of our major hotels. That's when we'll really know that we are achieving what we set out to do and our efforts and investments are bearing fruit.

This is why the creation of the National Workforce Database that enables WORC to share information with key government agencies is so important. For the first time, government, employers and the recently formed National Workforce Development Task Force, also championed by Minister Myles and his team, will be able to see exactly how many qualified Caymanians exist for certain positions; what skills are in surplus, what skills are lacking, and where training and skills development needs to be targeted.

For the tourism and hospitality sector, this means we can more accurately map out demand to understand how many culinary specialists do we need? How many front office professionals do we need? How many food and beverage managers, how many maintenance engineers, how many digital marketing specialists, accountants, or HR professionals focused on tourism. This kind of planning will allow us to be targeted and strategic in our workforce decision-making, and is the pathway to that headline that I am looking forward to seeing.

Mr. Speaker, the feedback I have received from my interactions with stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sectors shows that there is broad support for these reforms. The majority of concerns raised were to do with the length of time taken to process work permits. For an industry heavily dependent on labour, staffing delays and interruptions adversely affect daily operations and this needs to be addressed, particularly as we enter the high season. I know that my colleague, Minister Myles, is working diligently to improve the work permits process and he is implementing measures to streamline and accelerate processing. This is a fixable problem and it is being fixed; relief for the tourism industry and other business owners is on the way.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to speak briefly on one of the more sensitive aspects of the amendments, namely the enhanced authority for the Director of WORC and relevant officials to investigate and revoke certifications in case of marriages of convenience where immigration benefits are the sole motive for the union. Many of us have heard allegations about persons gaming the system. While I would hope the vast majority of marriages that take place in our Islands are legitimately built on a foundation of love and mutual respect, the reality is there have been abuses.

Entering into a fraudulent marriage just for immigration status is not a harmless administrative shortcut. It is a deliberate act of deception that allows someone to unjustly leapfrog ahead of those who have followed the proper process, and we are legitimately working through our immigration requirements.

Mr. Speaker, fraudulent marriages constitute a breach of our laws — a serious breach. Oftentimes they represent a calculated effort to defraud the government by allowing persons to gain access to rights and benefits that they would not normally be entitled to. People have been making a business out of this and this has to cease. This country will be a country of law and order and this Immigration Bill will help us instil this as well.

Every sham marriage weakens confidence in our institutions and dishonours the legitimate foreign spouses who have built genuine family bonds, contributed meaningfully to our country, and respected our laws; therefore, I stand 100 per cent in agreement with strengthening the ability to investigate the fraudsters and prosecute those who engage in this practise. Government must take action to send a clear message that attaining RERC, residency rights, or Caymanian Status along with their associated benefits, must be earned honestly and not obtained through deception.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Gary B. Ratty: Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, this is about ensuring that love, trust, and genuine partnership are at the heart of marriage in these Islands. The goal is not to intrude in private relationships, but to protect the system from exploitation.

I will now turn my attention to the term limits being introduced for the public sector. Mr. Speaker, the goal for implementing term limits is not to abruptly displace hard-working expatriate workers, many of whom have served this country with dedication and professionalism for years; rather, it is to ensure that our own people have a pathway into meaningful careers and senior positions within the civil service. Too often Caymanians with ambition and talent have felt that upward mobility is limited because certain roles remain indefinitely out of reach due to expats being a permanent part of the structure.

Term limits will help to correct that imbalance by ensuring that public sector roles evolve over time

giving Caymanians the ability to become trained, qualified and rise through the ranks. In my view, the introduction of term limits is about inclusion not exclusion, and represents a forward-looking strategy that delivers benefits on both sides of the equation. On the one hand, it provides certainty and fairness to expatriate workers who will understand clearly the length of their service, helping them to plan accordingly; while on the other hand it provides our people with real prospects for advancement supported by succession planning and professional development.

