



CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

EXPENDITURE REQUESTS TO FINANCE COMMITTEE

FOR THE APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEARS 2026 AND 2027) BILL, 2025

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2027

EXPENDITURE REQUESTS TO FINANCE COMMITTEE WITH RESPECT TO THE APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEARS 2026 AND 2027) BILL, 2025

Verbatim transcript of the Standing Finance Committee meeting held Wednesday, 19th November 2025, at 10:25am in the Chamber of the House of Parliament; George Town, Grand Cayman.

Present: Hon. Rolston M. Anglin, JP - Chairman
Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP
Hon. Gary B. Rutty, MP
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, JP, MP
Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, JP, MP
Hon. Nickolas T. A. DaCosta, JP, MP
Hon. Michael S. Myles, MP
Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCl, Cert. Hon., JP, MP
Mrs. Julie J.T. Hunter, JP, MP
Hon. Joseph X. Hew, MP
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, JP, MP
Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, MP
Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP
Mr. A. Roy Tatum, Cert. Hon., MP
Mr. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP
Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MP

Apologies: Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, CCl, JP, MP

In Attendance: Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary & Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance & Economic Development
Ms. Anne Owens, Senior Assistant Financial Secretary, Ministry of Finance & Economic Development
Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General, Ministry of Finance & Economic Development

Witnesses: Mr. Fabian Whorms, Chief Executive Officer, Cayman Airways Limited
Mr. Richard Simms, Director of the Department of Environment Health
Dr. Marc Lockhart, Clinical Director, Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre
Ms. Judith Seymour, Director of the Department of Counselling Services
Ms. Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Director of the Department of Environment

Procedural Clerks: Mrs. Zena Merren-Chin, Clerk & Chief Officer
Mrs. Twila Escalante, Deputy Clerk

[Hon. Rolston M. Anglin, Chairman, presiding]

The Chairman: Good morning Members, I call this meeting of Finance Committee back to order.

I will ask the Member for George Town West to open us in prayer.

PRAYERS

Hon. Pearlina McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker:
Good morning.

Let us pray.

God of wisdom, we ask for your guidance on this day as you steward the resources entrusted to us as Members of Parliament.

Dear God, we ask you to grant us clarity in our decisions. We ask You to grant us integrity with

our actions, and dear Father, remind us to be united in the purpose that we are sent here by our people to do.

Let us say The Lord's Prayer:

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 Chairman: Please be seated.

Thank you, Mrs. McGaw-Lumsden.

Members, we are left with two ministries to examine: the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Health. As we know from the Schedule provided, we will deal with the Ministry of Tourism and therefore, the Appropriations to the Minister of Tourism.

I would invite the Minister to give us brief opening remarks in regard to his Appropriation; I note that he has distributed this electronically and also the detailed spreadsheet with all of his appropriations and the explanations for any of the changes in those output groups.

Honourable Deputy Premier.

STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND TRADE DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Gary B. Ratty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, good morning, and thank you very much for that.

I'd also like to thank the Member for George Town West for that lovely prayer this morning because we all know we could do with much this morning — as I saw the Member for George Town Central put on a second pair of glasses...

[Laughter]

Hon. Gary B. Ratty, Deputy Premier: Good morning, everyone.

Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to present an overview of the Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development's 2026-2027 budget. I look forward to providing this Finance Committee with a more in-depth understanding of the Ministry's planned expenditure over this budget period.

It is seven months since I assumed responsibility for this Ministry. I have spent these months listening to industry partners, to public servants, to visitors, and, most importantly, to Caymanians whose livelihoods depend on the growth and success of our tourism industry. What I have learned has influenced not only the budget before you today, but the strategic direction of the Ministry for the years ahead.

I won't pretend the road ahead will be easy. There's much to fix, and even more to create. I will not stand here and claim to have all the answers, but I do

have a clear vision for success and the determination to leave our industry better than I found it. One thing is certain, under my leadership it will not be business as usual — change is happening.

For 2026, the Ministry of Tourism and Trade's Operating Budget is \$30.7 million, of which \$2.8 million is for the core ministry and \$27.9 million is allocated to the Department of Tourism.

In 2027, the budget increases to \$31 million, of which \$2.9 million is allocated to core Ministry operations and \$28 million to the Department of Tourism. Overall, this reflects a budgetary increase of \$3.4 million or 13 per cent for 2026 and \$0.3 million for 2027; of the \$3.4 million increase in 2026:

- \$1.5 million is required to cover increased personnel costs including the unbudgeted Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) awarded to staff last December 2024, plus pension and health insurance obligations.
- \$1.5 million is earmarked for supplies and consumables, which includes items such as professional fees, advertising, marketing and essential travel.
- The remaining \$400,000 pertains to a change in reporting standards for leases, which has led to a sharp increase in the recording of depreciation.

The Department of Tourism

The Department of Tourism has responsibility for marketing and promoting the Cayman Islands' product development, tourism-related training, and providing industry support.

The Department's budget of \$27.9 million in 2026 and \$28 million in 2027 is invested in global campaigns, digital advertising, airline partnerships, and industry development initiatives. These investments ensure that Cayman remains visible, competitive, and compelling to travellers.

With a modest increase in the budget for 2026 that remains relatively flat for 2027, the Ministry and the Department of Tourism, like many other entities within government, are tasked to become more efficient with service delivery, and more discerning with the initiatives we support.

Prudent fiscal management will be emphasised without losing sight of the human impact of our decisions and without compromising standards or quality of service. We will also explore opportunities to strengthen our revenue base and diversify our tourism product to support the industry's continued growth, and by extension growth in our economy.

FOUR STRATEGIC-PRIORITY PILLARS

For this first budget cycle under my watch, my Ministry's focus will concentrate on four priority pillars, which I will speak to individually. They are:

1. Sustaining and Growing the Tourism Industry
2. Training and Empowering Caymanians
3. Enhancing the Tourism Product
4. Trade Diversification.

Every initiative pursued, every project approved, and every dollar spent by my Ministry will connect to one or more of these four pillars, and in turn will contribute to the Government's Broad Outcomes relating to:

- Building a diversified, resilient economy that supports prosperity and innovation;
- Supporting a highly skilled and adaptable Caymanian population; and
- Ensuring sustainable infrastructure and environment development that protects our natural resources.

This overarching framework will guide us in being more fiscally responsible and transparent in delivering meaningful results that serve the long-term best interests of our people.

PILLAR ONE - SUSTAINING AND GROWING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Industry Performance (January - September 2025)

Mr. Chair, with that framework established, I now turn to the Ministry's first priority pillar: Sustaining and Growing the Tourism Industry.

Responsible growth begins with a clear understanding of where the industry stands, in order to chart where we aspire to be. I will begin with a brief look at the industry's recent performance, followed by the growth forecasted for this budget period starting with the stayover sector.

Stayover Arrivals

Between January and September of this year, our Islands welcomed 338,385 air arrivals which is up 2.4 per cent from 2024, and is the third-highest total for this period in our recorded history.

For 2026 and 2027, air arrivals are forecast to increase by approximately 2 per cent year over year.

Accommodation: Our accommodations sector offers 8,426 rooms across all three Islands, which is an increase of 316 rooms compared to September 2024. Importantly, the market continues to evolve: Hotels make up 33 per cent of room stock, apartment/condos account for 50 per cent, and guest houses /villas contribute 17 per cent, allowing us to serve a wide range of visitors and budgets.

In 2026, the opening of two new hotel properties will increase our national inventory to 8,908 rooms. One | GT will add 100 rooms; and the Grand Hyatt, which will be the largest hotel in Cayman, will add 382 rooms, creating jobs, expanding our product and reinforcing our position as a desirable and resilient vacation destination.

I just want to go over some of the room stock by property category:

Room Stock by Property Category					
Category	GCM	CYB	LYB	Total	%
Apartment (Condos)	4,100	55	49	4,204	50
Guest House (Villas)	1,283	102	45	1,430	17
Hotels	2,654	71	67	2,792	33
Total	8,037	228	161	8,426	100%

Tourism Accommodation Tax (TAT): Revenue collected between January and September 2025 from tourism accommodation charges (commonly known as TAT) was \$36.2 million — up \$1.8 million or 8.13 per cent from the same period in 2024. TAT collection for the full year 2025 is projected to be \$46 million.

For 2026, the Ministry of Tourism is forecasting TAT revenue to be \$48.8 million, rising to \$49.1 million in 2027.

Airlift Outlook: January-April 2026: From December and into 2026, we look forward to the strongest growth in airlift capacity our Islands have seen in recent years, which is extremely positive for winter and spring arrivals, and very exciting news for the industry.

Fifty-five thousand seats will be added to our destination between January and April 2026, raising seat capacity to 358,512. This represents an increase of 18 per cent compared to the same period in 2025.

As well as growth in seats, the number of flights into our Islands will climb by 23 per cent to 2,196, which is 411 more flights than January to April, 2025.

This includes service from Porter Airlines, a brand-new carrier to our Islands that will be operating from Toronto starting in December. Porter Airlines initially announced a once-weekly service but already increased to three times weekly due to customer demand before the service was even launched. Porter is also introducing service from Ottawa, which is a first for Cayman and improves access for travellers coming from Quebec and Montreal — and that's not all, Mr. Chair.

- Jet Blue and Spirit airlines will be re-introducing service from Fort Lauderdale;
- Delta Airlines will be offering service from Detroit and New York, which are new gateways for them.

- As of October, American Airlines resumed its daily Miami overnight service and is increasing its Chicago service to daily operations from December.
- United Airlines is also expanding its service out of Chicago from 1st January, 2026.

These new services are due to demand from high-value markets, and reflect the Department of Tourism's successful airline strategy and strong partnerships with international carriers.

Mr. Chair, this island is going to be very busy with more airlines, more flights, and more seats coming into Cayman, creating more opportunities for Caymanians. This is welcome news for the industry, particularly our taxis, attractions, restaurants, retailers, tour operators and hoteliers.

Cruise Sector

I'd like to discuss the cruise sector and the FCCA [Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association] overview from when Minister Ebanks and I attended the FCCA [Cruise Conference] last month in Puerto Rico.

FCCA Overview: Looking now at the cruise sector.

I know that following the outcome of the referendum on cruise piers, people who work in this sector were worried about their future and the future of cruise tourism in Cayman. Having recently met with cruise line executives at the FCCA conference, I am pleased to report that our cruise sector *is not* disappearing, and I am now in a position to provide the country with an update, based on those discussions.

Twelve meetings were held over two days with various cruise executives, who each reaffirmed Cayman's position as a high-demand port of call. While there is strong guest satisfaction with our island's safety, cleanliness, and natural beauty, they also spoke candidly about our tourism product and areas we must improve.

- Tendering remains the most significant operational challenge, particularly for larger vessels and during peak arrivals.
- The visitor experience at Public Beach needs attention and there are concerns about jet ski safety, limited swim zones, and insufficient amenities for passengers.
- Attractions such as Pedro St. James and the Cayman Turtle Centre are under-utilised, which means opportunities exist to make these experiences more interactive to increase visitation.
- Passenger spend is flattening because nearly 45 per cent of cruise passengers are repeat guests already familiar with our attractions. Coincidentally, 45 per cent of stayover visitors are also repeat guests, which highlights a need for more authentic

and culturally rich experiences and activities for guests to enjoy when they visit Cayman.

Overall, the discussions at FCCA were productive and the forecasts for passenger arrivals positive with George Town remaining on the itineraries of several major cruise lines including Royal Caribbean, Norwegian, MSC, Carnival and Disney.

Cruise Passenger Arrivals 2025–2027: I'd like to talk about the cruise arrivals' forecast for 2025 to 2026. For 2025, passenger arrivals are forecast to be 1.1 million from 363 ship calls, rising to 1.3 million passengers from 449 ship calls in 2026. Those numbers are correct as of 6th November 2025, and reflect the cruise lines' confidence in our Islands.

For 2027, early projections estimate 1.7 million passengers and over 500 ship calls, but those figures are likely to change, up or down, given that it is still two years away.

I am also exploring the possibility of having more cruise calls going to Cayman Brac to bring a regular economic boost to that island; since returning home from the FCCA conference, I had a further call with one of the cruise lines to advance that discussion, and I look forward to making an announcement when a positive agreement is reached.