Mr. Speaker, given that the new regime will potentially have the greatest impact on staffing within our teaching, health care, and police services, there is a clear need for sensitivity, careful planning, and stability as we move through the transition. These are sectors that form the backbone of our society, educating our children, safeguarding our health, and upholding the rule of law. We cannot and will not risk disruption to these essential services.

What this Government has proposed is a phased, deliberate, and pragmatic transition that is guided by foresight and consultation with stakeholders. Our intent is to maintain continuity of service while gradually creating pathways for Caymanians to step into roles of responsibility and leadership as they are ready and equipped to do so. This is not change driven by haste, Mr. Speaker, but by prudence. It is change undertaken with respect for those currently serving and with confidence in the ability of those who will follow. We are charting a steady course that will strengthen our institutions rather than destabilise them, and we are ensuring that current expatriate professionals as well as aspiring Caymanian successors are treated with fairness, clarity and dignity.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments to the Immigration (Transition) (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2025 are not punitive. They are protective. The reforms touch on some of the most sensitive and important areas of life, including jobs, marriage, families, and the right to live and work in the Cayman Islands. I know some people have expressed concern that the passage of this Bill may make the Cayman Islands appear less welcoming to foreign workers and businesses. Mr. Speaker, I offer an alternative perspective in saying that true prosperity occurs when the local population is integrated, invested, and engaged in its own economy.

Businesses do not thrive in a society where citizens feel excluded or marginalised. A labour market that side-lines Caymanians is not sustainable — not economically, not socially, and not morally. As I said earlier, and I repeat with the utmost honesty and sincerity: This government is not closing the door to expatriates. We value their contribution, their skills, and the diversity they bring to our workforce and to this country. These reforms are not about them and us; they are

about levelling the playing field for Caymanians and restoring their sense of ownership, pride, and dignity in their own labour market.

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that I wholeheartedly support the reforms this Bill is crafted to achieve. Even though some of the measures are long overdue, the time has finally come to take courageous, responsible action. I therefore urge every Member of this honourable House to stand behind this Bill, stand behind Caymanians, and establish this legislation which is fair, principled, and future-focused. By doing so, we will ensure that the Cayman Islands remain a land of opportunity for all those who chose to come here, but first and foremost, for all those who call it home — us, Caymanians.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, my campaign theme song was '*Get up, Stand up; Stand up for your right*'. Today, I stand strong for my fellow Caymanians and ask them once again to stand up for your rights and your future because this is for you.

Mr. Speaker, may God continue to bless our beloved Cayman Islands and those who live and work amongst us.

Thank you very much for giving me the time. God Bless.

[Desk thumping]

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

Mrs. Julie J. T. Hunter, Elected Member for West Bay West: Mr. Speaker, today, as a first-time Member of Parliament, I rise with a deep sense of duty to the people who placed their trust in me — my West Bay people, my Caymanian people. During my campaign, I promised them that I would put their interests first, and that I would only vote on reforms and make decisions that would benefit them, and Mr. Speaker, I intend to keep that promise.

Many of them gave me heart-breaking stories of feeling dismissed, betrayed, and disillusioned. In fact, Mr. Speaker, those were the stories that stirred me to action and guided me to put myself forward to become a Member of this honourable Parliament. Stories like a young qualified Caymanian chef graduating with honours being offered a position in housekeeping; or a young Caymanian HR professional being unable to get a job for eight months, or another young Caymanian putting in over 70 job applications without one interview.

The Immigration (Transition) (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2025 is not merely administrative housekeeping. It is a decisive effort to protect and secure the future of Caymanians. Our Islands stand at a crossroads. We must modernise our immigration framework not just for its own sake, but to preserve the social, economic, and cultural fabric that makes Cayman what it is.

Mr. Speaker, immigration debates are never easy. They stir emotions and they test our resolve, but we must face these issues head on. Long before I became a Member of Parliament I saw large billboards urging the need for immigration reform and when those billboards went up, I shouted for joy. I said, *Finally! A Government Minister who has the tenacity to do something about the dire situation our Islands face* — but, alas, Mr. Speaker, the billboards soon came down and no immigration reform took place. I was so disappointed.

Now, I'm not sure whether it was just not enough support for that MP to carry it forward, or whether it was the naysayers in the business community or the naysayers in government who felt threatened, but like I said, issues like immigration reform take all the resolve and determination you have to keep going, to keep pressing in spite of opposition and to ultimately do the right thing. Thus, as a proud Member of the NCFC, I am extremely happy that we have the determination, the fortitude, and the foresight to do the right thing and the right thing right now is to put Caymanians first.

[Desk thumping]

Mrs. Julie J. T. Hunter: From the very beginning, we have welcomed people and businesses to our country and to our shores. In fact, our forefathers all came from other countries to make Cayman their home; however, there is also a responsibility that every government has, to ensure that the resources and infrastructure exist to enable, first, our own people to thrive, but also to ensure that anyone who lives here has the ability to support themselves and their families. We have not been good stewards of this responsibility and the balance has been tipped.

Mr. Speaker, every one of our systems is strained to the extent of breaking because of the unchecked population growth that has been allowed for over a decade. Our health care system was never designed to accommodate 89,000 people. Our schools are overcrowded, our prisons are overcrowded, our roads are completely inadequate with families having to use sleep time for breakfast and dress in the car during the morning commute. This, Mr. Speaker, is all too familiar and these strains impact every one of us who live here. Reform is not optional, it is necessary. It is necessary for safeguarding our long-term prosperity, our sanctity and our way of life that reflects our values and heritage.

Immigration reform and halting migration has become so very prevalent in our world during the past year. Take a look at the UK with their boldest immigration reform in over 50 years. Germany, USA, Canada and many others are following suit.

Mr. Speaker, to understand where we are, we must first look at how we got to this point in our immi-

gration history. Immigration has shaped the Cayman Islands for over 50 years. In 1971 we introduced the Caymanian Protection Law. That law was clear, if you were born here to Caymanian parents or had strong ties to these Islands, you were recognised as Caymanian. It was designed to protect our people and make sure Caymanians were first in line for opportunities, but in 1992 and again in 2003, things changed; the Caymanian Protection Law was repealed. The Caymanian Protection Board was dissolved. This change was when Cayman started slipping down the slimy, slippery slope that has ended with where we find ourselves now.

From the time the Caymanian Protection Board was dissolved and the law repealed, Caymanians no longer had the safeguards in place to protect them. Immigration then became less about protection and more about managing economic growth. Responsibilities shifted to immigration boards and today, to Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman (WORC). Immigration turned into a system that issues tens of thousands of work permits every year. That has helped our economy grow, but it has also created serious challenges and many of our people have been left behind.

As I have already noted, reforming immigration is difficult because we are caught between two powerful forces. On one side, employers need foreign workers to keep businesses running. On the other side, Caymanians want job security and cultural preservation. Let's be honest, the balance has tilted. Expatriates now outnumber Caymanians, with 54 per cent making up our population as of 2024. Many of our people feel they are just a minority in their own country and are being overlooked for jobs and opportunities for growth. There's frustration about transparency and how status and residency are granted, and there is concern about the erosion of our culture and even our environment. The current system has shortcomings and it has not delivered on the promise that Caymanians must come first. Yet, despite decades of attempts, no administration has had the political courage to tackle these problems until now, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

Mrs. Julie J. T. Hunter: Immigration reform is not just about laws, it is about protecting our way of life while meeting the needs of a growing economy. We need clearer rules, stronger enforcement and greater transparency. We need to reaffirm that Caymanians are first in line for opportunities in their own country and we need to do this while maintaining fairness and stability for everyone who calls these Islands home.

If we fail to act boldly, the status quo will continue to erode trust and strain our social fabric. Immigration must be a tool for balance, not just a source of revenue. Let's all work together to find that balance.