I sincerely hope this update will allow the businesses and operators who work in this sector to breathe a little easier and feel more hopeful about the future. It is looking bright, Mr. Chairman.

Revenue Collection: Mr. Chair, in addition to the jobs and livelihoods it supports, cruise tourism is an important financial contributor to our economy.

According to a report released by the FCCA on The Economic Contribution of Cruise Tourism to the Destination Economies, cruise passengers visiting Cayman spent an average of US\$116 per person in 2023-2024, placing Cayman 9th above 33 destinations. Applying that average spend to the passenger forecasts, cruise passengers will contribute over \$129.2 million in 2025, and \$159.6 million in 2026 to our economy. This is in addition to the passenger fees cruise lines submit for every passenger aboard their ships, which are collected by the Port Authority.

Though economic contribution is an important measure of success, it only tells part of the story. The true value of tourism lies in how the revenue translates into training, development, and opportunities for our people — opportunities that strengthen the industry, make it more inclusive, and ultimately enhance the experience for our visitors, so I would like to touch on scholarships and training.

PILLAR TWO - TRAINING AND EMPOWERING CAYMANIANS

Scholarships and Training

Pillar Two focuses on Training and Empowering Caymanians. As Minister, I am determined to ensure that tourism is a catalyst for opportunity and advancement, preparing our people for the jobs of tomorrow — especially as AI [Artificial Intelligence] becomes increasingly embedded in daily operations. Tourism must work for Caymanians and Caymanians must work in tourism. That principle underpins my approach to training and the Ministry's investments in workforce development.

To this end, funding for TP 12 – Tourism Scholarships and Training has increased from \$1.1 million annually to \$1.45 million to allow more Caymanians to pursue tertiary education and skills development training; this enhanced level of funding will continue through 2027. With training costs rising year over year, the Ministry's allocation for scholarship and training was consistently underfunded, requiring supplementary top-ups to meet its obligations to students. To correct this, the budget now provides an additional \$350,000 each year, which is more in line with actual costs and should eliminate the need for supplemental funding during this budget period.

Department of Tourism – Training Budget

The Department of Tourism's education-focused outputs — TOU 16 and TOU 19 — will also see significant increases over this budget cycle.

TOU16 relates to Tourism Sustainability Programmes and will increase from \$2.2 million in 2025, to \$2.6 million in 2026 and \$2.66 million in 2027, reflecting a 20 per cent increase over 2 years.

TOU19 relates to Tourism Education and Awareness Programmes and will increase from \$1.4 million in 2025, to \$2.2 million in 2026 to \$2.3 million in 2027, reflecting a 58 per cent increase over 2 years.

Those investments are directed at providing Caymanians with skills and qualifications to assume roles within the tourism industry. If our people are expected to participate, we must ensure they have the training, resources, and pathways to succeed. That is how we build a future workforce and a future industry, led by Caymanians.

PILLAR THREE – ENHANCING THE TOURISM PRODUCT

Mr. Chair, empowering Caymanians for roles in tourism is linked to ensuring the product they represent is something to proudly promote. This brings me to Pillar Three: Enhancing Our Tourism Product. I have spoken about significant growth in airlift, accommodations, and cruise passenger arrivals, which translates into more tourists visiting our attractions.

Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority (CINAA)

Four of our most iconic sites: Pedro St. James, the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, the Cayman Craft Market, and the Hell attraction fall under the remit of the Tourism Ministry and are managed by the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority (CINAA).

In 2026, funding for CINAA will increase by \$320,000, or 16 per cent, bringing its annual allocation to \$2.3 million. This includes increases of \$150,000 for both Pedro St. James and the Botanic Park and increases of \$10,000 each for the Craft Market and Hell.

A new Board, chaired by Mr. Charles Clifford, is now in place at CINAA, bringing renewed direction and strengthened governance to the Authority. I am also pleased to share that Cabinet has approved the purchase of land adjacent to Pedro St. James, paving the way for expansion and enhancement of this national treasure.

Sadly, Mr. Chair, there are aspects of our tourism product that fall short of the high-end standard we aim to provide, and improvements are urgently needed. During my early site visits to Smith Barcadere and Consuelo's Beach, to name a few, I found maintenance issues and conditions below the level expected of a premier destination. While those specific issues have since been addressed, it is only a start.

There is more to be done, particularly to address the Public Beach concerns which were even raised by the cruise line executives. The experience at Public Beach cannot be described as high-end luxury. We should not be selling a product we are not proud of, or marketing a standard we do not consistently deliver. These issues are not superficial. They strike at the heart of the beach experience for visitors and residents alike, and affect the strength of our tourism brand. I therefore intend to work closely with the relevant ministries to drive the necessary changes and improvements.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I applaud this government for moving with urgency to protect the southern end of Seven Mile Beach where erosion has reached a critical stage. Inaction posed a serious threat to our environment, our tourism industry, and our reputation as a premier destination. The replenishment plan approved by Cabinet will prevent further damage to our best-known tourist attraction and preserve it for future generations to enjoy.

Beautification Committee

To ensure that our Islands reflect the beauty and standards we uphold, \$250,000 has been budgeted over 2026-27 for the Beautification Committee, which operates under the stewardship of my Parliamentary Secretary, Ms. Heather Bodden. Small details — clean signage, proper lighting, well-maintained facilities — shape the perception of our Islands just as powerfully as attractions do, and are just as important.

Visitor Experience Development Grant Programme

With respect to tourism product diversification, I am renewing the Visitor Experience Development Grant (VEDG) which supports Caymanian entrepreneurs in bringing new tourism experiences to the market. The Ministry has budgeted \$500,000 in 2026-27 for the development of new products and services primarily for visitors, to provide them with an authentic Caymanian experience. This is an effective way to diversify our tourism product while ensuring that the benefits accrue to Caymanians.

I should note that I found this programme in place when I arrived and I have no reservations continuing the legacy of a former Minister if it delivers benefits for Caymanians and to the industry.

Film Commission

The Film Commission also continues to evolve as a promising new frontier for tourism. Cayman is now a member of the Association of Film Commissioners International, and Ms. Brittany Kelly is the first Caymanian to attain Film Commissioner Certification. This noteworthy achievement reflects Cayman's commitment to the highest global standards in film commission practice and industry engagement.

One million dollars is allocated in the 2026-2027 budget for the Film Commission rebate programme, which is a positive step towards positioning Cayman as a film-friendly destination, to attract productions to film on our shores; by supporting the film commission, my Ministry is aiming to give our Caymanian creatives an opportunity to hone their skills right here at home and mitigate the brain drain in Cayman's creative industry.

Films bring visibility, creative opportunities, and a modern dimension to our tourism product. This sector is small now, but it is strategic and it will grow.

National Tourism Plan

Mr. Chair, achieving long-term tourism success requires responsible management and early in the New Year, the Ministry and Department of Tourism will begin developing a new National Tourism Plan that will be future-focused and set clear priorities within a comprehensive guiding framework. The plan will ensure that the industry's development keeps pace with global trends, embraces innovation and aligns with national priorities while keeping Caymanians at the heart of the strategy.

PILLAR FOUR - TRADE DIVERSIFICATION

Moving on now to the Ministry's fourth focal pillar: Trade Diversification.

Mr. Chair, the Portfolio of Trade Development is working to address one of the most important long-term economic challenges facing these Islands: the cost of imported goods and overdependence on a single-source market.

Last month, the Ministry convened a strategic consultation with some of the country's most experienced business leaders. The discussions were frank and constructive, and centred on how Cayman can diversify its trading relationships, reduce import dependency and, ultimately, lower costs for consumers. That meeting was only the beginning. Over the coming months, the intent is to develop a National Trade Diversification Framework to guide our approach to global supply chains and strengthen our economic resilience.

Cayman Airways

Turning now to Cayman Airways — a vital national asset that is a proud symbol of Caymanian identity and keeps our Islands connected to the world. Cayman Airways' strategic value to our economy through tourism spending, local employment, supplier engagement, and community benefits was estimated at \$270 million in 2023 and \$275 million in 2024. That is a return on investment (ROI) few other public enterprises can match.

For 2026 and 2027, Cayman Airways will receive \$18.5 million per year in output payments:

- \$3.1 million for domestic air services, ensuring a reliable air bridge between all three islands.
- \$15.4 million to support core tourism gateways and essential routes.

Additionally, the airline will receive equity injections of \$10.5 million in 2026 and \$8.5 million in 2027 to meet its recurring financial obligations with respect to staff costs, maintenance and other operational expenses.

In my first meeting with the new Board of Directors, I outlined a vision for Cayman Airways focused on controlling costs and maximising revenues through strategic decision-making and sound business practices. Beyond maintaining the essential air bridge to the Sister Islands, the Board will concentrate on three priorities:

- objectively reassessing all routes based on national need and economic viability;
- establishing a clear path toward long-term financial sustainability; and
- upholding absolute compliance with all safety and security standards.

To help manage rising operating costs during this budget cycle, Cayman Airways will implement targeted fee increases and introduce new value-added products. One key initiative for 2026–27 is a

bundled travel package that combines flights, accommodations, and activities — supporting local partners while encouraging longer stays. Cayman Airways projects that these and other revenue-enhancement measures will generate \$6 million in 2026 and improve the balance between capacity and demand.

Cayman Turtle Centre

I now shift my attention to the Cayman Turtle Centre. The Cayman Turtle Centre remains both a cultural institution and a cornerstone of conservation. Its operations are heavily dependent on cruise visitors and while numbers are stabilising, they remain below pre-pandemic levels.

To support financial sustainability, effective 1st November 2025, the Centre implemented a six-per cent increase adjustment on the cost of admissions. Ticket pricing moved:

- for Turtle Adventure: from US\$47 to US\$50 for adults and US\$27 to US\$29 for children; and
- for Turtle Safari: from US\$30 to US\$32 for adults and US\$21 to US\$23 for children.

Management will also be looking holistically at revenue and partnership opportunities with other SAGCs as well as continued cost-saving measures.

With conservation being a vitally important aspect of the Turtle Centre's mandate, species conservation plans were developed for the Green Sea and the Hawksbill Turtles respectively, given that both species are considered as critically endangered. Adoption of these plans is essential for protecting the species and would enable the Centre to pursue new revenue streams through partnerships with other conservation entities. I intend to collaborate with the Minister for Sustainability to bring both species' conservation plans forward for the consideration of Caucus and Cabinet.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, I have set a clear and ambitious agenda in this budget, one that invests in our people, strengthens our product, and expands our potential. Change is not always easy nor welcomed, but in the context of our tourism industry, some changes are necessary, while others are long overdue. The tourism and trade sectors are in good hands, and I remain confident that the industry's brightest tourism years are still ahead.

My Ministry team and I stand ready to deliver these initiatives with integrity, compassion, and unwavering commitment. Our aim is to advance an industry where growth is sustainable, opportunities are inclusive, and the principle of *Caymanians first* remains firmly at the heart of our efforts, providing reassurance that this government has our people's best interests at heart.

I wish to thank my National Coalition for Caymanians (NCFC) colleagues for their support, advice,

and cooperation — not only in preparing this budget, but since the inception of this administration.

I thank my Chief Officer, Mr. Stran Bodden; my Director, Mrs. Rosa Harris; and the teams at the Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development, as well as the Board Members, Directors, Management and staff at Cayman Airways; the Cayman Turtle Centre; and the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority. Their professionalism and dedication strengthen my confidence that our industry is in good hands.

Members' Contribution to Tourism

Mr. Chair, I would like to make one last observation. I look across at all 18 members in this Chamber — 19 including myself — each of whom, in one way or another, has contributed to building our tourism industry and has been blessed to benefit from it.

Let me begin with my good friend, the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Joseph Hew — and this is the story that was told to me.

My father was the first certified Caymanian hotel manager; back in 1957 he was offered the job to manage the Pageant Beach Hotel. He told the family he would only accept under one condition: that the late Ms. Valma Dilbert Hew, the Leader's mother who was living in the Brac, be hired as his assistant; it was agreed by the family. During this time she met Mr. Lenny Hew, who was a guest at the hotel dealing with our telecommunications business. I often joke with the Leader of the Opposition that if it were not for my dad he wouldn't be here today.