Mr. Speaker, in my remarks today I will speak briefly to three key elements of this Bill: fairness and justice; economic necessity; and social integration and

security. Together, these pillars form a comprehensive approach that strengthens Cayman's foundation while protecting opportunities for Caymanians today and tomorrow, and these are the cornerstones of what the NCFC Government aims to secure through this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, fairness must always begin with our own people. Caymanians have long felt that immigration systems do not sufficiently protect their place in the job market or their prospects for advancement. Too often, barriers appear where opportunities should have existed. Caymanian professionals feel overlooked and Caymanian young people question whether the system truly works for them.

This Bill is only the beginning in correcting these inequalities, Mr. Speaker. It ensures greater transparency in processing and strengthens compliance, and it also enhances the fairness of the decisions affecting both foreign nationals and Caymanians. We recognise that education and training are equally critical if we are to ensure that our Caymanian workforce is adequate and fit for purpose. There will also be reforms in that Ministry to go hand in hand with our immigration reforms. These reforms are designed to ensure that Caymanians are never disadvantaged in their own country, and that foreign nationals are not being taken advantage of and are not taking advantage of the social systems designed to support our own Caymanians.

These reforms will ensure that those Caymanians registered in our national workforce database will be given fair opportunities based on their skills and their readiness to work; and when our university graduates complete their studies, they will be given employment before we grant permits for jobs that they are qualified for and ready to fill; and that those Caymanians wanting to advance within their careers will be given the training and development to enable them to pursue their aspirations. These reforms will also close loopholes that have existed for many years and which undermine Caymanian employment.

Mr. Speaker, fairness should not just be a concept. It is a value deeply rooted in our Caymanian identity. A just immigration system strengthens our sense of national unity by ensuring Caymanians feel protected, valued and, most of all, prioritised and that guest workers in our country are fairly treated.

Mr. Speaker, immigration is closely tied to the economic well-being of our Islands. We cannot ignore the reality. Cayman requires foreign workers to fill legitimate gaps; however, we cannot allow economic dependency to come at the expense of Caymanian opportunity, Caymanian development or Caymanian upward mobility. This Bill reflects that balance. It recognises the indispensable contributions of guest workers while ensuring that Caymanians remain at the centre of our national development strategy.

Let me say that again: It recognises the indispensable contributions of our guest workers while ensuring that Caymanians remain at the centre of our national development strategy.

Mr. Speaker, businesses in financial services, tourism, retail, healthcare, construction, technology, and other industries all express a need for skilled labour; however, businesses also want continuity, clarity, consistency, efficiency, and predictability. These are the conditions this Bill will bring to our Caymanian businesses and people. By refining processes and strengthening oversight, we give businesses the confidence to grow while creating structured training and advancement pathways for Caymanians.

From a fiscal perspective, Mr. Speaker, immigration plays a significant role in government revenue, but meaningful revenue cannot be the only measure of success. True economic sustainability comes when Caymanians are working in higher-skilled jobs, leading industries and shaping the trajectory of our economy. This Bill helps to ensure that immigration *supports*, not replaces, the Caymanian workforce.

Mr. Speaker, safeguarding Cayman's economic future means ensuring we remain competitive while retaining the soul of our Islands. This legislation places Caymanians at the forefront of that vision. The social fabric of our country is delicate. We are a multicultural society, one that thrives on diversity, but it is crucial that integration occurs in ways that protect Caymanian heritage, promote harmony and maintain community safety.

This Bill strengthens integration by requiring clear pathways for compliance, stronger accountability and more structured expectations from those who come to live and work among us. These measures help ensure that newcomers understand and respect Caymanian culture, values and social norms. For far too long, these principles were left unchecked and those given Cayman Status, residency, and even the privilege of a work permit, were not held accountable to uphold, protect and adopt our Caymanian heritage, causing so much of our precious heritage to be eroded and side-lined for the sake of other more dominant cultures that now call Cayman home. As a people, we are now only 46 per cent in our own homeland, so protecting our heritage and culture is as delicate as protecting our Blue Iguana.