I also recognise the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Kenneth Bryan, for his contribution to the tourism industry. He also once worked at the Marriott Hotel and as the previous Minister he was faced with one of the greatest decisions this country has ever faced — the reopening of our borders after COVID. It was almost like starting from scratch.

The Member for George Town West, Hon. Pearlina McGaw-Lumsden worked at the Hyatt Hotel in sales at a boutique, and her mother worked at the Holiday Inn in the restaurant and as a housekeeper.

The Member for Cayman Brac East and Mother of the House, Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly's mom, Ms. Shirley Mae O'Connor, also served faithfully in the hotel and tourism industry.

The Member for Red Bay, Mr. Roy Tatum's mother, Ms. Maggie Tatum worked as a cook and bartender at the Brac Reef and the Divi Tiara while his father, Mr. Arlin Tatum was a charter boat captain at Southern Cross Club in Little Cayman. Even the member himself had a stint in the industry as a teenager, working at the Brac Reef as well. *Ah got that right, Mr. Roy?*

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Good, good.

In the late 1950s the Member for George Town East, Mr. Roy McTaggart's father, the late Bill McTaggart — affectionately known to all as 'Uncle Bill' — was manager of the Yacht Club which is where The Wharf Restaurant stands today. His mum, Aunt Carlene, was one of the first flight attendants at Cayman Airways.

Uncle Bill's assistant was the late Mr. James "Sonny Boy" Bodden — and I have to mention his granddaughter, our good friend Ms. Brittney Bodden, who is responsible for the back-of-house management here at the House of Parliament and has a degree in Culinary Arts with Food Service Management so this House is touched even beyond this Floor.

My dad, Ms. Valma, and Uncle Bill, shared many great stories from those days; stories that remind us of how small, close-knit and determined our community once was. The late Bob Soto, a pioneer in his own right, was also part of that early group.

The Member for Bodden Town West, Mr. Christopher Saunders' father, the late Roy Saunders, was a bartender for many years at Holiday Inn and was one of the very best — I had a good time with him. The Member himself worked as a night auditor at the Sleep Inn Hotel, from 11pm to 7am six nights a week and then went to his day job five days a week starting at 9am.

The Member for Bodden Town East, Mr. Dwayne Seymour, spent several years at the Cayman Airways' front counter before going on to open his own company at Owen Roberts Airport.

The Member for Cayman Brac West, Hon. Nickolas DaCosta's mother, Ms. Tammy Banks worked as a night auditor at the Divi Tiara, while the Member and his wife have managed condo properties along the Seven Mile Beach.

The Member for East End, Hon. Isaac Rankine's father, (and my second father) Papa Jeralow, spent several years on the Cayman Aggressor fleet working as a cook, and he also worked as a fishing guide and captain on many of my dad's charter boats. His mother, Rita, was also at the Marriott Hotel for over 15 years.

The Member for North Side, Hon. Jay Ebanks' grandmother, Ms. Alex Johnson, managed numerous rental villas in the Rum Point/Cayman Kai area. The member himself has managed properties and provided maintenance and construction services, continuing the family legacy.

The Member for West Bay North and Chairman of today's Committee Hon. Rolston Anglin's late mother, Ms. Clovena Anglin, worked alongside the Cumber family in their hospitality businesses; and his father, Mr. McClurn Anglin has served at the Turtle Centre for over three decades.

The Member for West Bay Central, Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks' late father, Mr. Austin Ebanks, began his career in the North Sound as Capt. Crosby's first mate; at a time when visionaries like

Captains Marvin, Crosby, Gleason and Dallas, saw Stingray City's future potential, Mr. Ebanks went on to purchase his own boat, 'The Dove', and launched his own North Sound excursions for visitors — imagine if we didn't have Stingray City today. We actually need more of these types of wildlife interactions, especially with the number of tourists that will be coming in the next couple of years.

The Member herself joined the tourism industry straight out of high school, working with Cayman Airways and rising to the rank of Senior Cabin Crew member.

The Member for Prospect, Hon. Michael Myles' mother, Ms. Grace, served in tourism for over 32 years beginning at the Holiday Inn before managing condos along Seven Mile Beach; the Member has also contributed by training Caymanians for tourism roles through his own organisation.

The Member for West Bay West, Ms. Julie Hunter's mother worked as a cook at Galleon Beach and Grand Old House, later transitioning to house-keeping at the Colonial Club, where she was beloved by guests. Her dad, Mr. Willie, served as Head of Maintenance at the Royal Palms and Coconut Harbour for many years. The member herself worked at the front desk of the Holiday Inn.

The Member for Savannah, Ms. Heather Bodden, has devoted over 40 years to the tourism sector and worked alongside our National Hero, the late Honourable Jim Bodden, in creating Pirates Week which we just celebrated this past week and last night was one of the nicest fireworks and drone shows I think we ever had. She also represented our Islands abroad on numerous promotional trips, proudly carrying the Cayman name and the Cayman flag.

The Member for Newlands, Hon. Wayne Panton's own family, believe it or not, owned the Bay View Hotel in George Town, and as a young man, he worked at the Casa Bertmar Dive Shop from the age of 13 for several years.

Finally, Mr. Chair, the Premier's father, Mr. Atlee, once served under the Ministry of Tourism as manager of the Turtle Centre. Today, he still boasts of providing the Financial Secretary with a cheque when the Turtle Farm was profitable — and, Mr. Speaker, we all hope those days will return soon.

Mr. Chair, I would be remiss if I did not mention my own family's long-standing connection to this vital industry. As I noted earlier, my father was the first licenced Caymanian hotelier, but my dear late mother, Mrs. Carolyn Celia Ruddy, also played a key role in shaping our tourism story. She was the very person who typed the original application to the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] that allowed Cayman Airways to operate flights into the United States so when you talk about passion and care for tourism and Cayman Airways, *I got it in my blood, sir.*

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: I'll give a personal story. In 1968, she typed that document; I was almost two at the time, and she took me to the office. It was 120-plus pages on a manual typewriter, and she put it on the floor getting ready to stack it, and for some reason I decided to christen it with my own champagne —

[Laughter]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: And Cayman Airways has been blessed since.

[Laughter and desk thumping]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: I would also like to mention someone whom I respect and hold in high regard, Mr. Don Seymour, one of the most successful Caymanian businessmen. His mom, Miss Eloise, was a taxi driver, and he told me the story when she actually took out a mortgage on her house to invest in her children's education. There is no better investment a parent can make than in their children's education; that's a prime example and for many of us here today, our parents made the sacrifices to educate each one of us. Some went higher, some didn't go as high, but I think all 19 are honourable sitting in this House today.

As for myself, I am privileged and honoured to serve as Minister of Tourism and Trade, and before that, as part-owner and Managing Director of the Comfort Suites Hotel and several restaurants that served both locals and visitors alike. Tourism, for my family and for me, is not just an industry — it is a way of life and a legacy that has shaped who we are as Caymanians. As Minister, I am mindful of where we came from, and I will continue to honour those who came before us by ensuring that Caymanians always have a place and a future in our tourism industry.

Mr. Chair, I thank you and my colleagues for giving me the time to read this statement. I know it was a little long-winded but it was cut down significantly from the beginning.

Thank you, sir.

The Chairman: Thank you very much Honourable Minister.

I recognise the Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to all the support staff for the Ministry and the SAGCs here for the Ministry of Tourism. As you know, I know all of you and I miss you guys a lot. Keep up the great work.

First, I want to say thank you so much to the Minister for outlining his plan. I really hoped to have had most of these details throughout the budget, but

we have it today so we have a vision of where he's going. I want to also say thanks to your family and all those who helped build the foundation of tourism that we have today.

We all have much to be proud of in this industry called tourism which, though it may not bring in as much money as financial services, I'm certain that we would say is more valuable to who we are as an identity. Tourism is where we really show who we are, and I'm proud every time I say the words *CaymanKind*.

An Hon. Member: Amen.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: With that being said, in our natural process of asking questions, I'm going to focus on some of the things you said and then go into the numbers. I have questions about conflicting information between your budget document and what you said in your speech; maybe we can get some clarity.

I want to say that one positive thing I have heard thus far is the purchase of the land next to Pedro. Really, really proud that your government is willing to do that; if you can buy more around it, buy as much as you can. I also want to say thank you for continuing most of the things I started — and when I say I, [I mean] myself with the team at the Department of Tourism (DoT) — because to be honest with you, I got much of the shine based on others' hard work and I'll be talking about some of those things but I'm glad that you've taken those ideas and continued. I'm a bit concerned about the reduction in support for it, but we'll get to that shortly.

I also want to thank you for recognising that I, as Minister, and our administration did something probably a bit harder than what you are going to be doing. We had a country — there was no tourism; we had to start from scratch and your recognising as much meant a lot to me because I, along with the staff at DoT and all the supporting stakeholders, probably had one of the most difficult tasks for this country — to open safely and get our tourism product back up. I think it's fair to say, you know, that you've come in and found some things there for you.

With that being said, I do have some concerns. The first one is that you are the Minister for Tourism *and* Trade. I've noticed the lack thereof in discussions about trade. I've also noticed that there's nothing in your budget for trade either and unfortunately, there is a growing perception that the trade part of your Ministry is only trade in name but not in action so let's start there.

Can you tell me about the trade component, because we have much to talk about regarding the tourism part, but I can't identify any trade policy area or budget for it — I guess the question is what are you doing with trade?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Also, thank you to the Member for George Town Central for those kind words. I just want to reiterate something he spoke about. I did and I appreciate all the hard work and efforts that you did. I heard the COVID stories of working through the night and starting from scratch, and I couldn't start today without mentioning that because you had much on your shoulders.

Talking about trade diversification. It is relatively new. We had our first meeting, I'd say about four weeks ago, and probably 15 or 20 people attended. We are also in collaboration with Minister Jay Ebanks and we're looking at opportunities that we can bring products into Cayman. Every time a ship crosses here to go up to Miami and you exchange cargo in different hands, it's an added cost. If we can look to the west and to the south and southwest of us, and tap into some of those markets and be able to bring, you know, whether it's construction goods or food supplies into Cayman that will help us lower our cost of living because I've done some research and got information coming from Brazil that there's a possibility that we can land products here for at least 30 per cent of the [current] cost. If we can get goods not at a discounted price but at a better purchase price, and pass those on to consumers, that would be a direct reflection to reduce the cost of living.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Minister. I'm glad to hear that something is going to eventually get started in respect of the trade component so we can actually see specifics; and I guess there are going to be several discussions until you develop what that Ministry is like. Patience is going to be necessary, and I offer that to you.

As we are speaking about shipment and trading and things—and I hope I'm not stepping out of line here, it's your government and you can do as you think is necessary for allocations; but people are even questioning, if you are the Minister for Trade, wouldn't it make sense to keep the ports and airports under that Ministry, particularly because of the tourism component and now trade so when you're having those discussions... I know the Honourable Minister is a very capable Minister to do it, and he's my friend as you know, so I'm not suggesting he's not able to do it, but he has a big Ministry already. It may have made sense to keep it there. I wouldn't expose you to say anything about that, but people are asking if it would have been more logical for you to have kept that. Any thoughts?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you for that honourable Member. At the time we discussed the different Ministries and Portfolios, it was brought to my attention a potential conflict between Cayman Airways and the Airports Authority (one being the tenant, the other being the landlord); and Minister Ebanks

having infrastructure. Trade came on probably about a week after we discussed the different ministries; it wasn't on the table at the time we were discussing the original ministries.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, we can move on, but just a hypothetical suggestion that you guys may want to reconsider. That's my thought.

I want to turn to your contributions now. The first thing you said was *change is coming*. You also highlighted at the very end that “**some changes are necessary while others are long overdue**” — can you specify what you are speaking of? What changes? Do you have a list of them? Is there something happening now that you think needs to stop, and then you're going to bring other things in? Can you give any more specifics?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When I say change is coming, you know, there's always change in the air. We have to look at our current tourism product — who are we presenting it to and who are we presenting it for. I go to Cayman Airways... we got to look at our destinations right now. Are there other markets we should be tapping into? Do we want to enhance and grow that?

We look at Pedro St. James for instance, when we talk about change. We purchased a piece of land to the east just a couple of weeks ago; we're closing on that. We want to look at upgrading the facilities there, you know, more offerings, weddings, celebrations, parties, because there's much potential there that we need to tap into, not just people coming through and touring. There are night-time activities, but we also need to be cognisant of parking because there are people in the area complaining about our guests parking in their lot.

We just want to make sure that we're looking for the future, you know. It's the same thing with the purchase of 125 acres of land in the Brac, I think in July or August, so we're thinking long term.

The Chairman: Hon. Bryan continuing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Okay, I look forward to those changes, bearing in mind we're seven months in and we got to start seeing some of those.

You said the overall budget has increased. I'm confused by that because I did all the changes in your line items and according to my calculations — and I'm willing to have the Financial Secretary (FS) examine this but, line-item by line-item, your totals actually have decreased by \$5.4 million with your whole budget supplementaries, yet in your statement you say it has increased. I mean, we can happily go through

each output for the two-year period, line by line, and I can show you the numbers from last year to this year. I think you probably will eventually recognise there's also a \$2.2 million decrease for Cayman Airways. I think you would agree to that. No?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chair through you, I am happy to go through whatever way the honourable Member for George Town Central likes to take it.

The Chairman: Members, we're not going there. The government's budget is set and the Minister needs to explain his variance.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew: Mr. Chair, I wonder whether we wait until we get into the actual appropriations to do deep dives into those numbers so we can finish with the statement.

The Chairman: Yes, it would be good if we were to go that route, but as we move forward we have to ensure that we pay close attention to what I have set as a very liberal conversation with all Members of the Parliament. I think a basic question has been set that would cut across all the appropriations. I think overall there's an envelope that every Minister has received, and all Ministers would know its details and how they are going to manage and deliver their commitments within that envelope.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, the question was simply the variance between his statement and what is actually in the appropriation. I don't want to make it a big deal because I don't intend to argue today with my good friend, but from a perspective that people fully understand what the budget is saying.

I was surprised when you said there's an increase because I've checked your budget line item by line item, cent by cent, and there has been a decrease — and just for the listening public, myself and the Deputy Premier's relationship is stronger than ever. At the end, when we're closing off the last one, if the FS wants to provide — but it is unfair to the public to say that there's an increase when there's not an increase. There are increases in certain line items, but your overall budget, line item for line item for the last two years, 2024 and 2025, has decreased for 2026 and 2027. I'll leave that there and go on to my next question, Mr. Chairman, in the interest of what the Leader said.

You also said that you intend to grow the industry. Do you have any specifics on how you're going to do that? The reason I say that is that we got significant pushback from further growth in tourism by many different entities in society that think tourism shouldn't

be growing anymore because it's contributing to traffic problems, population growth, and so forth. It's important that I know from a policy and direction perspective, as the Deputy Premier as well as the Minister, when you say you're growing the industry, is it a change in tune; it's actually the same tune that I had and I support you but — how do you plan to grow it?

In your speech, you said there's a clear understanding of where the industry stands in order to chart where we aspire to be. The question is, where do you aspire for tourism to be by way of growth in, say, the next five years?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the next five years, my goal is to increase stayover tourism — I'd like to hit the 550[,000] mark. I would also like to hit the 1.7 [million] mark for cruise tourism, which is growth because the numbers that we have for 2027 are very, very encouraging and 2028 is looking just as good if not better; but I am mindful, you know, that we look at growth [and] what I mean by growth is to also spread some of the love on the island, possibly taking tenders into the West Bay dock.

Minister Anglin, Minister Ebanks and I were in West Bay a few months ago and we looked at the Waterfront property that was purchased under your guidance a couple of years ago. Just last week, we had divers there [checking the] depth to see if we could also utilise it for bringing tenders. When I say growth, it's not just funnelling everybody to George Town. You talk about the traffic; if we can spread some of this. Minister Ebanks was also talking about enhancing the Spotts' docking facilities to send some of those east. We have to spread some of the love on the island; that's along the lines that we're talking about growth as well.

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

I'm interested that you said the growth particularly for 2027, and you went into the cruise component. When we were discussing the port with the Honourable Minister Jay Ebanks, a question came up about the numbers for cruise passengers, and you gave the list for 2025, 2026, 2027, and 2028. I noticed in your speech you stopped at 2027 because it is the highest point, but on the day we were doing that, you also mentioned there's going to be a drop in 2028. Any particular reason you didn't highlight that in your speech? It's important for the context of where the industry is going. I know that naturally you're going to highlight the good stuff, but it's important that we highlight what the projections are saying for the bad stuff. I can bring the Hansards if you want.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Member for George Town Central, thank you for that. The reason why I didn't bring up 2028 is that it is basically three years out from here and the bookings aren't all confirmed. There's more to come and there are other ships being built as well that we hope to capitalise on. I felt more confident with 2026 and 2027.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Fair point. Can we go to page six of your speech where you talked about the visitor experience grant?

You said that you're funding it by \$500,000 but that's a decrease of 50 per cent from the last two years. I mean, are you intending to expand the offerings because that's what FCCA asked about, new activities, and it's in line exactly [with] what I was facing; hence the reason for the creation of this grant — to inspire new offerings. You say you want to support that, but you've cut the budget by 50 per cent. If you look in your Plan and Estimates, you'll see that the budget for the VEDG Programme, which is the Visitor Experience [Development Grant] Programme, which was created under our government or under my tenure — not trying to make it a political thing — was \$1 million over the two years; for yourself it's \$500,000 over the two years and it's not supporting the entrepreneurs who are trying to build those new products.

You remember the criteria made for it was it had to be new, it had to be innovative, you got brand points to get the grant for it to go to Eastern districts and stuff like that. Much hard work was done by the Department of Tourism to create that, but the question is if you want to expand it, why are you underfunding it by 50 per cent.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Yes, sir. Thank you for that question. We also increased the outputs for the scholarship programmes — I have increased those significantly. We dipped some of the VEDG because we saw the opportunities. I mean, Cayman Airways as an example: we have pilots who are going to be retiring soon, so we have to think succession plans and where can we invest money in pilot scholarships as well as general scholarships so we kind of shifted some around there.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. If you want to make an amendment to get that extra \$250,000 back for this programme, I would support you. I'm glad though, speaking of the Pilot programme. Again, another scholarship programme I created which you're continuing, so I'm very, very happy about that.

Let's talk about beautification, which is another programme that has been cut. Do you recall that — maybe your Chief Officer can assist — it's now at

\$250,000? Beautification is very important, and I know the Honourable Member for Savannah is a big steward for this as she was before, but it's now down to \$250,000. Can you tell me what line item is that covered under because I am assuming it's under the same line item that was there before, which is the TP, but your TP only has \$1 million in it?

You also highlighted the film programme of a million, but there's no one million provision for a film programme. Based on how we used to do it, I assume that TP, which covers sports and cultural tourism programmes assistance, is normally where beautification and the film rebate would be, but according to your speech you've already gone over the million-dollar mark you have in your budget, so where is the money coming from?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Yes, it will be coming from that. When it came to beautification, Minister Ebanks and I did some tours together and some of the things that we felt were under beautification, Public Works was also doing, so we were almost duplicating. For instance, we had some activities at Consuelo Beach and the Smith Barcadere and Public Works actually came in to do the work which they thought, you know, might have been beautification. If we can save something and if a Ministry is already allocated to take care of those things, we just let the Public Works continue to deal with it.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much. That's fair.

The Chairman: Hon. Bryan continuing.

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

That makes sense from the reduction perspective. Can you then address the other part, which is the beautification allotment of a quarter million, and the film rebate part of a million? Where is it going to be coming from specifically? The Chief Officer could probably assist because I suspect it's under the TP for the million, but the total amount for both is over the million because there's no other output group there for those.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you. That's TP 67 you are talking about?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: The film rebate in there is for \$500,000. The sponsorship request is \$375,000, and the beautification projects are \$125,000 per year.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Slow down so I can get those numbers. Start over.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Did you not get the spreadsheet?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: All right, I do have it. I do apologise for that, sir. The million... Okay, continue on.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Yes, sir. The film rebate is for a million dollars over two years. The sponsorship requests are for \$750,000 over two years; and the beautification projects are for \$250,000 over two years.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Oh okay, so it's a further cut. I see, I see what you've done there. Your announcements are based on a two-year period as opposed to a one-year period, so \$250,000 would be the two years — \$125,000 for each year. That makes sense?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Correct.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. It's actually a 75 per cent cut because I think we had the beautification component across the island in the system at \$650,000, right, Ms. Heather? A substantial cut from a beautification perspective. Okay, that's the Government's decision. I can't override it; if you don't find it a priority then ...

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: No, no, I just want to be clear, honourable Member. Public Works is also doing several things that we felt the Beautification Committee could have been doing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. Can we talk about the sponsorship request? It is now substantially less, at \$375,000. Now, in most cases, people under-appreciate it because they don't quite know where the money for many things comes from, but the film rebate is taking up \$500,000 for the year out of the \$1 million, and \$125,000 for the beautification that's \$625,000 which leaves you \$375,000.

Normally, the ministry, what we do for local entertainment, particularly for our guests, is to sponsor many of the concerts — Capella, Out of this World, the Seafood Festival... Many of these things that the department would tell you are guests, and we let the hotels know these are entertainment because one of the biggest criticisms we had in the tourism product is there's nothing to do, and rather than the government taking it on, we would sponsor these events. Now you have a substantial drop in your sponsorship monies.

There's another key component, which is the Cayman Classic Basketball Tournament, which is actually happening this coming week and brings in [significant] tourism revenue and traffic; and business opportunity. Are you going to continue to sponsor all those things, and if so, can you do it with this amount?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, honourable member. I got some tickets for the Classic this weekend, if you want some.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: My constituents would appreciate it.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Minister Rankine and I were speaking especially when it comes to sports tourism. We're going to look at those and see how we can divvy up between the two of us and be like a co-brand together.

I went through the list of some of the other sponsorships that you spoke about and if it's not going to directly impact, or we can benefit from it as a tourism destination and tourism industry I'm very, very mindful of how we are going to spend it. I'm taking a conscious decision and making sure that we get value for money and exposure.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Fair enough. I thank you so much for that answer, Minister.

I did ask the Honourable Minister of Sports, if you recall, because I examined your budget and I saw that the Cayman Classic wasn't there. I asked him if he was going to sponsor that, and he said no; you recall? That was on Monday.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: I don't recall.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, all right. Hopefully we'll find a saving somewhere; the Cayman Classic is important, and I think the DoT will tell you that.

Value for money. Are you saying the two concerts and the seafood festival, which are predominant things for local and guest experience, will not be sponsored this year?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying I'm taking a conscious look at many other line items that have been sponsored in the past to ensure that they are directly reflected for tourism, that we are getting the exposure, and it's intended to benefit tourism.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, thank you so much.

Can we move on to Cayman Airways as a part of your speech? It's on page 11.

Based on my calculations, for CAL 1, CAL 2, and equity investment for Cayman Airways for 2024 and 2025 was a total of \$58.3 million. As per your budget now, for Cayman Airways it's \$29 [million] for 2026 and \$27 [million] for 2027, which is a total of \$56.1 million. That's a difference of a \$2.2 million decrease over the budget cycle. What I'm concerned about is that you see where there are two perspectives; you can look at Cayman Airways as a regular business just to try its best to cover its overheads or you can look at it as an economic accelerator.

In my opinion, I see Cayman Airways as an economic necessity to continue not only flights for our local population's storm/emergency evacuation, but also leveraging the market — when other airlines try to bring up the prices, we can manage it, so it's important even though some people want to accuse it saying it's not making money.

You've decreased it by \$2.2 million over the period. I think you said that you want them to control costs, which is natural. Every government is going to want to do that but I think you're setting up Cayman Airways in a very difficult position whereby they're going to be forced to do other things such as increase either the cost of tickets or baggage and fees. We have this video that's going around right now, which is killing Cayman Airways about the cost of baggage and fees. If you haven't adequately...