Mr. Speaker, security is a priority that no Member of this House can take lightly. This Bill enhances the information available to the law enforcement and immigration authorities to ensure that our borders are secure, regulations are upheld and public safety is uncompromised. A safe Cayman is a prosperous Cayman.

As the Honourable Minister for Caymanian Employment and Immigration has mentioned previously, our social and public services including healthcare, pension, education and housing also feel the pressures of immigration inadequacies and this Bill supports a more responsible and measured approach to ensuring that the beneficiaries of these systems are those that need those protections the most; our most vulnerable citizens.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, these three pillars: fairness and justice; economic necessity; and social integration and security, do not stand alone. They reinforce one another. A fair system strengthens our economy, a strong economy improves social cohesion and social cohesion enhances both fairness and stability. Together they create an immigration framework that protects Caymanians and shapes a confident future for our Islands.

Mr. Speaker, we have delayed too long with immigration reform. Now we are simply out of time. We must act now to protect the 46 per cent Caymanians that we have left in these Islands. In this instance, delay is dangerous and the cost of inaction is great. This is a historic moment in our legislative journey. I am proud to be voting 'Yes', in my first eight months, for such an important piece of reform legislation. Just as past leaders like Mr. Berkley Bush and Mr. Benson Ebanks showed real courage in the face of opposition and went with the decision of building our dock, which for the past 48 years has served as a lifeline for these Islands, we must also take bold steps to protect Cayman's future and, we too, must show that same courage and determination in doing the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, I call on every Member of this honourable House to support this necessary, thoughtful and forward-looking reform, one that places Caymanians at the heart of our future. Let's put politics aside and deliver on our campaign promises. This is a defining moment. Let us act with courage and conviction. This is not just about passing a Bill, it is about protecting our identity, securing opportunities and shaping a Cayman that our children and grandchildren will be proud to inherit. The time for action is now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I commend this Bill to this honourable House. Before I conclude, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Minister and his team for the hard work and dedication that they have put into bringing this immigration reform Bill to this stage. Thank you very, very much team. You did an excellent job.

[Desk thumping]

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

Honourable Acting Deputy Governor.

Acting Deputy Governor, Hon. Eric Bush: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to offer remarks with respect to the introduction of term limits within the civil service which will be introduced via amendments to the Public Service Management Act and the Immigration (Transition) Act.

Firstly, I wish to commend the Government for bringing this Bill to Parliament. This reform represents not only a bold step forward in modernising our immigration system, but also a reaffirmation of our shared

commitment to fairness, parity, opportunity and national progress. The civil service is honoured to have played a constructive role in shaping this reform. We have worked tirelessly alongside Ministers, offering expertise, analysis and practical guidance to ensure the legislation is fair and balanced, safeguarding business continuity and minimising disruption within the Civil Service, all while fulfilling the mandate set out by the Government. We are grateful for the trust placed in us and proud to have contributed to the reform that will strengthen our immigration provisions.

Mr. Speaker, as Members of this honourable House are aware the introduction of term limits within the civil service will be achieved by removing from the Immigration (Transition) Act the longstanding exemption that is applied to civil servants, retaining it only for certain designated groups whose continuity is essential to the functioning of the Government.

In concert with this, amendments were made to the Public Service Management Act earlier this year, allowing for additional regulations to be made in the Personnel Regulations to govern the employment of non-Caymanians in the civil service and to enhance information sharing in the civil service, specifically amending **"section 67 of the principal Act to empower the Cabinet, on the advice of the Head of the Civil Service, to make regulations —**

- (a) to provide for term limits in respect of the employment of non-Caymanian civil servants;**
- (b) to provide for limitations, prohibitions, exemptions, conditions of employment and any other matters relating to the appointment and reappointment of non-Caymanians as civil servants; and**
- (c) to provide for information sharing between the Portfolio of the Civil Service and the Workforce Opportunities and Residency Cayman [Office]",** otherwise known as WORC.