You've reduced it, not increased it — you reduced the cost to Cayman Airways; then you have the personnel issue, no COLA [cost of living adjustment] for the personnel in there. You're going to have the issue of your mandate for the PMFA [Public Management and Finance Act] in respect to equal pay across SAGCs and government, and you haven't given them the money for it. Do you think this is adequate to support Cayman Airways, is the question?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Cayman Airways is a business and we got to run it like a business. I've given the board what I envisioned with Cayman Airways. They had their board meeting yesterday and actually went through the business plan, which I have not seen. I guess Cayman Airways has other areas to increase revenue or create revenue other than selling seats; we have to look at some of these outside-the-box areas and implement them. We're challenging, we're incentivising the management to put some new measures in place — not just raise fees but create different areas that we can generate revenue.

I feel quite confident that getting through the first year and putting some of these measures in place for 2027 can make up the difference.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Minister. Speaking of potential revenues or fees for Cayman Airways, I hope that that's not going to be the case because many Caymanians fly with Cayman Airways and they don't want to pay any more extra costs but again, it's your Ministry; you and your board are in charge of that.

Are you concerned about the new tax revenue measures that your government has laid out and what the effects would be on the tourism product? We are already a highly expensive destination for our guests. It's a common thing we are noted for as a bad mark — *It's really expensive in the Cayman Islands*; which is our product, you know, we are high end but I don't think we want to add any more cost to it. Are you concerned about any of that?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The last few days, I've sat in this honourable House and we went through the police budget. Everybody wants a new road. Everybody wants to feel safe and secure. Everybody wants to enjoy some new amenity or some new infrastructure, and it costs money to create those things. All 19 of us want something, whether it's in our district or constituency. From what's been provided to me, we haven't had any big changes in revenue increase measures in several years. The previous administration, including yourself, came through COVID; you know what challenges you felt. We talk about education, about health care. Across the board, everybody wants to have the best service available and to get the best services we have to pay for them.

I feel comfortable with what we have in place. I know there are some individuals that are questioning. If you go and you buy a gallon of gas and it's up one cent somebody's going to complain. At the end of the day, if we want to enjoy the better things of life here and the good quality of life and to provide for our visitors to come here, we have to make sure that we invest in our infrastructure and be able to provide for that. I'll go back to yesterday with the police; they want to feel safe in this country. As Caymanians, we want to feel safe as well and drive on a good road.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I agree with you wholeheartedly, Minister, so thank you for that. I'm assuming for the first part of the question that you're comfortable with the fee outlay. That's good to know.

Have you had any discussions with the tourism industry players, particularly CITA [Cayman Islands Tourism Association] and the Hotel Association in respect of the increased cost, because there are a number of those fees that were listed that will affect them and I'm assuming will affect the product we de-

liver and the cost factors. What have they given you by way of feedback?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: As of this morning, I haven't heard any feedback on the fees with the hotels.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Minister. I have other questions, but I am mindful my colleagues do too, and I don't want to overwhelm everybody. I'll take a break and I'll come back afterwards.

The Chairman: We've been questioning the statement now at substantial length. At what point are we going to turn our attention to output groups, because many of these questions do impinge upon output groups. I think we ought to get to the point where we start relating the questions to the actual output groups as well, Members.

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Chairman, I just have a couple of questions on this statement and then leave it to the others bearing in mind what you just said about the output groups. I thank the Honourable Minister for the presentation. Would have loved to hear the extended version.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Sorry, Honourable Leader, I can't pass that one on yet.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: On page eight, you listed TOU 16 and TOU 19. I searched for those; I assume they are wrapped up in DAT 1 and DAT 17.

In any event, the increase in what you have here as TOU 16 is 20 per cent. It would be interesting to hear a little bit about that but the one that intrigues me is under your heading TOU 19, which relates to tourism education awareness programmes with a significant increase of 58 per cent. I suspect that covers things like the PRIDE (Personal Responsibility in Delivering Excellence) training — which you might need to change that name soon. I suspect it covers those sorts of things but if you could elaborate on it for us it'd be good because I don't see it. I couldn't find it anywhere under the purchase agreements.

The Chairman: Leader, your point is taken on the nomenclature of the name.

Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, let me speak with my colleague for one second, please.

[Pause]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

TOU 16 refers to ports-of-entry specific training, tourism-operated service and cultural sensitivity, local community educational sponsorships — example CCMI (Central Caribbean Marine Institute), ECO Warriors and National Trust.

TOU 19, workforce innovation and initiatives, workforce recruitment readiness programmes, third-party training, Aquila, Lemon8, Connect by Nova, Inspire Cayman, PRIDE, Know Your Cayman Islands History, and promises customer service training workshops, operator tail inspection and licensing forum, PRIDE training course accreditation to increase workforce value to aid with workplace retention. It's also high school career fairs, primary school visits, materials, resources, coordination, youth tourism, career sector awareness, tourism youth ambassador programme, competition event, presentation training, career development, Ministry of Tourism scholarship programme, campaigns, orientation and networking events and educational support.

It's also School of Hospitality Studies with tourism and curriculum, competitions and awards sponsorships, FCCA essay and poster competitions, school projects and educational field trips. It's also developing future training initiatives, legacy learning mentorship programme, hospitality and business etiquette course, integration of public speaking and presentation course and environmental literacy programme.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. That's an exhausting list.

With the 58 per cent increase, can you say whether you're anticipating an increase in participants or have you increased the number of programmes you're covering in this?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, honourable Member. It will be both. We're doing these programmes because we have many more people.

Like Minister Myles [said] yesterday, we had 130 new hires and we want to make sure that we're getting our people ready. We have Grand Hyatt coming on and One | GT. If we're going to invest, we want to make sure to invest in training our people; get them up to speed and have the proper training like everybody else does or better.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Okay, thank you, Minister.

Through you, Mr. Chairman. I heard you mention a couple of entities there but didn't hear anything about the School of Hospitality Studies. Is it included in some of those training programmes you spoke about, or are we diverting the kids somewhere else?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: It is in here, sorry.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Minister for that. I'll leave it at that for now.

Mr. Chairman, if you would indulge me, I just want to make a couple of quick comments on the Film Commission. Funny enough, I advocated to move it to tourism when I was a tourism councillor and then when I became the Minister for DCI (Department of Commerce & Investment), I tried to move it back to DCI, but I never had enough time with it.

Honourable Minister, there are a couple of things to do with it. I don't know how much a million dollars is going to help you in attracting films, maybe for short stories and small productions, but where I think the film industry, and the festivals as well need some attention, is on customs and immigration. These may have been resolved; I don't know.

One: the cumbersomeness of listing every piece of equipment, musical instrument — it might be everything they bring in for a large conference, a movie or a concert; you have to list it all with customs. It's quite an exhausting process. There has to be some way of streamlining that to make it easy.

Two: immigration — the work visas for the guys setting up the things, people coming to work... and I know that when films come, in particular, they hire everyone they can hire; but also with concerts. Just as important for you are the large conferences. By the way, some people come in for conferences and their booth doesn't make it to the conference because it's held up at customs to get serial numbers and descriptions and values and all those sorts of things. Persons coming to set up particular booths, stages, et cetera, are on the road 364 days of the year, but we require them to get their police record from Biloxi, Mississippi — when they could be in Europe somewhere, working on the stage. It becomes very difficult, and I can say to you confidently it is why some of the larger conferences do not come here.

We went through it with Kaboo. It was a nightmare. Chief Officer, remember that one of the largest conference organisers loves the Cayman Islands but will never come back? He had to split the crew into two groups because the visa only allowed them to stay two weeks; [meanwhile,] the conference was a month long — and when he left, he left that beautiful glass dance floor over the pool. He gave it to Massive. He left that big beautiful tent they used. Many of these things get left here but there were several issues in getting them here, getting the people who know how to set them up, et cetera.

Those are some of the challenges you're going to face with large conferences, events, and movie productions.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Honourable Member, I appreciate that. We were at the Ritz Carlton a couple of months ago and the Cayman Cook-Off Festival came up. My team and I were having a discussion in their boardroom and something they asked for was a point person. I think exactly what you may be going down to, almost like a concierge service with Immigration or Home Affairs. I came right back and Minister DaCosta and I got together; he actually had his Chief Officer reach out to the Ritz Carlton right away and we're opening up that level of service and line of communication. Am I right there, Minister?

Cayman is a premier destination. It's special. There's no other place like the Cayman Islands. You look at the private jets that fly here daily. They don't ask how much it costs for fuel; if you got to ask how much, you know you can't afford it, but they're coming to this country and they're spending money and we as a People, as a government, and the private sector, must deliver first-class service and first-class treatment.

I want to touch on the Film Commission and the amounts there. Right now, we're working with two local producers. Frankie Flowers is producing a film called *The Bluff* and we will be having a premiere show of that in February. We're helping sponsor that as well in bringing down some talent and hopefully there'll be some stars coming in on the Cayman Airways LA (Los Angeles) flight.

We're also speaking with Ms. Jazz Pitcairn, a local film producer. She did, I think it was a 15-minute short film, on Hurricane Ivan; now she's turning it into a movie so we've been having some conversations with her on how we can help fund her as well. There's much talent here in Cayman, you know, a lot of interest being generated and if we can get some of that exposure and hopefully some of these will go big, the investment would be a drop in the bucket to the return.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Through you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Minister for that and just closing on that to say, you know, I support the Film Commission entirely. The most important role it will play is ensuring that productions, whether they be movies or reality shows, reflect the Cayman Islands in a proper way. I think that is the most important thing of ensuring that these productions go through the Film Commission and through the right process before being filmed and aired to the rest of the world.

Moving on to Cayman Airways, page 12 piqued my interest when you talked about key initiatives — a “bundle travel package” combines flight, accommodation, and activities. I'm sure that you guys have thought about it, but I thought I'd throw it out: *Two or three islands, one vacation.* Cayman Airways

flying into the Brac, then maybe you do a day or two in Little Cayman. Then one ticket covers the three islands. That's a bundle that I have always thought we should look at, so just throwing that out there.

Closing, Mr. Chairman, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to jump into the history lesson because it's one I'm very proud of. I thank the Minister [who] spoke fondly of my mom and his dad working together. We have jokes from stories we heard that we can tell at the lunch table, but not here on the mic. My mother, God rest her soul, went on to manage several condos on the Seven Mile Beach, the last of which I spent three or four years of my life — the Smurf Houses, Cayman Sands on the West Bay Road, and then went on to build her janitorial company which still maintains the public areas of the large hotels and stuff so her legacy lives on there. My dad started the first paper company supplying the hotels chemicals and paper. He started Commodity Marketing in 1971; unfortunately, we had to sell that business when I got into politics. It became Hews Hotel and Restaurant Supplies where I spent 30 years designing, supplying and installing commercial restaurant kitchens and laundries for the hotels. There are very few out there that I didn't have my hand in including a few restaurants that the Honourable Minister owned.

I spent six years as the president of the Cayman Islands Restaurant Association until myself, Doug Sears, someone we should all remember; Rod McDowall, someone we should honour in the tourism industry; got together sitting waiting to have a meeting with the honourable Tom Jefferson and in that meeting decided to create the Cayman Islands Tourism Association where I served as a director for a couple of years. There are people whom we have to remember in tourism. Persons who supported me as a young Caymanian. I worked in Ottmars; I worked at Shenanigans, Big Daddy's, Italian Gardens; I bartended for Barnes Bartendering until I became Chamber president, and my dad said, *son, you can't serve them and lead them at the same time*, so I had to give that up. Persons like Ms. Suzy Soto, the late Ms. Cicely Delapenha, the late Mike Flowers, and Dorothy Scott, all supported me 100 per cent as a young Caymanian and they were stalwarts within the local tourism industry. I just wanted to mention them and honour them at this time.

By the way, I would be in trouble, Mr. Chairman, if I did not recognise that my wife who owns Bon Vivant was the first and major sponsor of Cayman Cookout, so she remains in that industry.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Absolutely. Lots of deep roots across many of our families in the tourism industry.

One thing I want to mention, Honourable Leader, that you brought up, is in regard to the difficulties that different operators have around getting items in and out of Cayman. I got a request just this week,

and certainly, the approach that I've taken is a very liberal one, and I wanted to say it here publicly because these stories always grow legs in our little, small community called the Cayman Islands. They run extremely fast and far.

From my perspective, this is a very low-risk area of leakage of government revenues, so because it's low risk, I've taken a very liberal approach. In fact, the last one I got, I contacted the Minister of Home Affairs directly and gave him authority to inform customs. We wrote the people back to say, *bring your items*. I mean, as you said, they sent us this long list with serial numbers and all sorts of things, and we simply need to get out of the way of making sure the business comes to Cayman because the fact is this is a very, very low risk area for us as a country.

We need to do what it takes to ensure the items [arrive] and people's experience in and out of Cayman become one that is much, much more seamless, not trying to treat promoters — and many of them are local promoters; treating them like they are some sort of thieves trying to gyp the government, when in fact, we know the value of the items, many of which they are getting on rent, means they're going back because the owners of that equipment are going to ensure they get it back to move on to their next venue.

I hear you and that is an area that we are certainly going to work on closely together to make sure that we don't continue to stumble over ourselves because, as you quite rightly put it, it has been a hugely negative area.

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

[Desk thumping]

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Mr. Premier.

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Afternoon. Just a brief intervention to piggyback on your comment, which I think stems from what the Leader of the Opposition is getting at. It's a good thing that our conference packages are diversifying. We've started to get conferences and interest from conferences over the years that we perhaps didn't even conceive of in decades gone by so your point is quite right in terms of how we now revamp the entry point and the exit point.

In addition to that, what the DP (Deputy Premier) and I have been working on is a greater synergy between financial services and tourism. With all the rules around substance and activity having to happen here, it means more board meetings are happening here; that means more conferences want to happen here. I've already started to talk to the DP and Miss

Rosa, who does amazing work, on how we join those bridges because there's much activity that we can continue to capture because tourism is just a reason to visit. If we're getting more reasons to visit from business, then financial services and tourism really need to twin in terms of their contributions to the island, so thank you for that.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman.

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

For my last on the subject, I want to help you out. On the items coming in such as equipment, et cetera, I have no doubt in my mind that 100 per cent of the time these event folks are working with our local people, sometimes all of them. All you would need is a confirmation that they're working with a local events company here to cover that aspect of it.

The second part of it that I forgot is visas. I go by experiences. I remember Hyundai wanted to have their big conference here. The president of the company was from Korea, the vice president of the region was from Colombia, and when they saw what they had to go through to get the visa to come to Cayman, they moved the conference somewhere else. I feel that these conferences coming into the Ritz and the Westin, et cetera, should be managed by their event staff. They can collect \$50, we collect \$100 and send a list to Immigration and get the visas for the persons to come in for the conference. These are not the people we have a visa regime to keep out of the country.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for that intervention, Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Saunders, Member for Bodden Town West.

**AMENDMENT TO THE APPROPRIATION
(FINANCIAL YEARS 2026 AND 2027) BILL, 2025**
(Withdrawal thereof)

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I know you're anxious to get on to the Schedule so I'm going to open up that part of the conversation. Recognising that I filed a motion on DAT 1 which reads:

In accordance with Standing Order 84(3) of the Parliament Standing Orders, 2025, I, Christopher S. Saunders, elected Member for Bodden Town West do give notice to move the following Amendment to the Appropriation (Financial Years 2026 and 2027) Bill, 2025

- (1) That head DAT 1 be reduced by \$1 for 2026 and \$1 for 2027 in respect of "Advice and Support to the Minister for Tourism and Trade Development."**

As you may recall, Mr. Chairman, that motion was filed exactly to trigger the statements that we

have and the conversations that we have, and so far, I must say that I am impressed with the Deputy Premier and Minister of Tourism's opening statement.

It was very passionate and well delivered, but something that I want to touch on before I withdraw this motion so we can get back on schedule is that I'm happy that he actually mentioned the National Tourism Plan. It is something that I think is actually badly needed and long overdue. I know that in the past the Department of Tourism has worked on developing other plans which unfortunately sometimes get hijacked in a different manner in terms of their own tourism plan but I'm encouraged by what the Premier said in terms of linking financial services to tourism. The reason being that in the past, Mr. Chairman, before you had the formal Ministry of Financial Services, those two were linked, and I know you would be aware of that.

If you go back to the 1980s IMAC conferences, those things sprung out of the fact that most of the companies that we have are US-based companies and US tax laws when you talk about mind and management do not allow US companies to be offshore and have their board meetings in the US. As a result, many of those entities had their board meetings in Cayman. For whatever reason, between 2005 and 2009 the government lost its way in delinking that relationship between financial services and tourism and they started holding those meetings in other jurisdictions, when in the past they always came to Cayman. Many of us are old enough to remember. I think it was Joey Young who was building all of those hotels. We were catering for business travellers because they had to come to Cayman whether they liked it or not. We lost our way with that, so I'm very happy to see it coming back.

I remember and Mr. Chairman you would remember back in 2010 when you had to help us move mountains when as part of the deal when HSBC was doing the bond for government we insisted that HSBC's Capital Conference be held in the Cayman Islands and to note: to get invited to that conference, you had to be in the \$100 million borrowing club. In other words, if you were not borrowing or lending at least \$100 million we wouldn't invite you. We had guys flying in on private jets only to be told that they couldn't land or immigration wanted to hold their passport. These were multimillionaires coming in on private jets, and we were telling them they needed to leave their passport. You remember, Mr. Chairman, what had to be done at the time just to have millionaires and billionaires coming to this country for a day and we were chasing them away, you know what I mean, so I understand that.

The last thing I want to mention before I withdraw this motion is about Cayman Airways being a business. I agree with the Minister in that regard, but one thing needs to be clear, Cayman Airways is competing against other major US airlines that while they

are also a business, they are not in the transport business.

Those major US airlines — and you remember what I sent you, Deputy Premier — are no longer in the transport business. They operate like banks so you cannot have Cayman Airways, a transport company, competing with major US carriers that are hell bent or determined, or their business model allows them to lose money on the transportation side because they make their profit on the loyalty programme. Those are the programmes that are carrying those airlines. Any Caribbean country believing they can make money from transporting on an airline in a seat, that is done. Air Jamaica, BWIA and all of them have proven it can't work. Transportation has to be subsidised.

When we talk about Cayman Airways, there are other things that Cayman Airways provides to this economy. If anyone has any doubts, have a look at Turks and Caicos when Cayman Airways used to provide a service. The minute we left and the Americans went in, some days you flying to Miami is a \$1,500 ticket. At least on average, we can get a ticket for \$300 to \$500 year-round going to Florida. There are other things that Cayman Airways provides in our market that keep the airline fares down. Like I said, those US carriers don't mind that they're already losing money on the seats because they make the money elsewhere.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I got that off of my chest. DAT 1, the motion that I have filed to reduce the vote by \$1 each year, I am now putting a motion to withdraw that motion.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for your consideration, honourable member.

Member for Red Bay, Mr. Tatum — members, we are approaching the 12:30 hour; we will continue to take questions on the statement until that time, and then we move on to the Appropriation group.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: As we said earlier, because we are in Committee, you don't need a seconder. You can withdraw your motion on your own so the motion is withdrawn. No vote, no.

Mr. Tatum.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to chime in with what was said earlier in terms of the link between financial services and tourism. That link goes back to the very inception. I was reminded of a report that I read and some of us may have seen it. I came across this years ago called "Creating Cayman as an Offshore Financial Centre" published by the University of Alabama. I'll just read one little bit, sir, this is with regard to the creation of

the 1960 Companies Law. It said, "**the Administrator who introduced the Law into the Assembly, pursued two goals suggested by his immediate predecessor: first, the company registration fees**" — and before I say this bit, sir, as a country during the '50s and '60s, we had been struggling to find sources of funds to create a way to eradicate mosquitoes. I'll continue... "**the company registration fees would provide funds for the mosquito eradication program, and second, a growing financial sector could create employment for the seamen whose jobs were threatened...**"

Where I'm going with this, sir, is that early creation of those fees was used to—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Okay, all right. I won't go any further into this. I'm just showing since the early days of financial services the importance of those fees being used to get rid of mosquitoes in order to help grow the important tourism [industry] back when tourism was more important than the financial services sector. That's the link.

I'd also like to thank the Honourable Minister for the very moving bit of his speech towards the end and for acknowledging the importance of tourism; it continues to be important. Yes, my brother Russell and I did work at the Brac Reef for the huge sum of \$13 a day back when we were teenagers.

If I could start, sir, page four of your statement — room stock by product category. I guess I could guess at this, but I would rather not. Are you able to say how many of those are Airbnbs, or are they all in the guest house/villa sector?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Thank you, Member for Red Bay. Approximately 800.

The Chairman: Member for Red Bay continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, sir. I'll jump to Cruise on page seven. I am very happy to see the numbers therein going up. Do you have a breakdown by cruise lines because some cruise lines are worth more than others; I'll phrase it that way.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Member for Red Bay, I can get it for you in writing. I have it, but not with me.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: That's fine, sir. I think it's important for us to know so we can see exactly what lines are coming.

Page 10. I've had a few constituents write to me regarding the visitor experience development grant. There was a series of questions, but I'll summarise it into four. I think there's another round to come but in what's gone so far, could you advise if you have such there, how many applicants applied and how many were actually granted?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The persons assisted in 2024 were 14, and persons assisted in 2025 were 5, and they're to be announced.

The Chairman: He also asked how many applied, not just granted.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, I'll get that information.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: If you don't have it here, I'm happy to receive it otherwise.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, 110 applied in 2024, and 65 in 2025.

The Chairman: Continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Mr. Chair, thank you very much. I thank the honourable Member as well. Were the 14 for 2024 and the ones for 2025 announced — by announced I mean were they made public. I know you weren't there then.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, I'll get the information.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: I'm not looking at holding up anything, sir, so if it could be provided I'm quite fine with that. I don't want to slow things down. I just want to ensure I get the information so I can pass it on.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, through you.

Member for Red Bay, the five for 2025 are to be announced; I'm still waiting for the 14 from 2024.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: If it has been announced somewhere you can let you know.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, through you. The 14 for 2024 have been notified, but I guess you're asking if they were publicly announced;

no. They haven't been [made] public, but they have been notified.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Okay, that will be forthcoming at some point as well then.

The Speaker: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Yes, I will make sure that the Ministry passes that information on.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: The final question on that, sir: what is the expected process as we give these grants? Do we follow them up to see if they've been successful, if the entities have gone on to create the new experiences as was expected?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, the Member is looking for impact.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Very good word, sir. Thank you.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Yes, sir. There is a process that the Ministry has in connection with checking up on it.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: I'll leave that there, sir.

Page 11 – Cayman Airways: Also dear to my heart for many, many reasons, one of which is that it is the only airline that can take me back to Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. In Red Bay, there are many Caymanians like myself who migrated from the Brac who made our life here and now live within the Red Bay constituency and several in the Prospect constituency next door, as well.

I'm looking at what has been an ongoing issue — I've asked this before; improvements to the service? I thought we were looking at funding a new Saab. Could you provide some information in terms of improvements for the flights to the Brac? I don't think there's anything in the budget for it. What are the plans to improve the flights to the Brac? Are we actually looking at getting another Saab? What's the situation with that? Thank you.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you.

Like I said, Cayman Airways had a board meeting yesterday, and I'm sure this would have been discussed. I have not heard any details from that meeting, but when I spoke with the CEO some time ago they were speaking about considering a third Saab to add for the Brac.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Once you're aware of what the position is, I'd be grateful if you could let me know. Thank you.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Absolutely.

The Chairman: Mr. McTaggart, Member for George Town East.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you. Briefly, sir. Minister, the third Saab. Would that be to add frequency or for redundancy?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, let me confer with the CEO on this, please.

[Pause]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. As I thought, it would be both.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Well, okay. Minister, I just want to correct a couple of things that you mentioned in your speech — everybody else was doing so; but I have questions once we get into your appropriations.