Since the approval of those amendments to the Public Service Management Act, the civil service has undertaken work to draft the necessary changes to the Personnel Regulations in order to implement term limits within CIG [Cayman Islands Government]. This demonstrates, Mr. Speaker, our commitment to fulfilling the Government's mandate to limit the employment of non-Caymanians within the civil service to the same length of time as is applicable to private sector workers in the Cayman Islands, as per the Immigration (Transition) Act, which is currently nine years.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the amendments that were introduced to the Personnel Regulations will give statutory protections to avoid [having] persons who might join the civil service from the private sector being able to evade the term limit dates that are already applicable to them, and vice versa if non-Caymanian civil servants were to leave the civil service to join the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, as discussed in this honourable House previously, the civil service will introduce term limits responsibly, in a manner that is balanced with the mandate of the Government and with our ability to deliver essential services to the public. This is a key reason behind our decision to start the term limit for existing non-Caymanian civil servants to the date the relevant legislation commences, as opposed to doing it retroactively. This is the most responsible way of bringing about the change, ensuring business continuity, while achieving parity with the private sector. It also gives our valued non-Caymanian employees — who contribute across the civil service in areas such as education, policing, our prisons, our care home — the opportunity to plan for themselves and their families.

Mr. Speaker, while the introduction of term limits marks an important step, the reform can't conclude there. Term limits alone will not achieve our shared objective of increasing Caymanian representation within the civil service and it is that shared desired outcome which must guide our additional efforts. Term limits have not achieved this in the private sector and will not in and of itself achieve this in the civil service. In the 20 years since term limits were introduced, the representation of Caymanians within the national workforce has significantly decreased where Caymanians are now the minority. However, in the civil service, even prior to adopting term limits, our civil service has responded to the same population growth while managing to maintain our Caymanian workforce at approximately 70 per cent.

That said, we know more than term limits is needed to achieve the full objective of Government's immigration reform. In light of this, in addition to introducing term limits within the civil service, our proposed amendments to the Personnel Regulations will introduce mechanisms that enable certain civil servant positions to be designated as Caymanian only.

Our proposals will also enable the civil service to require non-Caymanian civil servants, through contractual terms, to participate in the training and upskilling of their Caymanian successors. This will primarily be accomplished through the enhanced framework for succession planning, which was rolled out this quarter and will drive greater accountability and transparency of succession planning within the civil service.

This initiative in tandem with pre-existing talent development initiatives, including the introduction, last year, of the scholarship programme for Caymanians within the civil service, will all serve to increase Caymanian representation within the civil service over time; particularly in key roles.

Mr. Speaker, as always, the civil service will work diligently to enact these changes and will do so in a manner that honours the wishes of the elected Government, while continuing to demonstrate to our employees that we are a caring employer and whilst ensuring that the needs of our customers are consistently and capably met.

Mr. Speaker, we made a commitment to introduce term limits within the civil service in 2026 in a responsible and balanced manner. That's exactly what we will do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I now invite the Premier to move the suspension of Standing Order 14(1) in order to start at 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

Suspension of Standing Order 14(1)

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Good evening and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that Standing Order 14(1) be suspended so the business of the House can start tomorrow at 10am rather than 2pm.

The Speaker: The question is that Standing Order 14(1) be suspended in order to allow the House to commence business at 10am tomorrow.

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

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: *Only if they gah breakfast.*

[Laughter and crosstalk]

The Speaker: The question is that Standing Order 14(1) be suspended in order to allow the House to commence its business at 10am tomorrow.

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

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Standing Order 14(1) is suspended.

The Speaker: I now invite the Premier to move the adjournment of this honourable House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With or without breakfast—

[Laughter]

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: —I move that this House do now stand adjourn until tomorrow, Thursday, 11th December and start at 10am.

The Speaker: The question is that this honourable House do stand adjourned until 10am Thursday, 11th December.

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

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

The House is suspended until 10am tomorrow,
10th December.

**At 6:56pm the House stood adjourned until 10am
Thursday, 11th December, 2025.**