You mentioned my mother being one of the original flight attendants for Cayman Airways, but it was not Cayman Airways; it was Cayman Brac Airways. I'm going back a decade before that. She and Isabell Giger Billeter, were the first two I remember with Cayman Brac Airways. Now I have to tell you, my father was not happy. He did not like her being a flight attendant, so it didn't last very long.

The second thing kind of slipped my mind. I'm having a senior moment.

[Laughter]

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Yes, I'll remember it and I'll get another chance.

APPROPRIATIONS TO THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND TRADE DEVELOPMENT

DAT 1 – Advice and Support to the Minister of Tourism and Trade Development

The Chairman: With that, I thank members for all the questions. Now we look at DAT 1 - Advice and Support to the Minister of Tourism and Trade Development. Are there any questions?

Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Can the Minister

say if there are any plans to increase the TAT (Tourism Accommodation Tax) or TST (Timeshare Tax)?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Member for George Town Central, at this time, No.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

Also, in your budget document, page 106, you have the intention to improve the financial reporting and recording system, which, if it's the same thing I'm thinking of, I fully support; but I want you to expand on that for me if you can. Where do you plan to take that? Look on page 106, under the Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development Plans. Seven bullet points down; it's also the third bullet point under the Department of Tourism; and a part of your outline of your risk management to modernising your revenue collection process. Can you tell me about that? What are you expanding to do there?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, just give me a minute, please, sir.

[Pause]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Yes, Mr. Chairman through you. It's an online platform to collect revenue in a more efficient manner.

The Chairman: Honourable member continuing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I fully support this. It's something the Department has been trying to do for some time. Also, there is a report that we wanted to do to ensure that we can streamline and show where the value of tourism is across the country, but it was going to be a costly exercise. I fail to remember the terminology of the tax system. I think Chief Officer can... I think you're going to get some advice.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs); it is being advanced by the ESO (Economics and Statistics Office).

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, I can assume then that eventually we're going to get there.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Yes.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. If they ask you for money to do it for tourism and the greater economy and understanding our revenue measures and the value of tourism, trust me when I say this: support them. Trust me when I say that because without it, they continue to undermine what the value of tourism is because we can't prove the dollar figure. This system will allow us to pinpoint from touch point to touch point exactly what the economic value is to this country; so if they come, Minister, I encourage you, please support them on it.

Another question I had on DAT 1 which deals with MDT 18, MDT 19 was... forgive me. I got so many questions listed here that I want to make sure that I'm asking under the right Appropriation and following your instructions, Mr. Chair. Okay, it doesn't fall under that line item and I want to ensure I keep in line with each line item because I think he's trying to create some discipline now, so I'll wait for the next line item.

The Chairman: Any further questions on DAT 1? If not, in accordance with Standing Order 83—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Sorry, sorry, Mr. Chairman; there's one. Can the Minister confirm that from an advertising money perspective the Department's budget has increased?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, give me two minutes, please.

[Pause]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. It has decreased slightly because they had to move money around to support global operations.

The Chairman: Honourable member continuing.

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

I want to say something supported by a question. Minister, for too long, even me as former Minister, unfortunately, we treat tourism like a stepsister and stepbrother. Your department's technocrats are the foundation of tourism in this country. You need to be able to give them enough funding to market. As a former business owner — well, not former, I think you still have some businesses — you know the importance of marketing. If they don't have the marketing budget...

I had fights with my own colleagues when I was there whereby I had to come back and get supplementaries because they convinced me, *oh, you*

can get the money, you can come back for a supplementary later. Don't fall for that. Do not fall for that. Fight for your Ministry. One of my biggest regrets as Minister is not fighting hard enough for DOT to ensure they have the money. If you can't tell somebody to come here, *they ain't gonna come.* We're competing with the world — not the Caribbean, the world; so when they say they need the money, find it. Every other Minister is going to find their priorities.

You are in charge of tourism and I'll be honest with you, I'm not happy to hear that it decreased. I thought it increased but I realised it's not there because it's hidden under other appropriations for marketing components. You're probably going to have to come back for a Supplementary because you are competing against the rest of the world. Our main source market, the United States, is going through much chaos right now with its spending, so we're going to have to work harder with our marketing strategists to convince them that Cayman is the place to come to. I'll leave it there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chair, through you, I appreciate that. I looked at the forecasts for air arrivals and cruise ships for 2026 and 2027, so I know our marketing money is working for us.

The Chairman: Since there are no further questions on DAT 1, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule to the Bill described as DAT 1 – Advice and Support to the Minister of Tourism and Trade Development in the amounts of \$2,850,110 in 2026 and \$2,951,466 in 2027.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: DAT 1 passed.

DAT 17 – Tourism Support, Training, Promotional and Advertising Activities

The Chairman: DAT 17 - Tourism Support, Training, Promotional and Advertising Activities. Since there are—

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: To be balanced, Mr. Chairman, DAT 17 deals with the actual Department of Tourism. The forecasted spend went from \$24.9 million in 2025 to roughly \$28 million in 2026 and \$28

million in 2027. What's driving that increase for the Department of Tourism?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Thank you, Member for Bodden Town West. It was increased for 2026 by \$3 million compared to 2025 due to personnel costs \$1.2 million in the COLA, pension [contribution], and CINICO [premiums]; supplies and consumables of \$1.3 million [in] advertising, marketing, and professional fees; and leases and IPSAS 43 depreciation of half a million.

The Chairman: Honourable Member continuing.

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

Through you, Mr. Chairman to the honourable member. Just to note that with 2026 being a midterm election year in the United States, marketing cost normally goes up in some markets depending on where the battlegrounds are for the US Congressional elections. You may want to keep that in mind as you go for your Supplementary; that you'll be competing in an expensive market at that time.

The Chairman: The Member will have the full support of the Caucus and the Minister of Finance for any supplementary funding that could be needed based on those outcomes.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: We got that in writing so good; you're good.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I want to ensure that we put that on the record. As a matter of fact, the Hansard [Unit] is listening; I want a copy of it as soon as the Committee is over. We *goin'* remember that.

The Chairman: All Members have access to all Hansards with social media, and I'm surprised that the Member for George Town Central has allowed me to start Finance Committee three consecutive days without double checking that YouTube was up and running. This will be in his permanent record on YouTube, Hansard, and everywhere for the rest of time.

Any further questions on DAT 17? Since there are no further questions, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as the DAT 17 - Tourism Support, Training, Promotional and Advertising Activities in the amounts of \$27,910,525 in 2026 and \$28,099,726 in 2027.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: DAT 17 passed.

CAL 1 – Strategic Domestic Air Services

The Chairman: CAL 1 - Strategic Domestic Air Services.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central.

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

I heard the Minister speaking about expanding opportunities with different routes. Are you talking with airlines or with Cayman Airways, and I only give you the context of this because with the money you're giving Cayman Airways right now, they will not be able to expand like that? When we launched flights to Los Angeles (LAX) and Panama, we had to give them seed money to start LAX, so I don't know in what context you mean by "you're expanding".

I'm assuming maybe in partnerships like what DOT does, go out and find bridge airlines. Many of the ones that you're announcing today were hard work we were doing on many trips from before; not taking the credit for it, but it's important that we highlight that it is work that has been ongoing for quite some time. I want to know where you're going with it because I want to ensure the budget allocation for Cayman Airways is equal to it because you can't say you want to do something if you don't have the money for it.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, thank you. One of the

Something we discussed earlier was possibly acquiring a third Saab. That's an expansion as well, although it's domestic. The Cayman Airways board met yesterday. I don't have all the information that came from there; I don't know what was discussed, so some [things] I can't elaborate on right now. For instance, we were speaking about a possible Austin route as well.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I need to correct an earlier statement by the Member for George Town Central when he basically said he had to get his funding. In the first budget, he got every cent from me that he asked for. I just want to state that for the record.

Secondly, I also had a slush fund in my Ministry [from] which I gave him money to expand the LA route so I don't want it said that he didn't get any support for tourism, at least when I was there. I just want to clear my name in that regard. I don't know what they did to him after I left, but he got what he got from me.

The Chairman: Just for clarity and my recollection of how a number of Ministers have run excess funding, you didn't quite mean a slush fund. You meant an excess of an Appropriation that could be divvied up.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you for the clarity, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Let's describe it the way I have. Thank you.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: No, no, no, no. Mr. Chairman, I'm going to tell exactly what we did. We went through every single Ministry, took out all the fat and we buried it all in one place.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: No, no, no, no, no, we buried it all... No, no, I can tell you why I'm saying that to you — because there's plenty of fat buried in all of these budgets; and I want to tell you, as Minister of Finance you need to go find every one of them and centralise it in one place and then as you need to give it out, you give it out. That's how government works.

The Chairman: Member, having been returned to this Parliament, I hope the Minister of PLAHI doesn't think for one minute that I don't understand where his fat is buried; so let's make sure that we are very, very cognisant about how budgeting works.

I clearly understand where you're coming from, former Minister of Finance, but are there any further questions on CAL 1?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Just for the record, we did a section 11(5) appropriation from another budget allocation that wasn't being used at the time. I don't know anything about any slush fund, sir. I think it was just a mis-categorisation of the appropriation — spaghetti around the plate; yeah, that's what they term it as.

In respect to the question, can the Minister say if he plans to bring Cayman Airways on par with the civil service in respect to their benefits and pay scales as per the requirement of the PMFA *[sic]*?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, let me get some advice on that, sir.

The Chairman: You're referring to the Public Authorities Act.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Sorry, you're right. The Public Authorities Act; sorry, appreciate that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Always looking out for you, Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, I think he's referring to the Public Authorities Act. It's not as far as to bring them on par, but it's to reduce the gap.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. Is there money in this two-year budget to reduce that gap? Not trying to go back into our Ministry, but we started that process on the basis of the concern of the gap [due to] the obligation of the law. We increased their salaries, we increased their pension contributions, many of those things but didn't get it to the adequate amount as per what the law requires.

Now, if you're saying that you are planning to reduce the gap as you were just advised, is there money in this budget to do that?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, just give me one second please.

The Chairman: Just to say there are a number of areas that various Ministers have taken over — and this is included — to which boards are new so there are a number of reviews that are happening; that information is going to fit in, so I'm anticipating additional requests potentially being made, so you're right on your line of questioning

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. To my understanding, it is not a requirement to reduce it and the reduction has already been made.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I'm confused. There is not a requirement to reduce it or you mean to increase it?

The Chairman: He meant the gap. He's referring to the gap.

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. It is not a requirement to *eliminate it* but it has already been reduced.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, I get what you're saying now, to bring it in line with the Public Authorities Act for mutual benefits and pay scales.

What has been the legal advice to Cayman Airways? Have they met the threshold that meets the Public Authorities Act — and I know the answer, Minister, so please make sure your advisers advise you right in respect to that. I'm not trying to get you in trouble. You don't have the money in your budget and you have an obligation. I had the same problem, so take advice very carefully, is all that I'm saying.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, let me seek the advice.

[Pause]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, the information that has been given to me was to reduce it, and we reduced it based on legal advice.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I will not belabour this. I think you opined earlier to let the new board assess the situation and if there needs to be supplementaries you will address it, so thank you for that.

There was one question that unfortunately I don't know how I allowed this to happen, but I know because the Minister is so prepared and ready to answer these questions I'm happy to ask them even though they kind of went across because I didn't see his answer for the National Tourism Plan timeline for development which has Cayman Airways involved in it, so I can get away from that perspective to ask the question.

The Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. My Ministry and I will be having a strategic meeting within the next two weeks planning to start on the National Tourism Plan probably in early 2026.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. Sticking with Cayman Airways. Our Miss Cayman used to work closely with Cayman Airways, but I notice there's no money in this budget at all for Miss Cayman. I don't know; the line item has disappeared. Is there no more funding? No more plans for Miss Cayman at all?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, just getting that information.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Oh, you're looking for... you won't find it because it's not there. Oh, you know. Okay, thanks.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. The sponsorship for Miss Universe Cayman has been moved to Tourism Scholarships under TP 12.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much, sir. Just hold one quick second.

The Chairman: You've been doing well, Mr. Bryan. You've trusted his answers thus far; let's move it along.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Sorry?

I thank you, though I didn't ask about the tourism scholarship, sir. There's a difference between the scholarship award that we give to Miss Cayman [organisation] for the winner and the funding to support the organisation to run the pageant.

The Chairman: Just to help matters along, unless things have changed materially, because I had this question asked to me just the other day in my Ministry; hopefully we don't have two scholarships floating around. As far as I'm aware, there's a clear obligation to the Minister of Education for the scholarship to Miss Cayman. That's what I've been told, Miss Cayman World and Miss Cayman Universe. That's what I've been told. The question was asked.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, maybe I can assist. The Education Department gave the scholarship. We always sponsor them with money. I think they categorised this as a sponsorship component.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: No, no, no, they actually do both. They do both. You're right. You're right. They do both, so I don't know where the double thing is, but what I'm saying is the scholarship money is there. I can see that in the Appropriation. I saw it in the TP.

What I'm talking about is that the money to sponsor the event isn't there. I don't know what people's public opinion is, but I can promise you this: the exposure we get internationally... As a matter of fact, I think the Minister would quite know what I'm talking about — his amazing daughter did a very good job in this area. You're familiar with the benefits of it from an exposure tourism perspective; but there's no funding for Miss Cayman any more.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. That would be rolled up in TP 67, sir.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: It wasn't listed in what you gave us, so you're saying you're going to put it in.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Correct.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. All right. Good. That's good. That's gone. I just want to ensure they get the support they need. I'm just trying to make sure it's under the right line item.

Mr. Chairman, in respect to Cayman Airways. Cayman Airways works very closely with people who sometimes miss their flights to Cayman to get onto the cruise ship, so in respect to cruise, is the cruise tourism plan going to be a part of the [overall] National Tourism Plan?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. It would absolutely be the right thing to do to have both cruise and stayover [tourism] under the main national tourism plan.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: In light of that, can you say what the intended plan would be? Remember now, and I'm not trying to trick you in any way, the country has decided by way of referendum and the Government has accepted that the country said "no" to a cruise pier. How do you plan to develop the cruise tourism plan now because I'll tell you that one of the biggest hurdles for developing it...?

For stay over, we have a master plan. There is hope; the team can run 50 circles around that. You just need to give them time and the money to write it, and they'll give you a beautiful document and a beautiful strategy. They've been doing great for decades, not because of you or me or a former minister; it's that team that you have there and I would trust that you trust the advice they give you because they know what they're doing.

Without the cruise component with the infrastructure, what has been your direction to them in respect to placing it in the development of cruise?

The Chairman: Minister, I'm going to allow the question; however, this is CAL 1 yet we've ventured on to cruise tourism. I'm going to allow this question, but then we get back to CAL.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Thank you, Member for George Town

Central. This will be taken care of when we discuss the strategy meeting next week for the National Tourism Plan coming in January, so to give you specifics right now, I couldn't give you specifics.

The Chairman: Are there any further questions on CAL 1 - Strategic Domestic Air Services?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Are there any new routes that Cayman Airways is possibly looking at? I know the Minister mentioned Austin. Is there anywhere else they're looking at pursuing?

The Chairman: That would be CAL 2. We're on domestic. Can we take the vote on domestic, members? Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as CAL 1 - Strategic Domestic Air Services in the amounts of \$3,134,000 in 2026 and \$3,134,000 in 2027 to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: CAL 1 passed.

CAL 2 – Strategic Tourism, Regional and Core Air Services

The Chairman: Minister, there's a question.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you for that, Mr. Chairman.

Member for Bodden Town West, like I said, they had a meeting yesterday. I don't know what was discussed. There are opportunities and other destinations that are of interest to us, but I can't give you a specific, definite answer right now.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much. Let's continue, if it's okay, Mr. Chairman.

I know that sometimes the Department of Tourism works very closely with Cayman Airways in terms of developing routes and so forth. Are there any routes the DOT is exploring that CAL or other airlines may be looking at?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Thank you, Member for Bodden Town West. Yes, Austin is on our radar right now; I'm looking forward to hearing an update on that shortly.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you. Get an update from who?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: From the Board or management because I don't know what was discussed at the meeting yesterday.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: No, no, but this one is in relation to tourism. The Department of Tourism does a separate exercise in terms of potential routes. Did they provide input or recommendations? Is there anything in the pipeline? They do such separately because Cayman Airways is really just a subset of the overall tourism product.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, just give me one minute, sir.

[Pause]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, the answer: based on the market research we received, we're looking at Seattle, San Francisco, and Phoenix [along with] Austin.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Now we're cooking with gas. Mr. Bryan, thanks much. I'll leave it back to your area.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: You want to buy more planes?

The Chairman: Any further questions on CAL 2? I think the answer said there are areas of interest and more work needs to be done to ensure what the final decision would be.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Actually, I have one follow-up to close off my section. From a regional standpoint, in terms of fuel, is there any consideration of using the Saabs to go to the Dominican Republic, Montego Bay, or somewhere like that?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. It is part of the logic of acquiring a third Saab — to be able to do those regional routes as well.

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

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Just one quick question behind you Member for George Town East.

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

I'm curious to know what the overall load factor is on the jet services we fly on the main international routes.

The Chairman: Excellent question. Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you, it's in the region of 58 per cent for the jet.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: A follow-up: what is the breakeven load factor?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) would like to answer this question.

Mr. Fabian Whorms, Chief Executive Officer, Cayman Airways Limited: Fabian Whorms, CEO of Cayman Airways.

Through the Chairman, there are two ways to look at the breakeven load factor. You look at it in terms of fully allocated costs, which is your fixed and variable costs; but primarily, when making business decisions we look at, does it cover its variable costs and what is the contribution to fixed costs?

You have those two elements. At the same time, the breakeven load factor both on a variable and on a fixed, fully-allocated cost basis varies by route, and it varies significantly. There are some routes that we operate strategically with the jets where even if it's 100 per cent full, we're not covering our fully allocated costs and we only marginally cover our variable costs. There are other routes where fairly low load factors produce a break-even scenario with respect to variable costs — I mean load factors as low as 40 per cent. Those are the routes that have low costs associated with operating them.

To give you an average answer, what I would say is that the target we're looking for on an overall average basis is to get that 58 per cent into the region of about 63 to 65 per cent. I would further add that these numbers may sound low but remember now, our demand flows are highly directional. Let me use Jamaica as an example: we're coming up to a busy Christmas season when everyone wants to go home, and we're going to add flights to accommodate the demand as best we can, but on the return, those flights are not going to have good loads. As you know,

some of them are going to have one-digit loads, less than 10. That is the reality of much of what we do.

It's never easy for us to achieve load factors approaching 70 per cent. Though for an average airline successful would be load factors in the 80 per cent range, that's just not a reality Cayman Airways has ever experienced and I don't anticipate it [being] possible going forward.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: While you're there, could I ask you another question? How is the Los Angeles route performing?

Mr. Fabian Whorms, Chief Executive Officer, Cayman Airways Limited: Through the Chair, it is covering its variable costs and making a contribution to our fixed cost. We still have capacity that we struggle to fill. The route is performing well enough for us to continue operating it, but when you look at the opportunity cost, it essentially takes up an airplane for a whole day or two half-days — a half-day going, half-day coming back.

We would like to see better performance from that route, so we are working to see how we can strategise with the DOT or any other way possible whereby we can maximise our efforts for gaining more exposure in the Los Angeles marketplace — how do we expose Cayman more? It's a very big market, which is a good thing because it can be a very successful market for us. It's also a very noisy market. It's difficult to create the presence we need but we're happy with where we are. You may have realised that at some point in the past we went from one frequency a week to two. Even at two it was covering its variable costs but only marginally; we had better overall performance with one frequency, so we're back at one. Ideally, we'd like to grow it to two. That is one of the challenges.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Through you, Mr. Chairman, as you were talking about that, sir, I wondered whether the fact that it is only one flight a week was an impediment to the route's development.

The Chairman: Mr. Whorms continuing.

Mr. Fabian Whorms, Chief Executive Officer, Cayman Airways Limited: Through the Chair. More frequency will always create more demand because it becomes more convenient for the travelling public; but it's all about finding the right balance between demand and capacity that we put in. We can add more capacity and create more demand, but we added more capacity than the demand created so the feasibility becomes less successful.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you very much, sir. My last question, if I could. I was very pleased to see that you brought Miami back. Most days I think you're op-

erating [flight numbers] 102, 103, 106, and 107. Has the overnight re-emergence of American on that evening flight had any effect on our passenger loads?

The Chairman: Mr. Whorms.

Mr. Fabian Whorms, Chief Executive Officer, Cayman Airways Limited: Through the Chair.

To give a bit of clarity. Historically, when the capacity that both Cayman Airways and American supplied was matched with the demand, Cayman Airways typically operated two flights per day, three on some days, to Miami; Miami is no longer that market for us.

The reason we had to move away from having a morning flight and evening flight daily, and even an afternoon flight on some days was because the numbers weren't there to sustain the capacity we put in, so we went in and surgically realigned our capacity so that on days when an afternoon flight, which is good for connectivity with tourists, was the best flight, we retained it. On the days we needed an evening flight, we retained it. On the days we needed a morning flight, we retained it; however, now we have ended up with some complaints because we are not offering what people are historically accustomed to, which is a morning and an evening flight every day, but it was done to improve our financial performance and it produced better results.

The issue now is with American bringing in daily morning and night service. This is good for the Cayman Islands and Cayman Airways is a part of Team Cayman; but we expect there's going to be, and we're starting to see some signs, that there may be a little more capacity in the market than we think suits Cayman Airways. We're looking at it carefully; we'll have to wait and see, but I can't tell you that it is going to be positive for Cayman [Airways]. More than likely it will have a negative effect on Cayman Airways.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the Member for George Town East for asking that question because it gives me an opportunity to highlight what I said earlier.

If you look at American Airlines' load factor it is 86 per cent; Delta is 85 per cent; United is 84 per cent; and South West is 78 per cent. Those are quite high load factors, but if you drill into their financial statements and break out the operations between what they make on transporting passengers versus what they make on their loyalty programme, you will see that the transport side is actually losing money, but they're making it back on the loyalty side.

That's the point I'm making; that we can't expect Cayman Airways to compete with airlines that operationally are going to lose money on the transport side. Even with operational load factors of 86 per cent,

they're still losing money on the transport side but they make it up through the loyalty programmes. As you can see, many local banks now are tying into the same loyalty programme where they have their credit cards tied either to the American Airlines programme or that programme because that is really where it is going.

I want to say that even if Cayman Airways gets up to a load factor, you're going to find that the same pressures are still going to be there because even within the industry right now, 86 per cent load factor does not even guarantee that from a transport side they are going to make a profit. I'm glad the Member for George Town East raised that issue, but we want to set the expectation.

As we said before, this is why we consider Cayman Airways an economic accelerator as opposed to what it is. Lest we forget, Jamaica just got hit by a hurricane and I can guarantee you all of us remember how valuable Cayman Airways was even right after Hurricane Ivan over 20 years ago. When you have your own airlift, you can do certain things. Again, I'm glad the Premier was able to [have CAL] be the first international airline back into Jamaica offering assistance right after [the hurricane].

There are other factors and other intangibles that Cayman Airways provides to the local economy that are hard to quantify; that are just difficult [to measure] but it's a valuable airline. Like you said, our goal is just to ensure it is done as efficiently as possible with the resources that we have. I just wanted to put that out there.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Any further questions on CAL 2?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Can the Minister confirm that LAX and Panama flights will stay in operation?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you, we can confirm that LAX and Panama will be staying in operation.

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

Through you, Mr. Chairman, this question is to the Minister, but hopefully the airline's CEO can answer. I was hoping to get it resolved when I was Minister, but we didn't. The arrival gate for Cayman Airways is a problem for many Caymanians. When you arrive in Miami, the walk is like a mile. I know there are costs associated with the location of the gate, the availability, et cetera; but even if we have to digest

some of the costs, Mr. Minister, on the basis of the quality — our people not having to walk [as far].

I see some of our seniors stopping and taking water breaks on the way from the plane to immigration. It's really, really long. If that means adding a little extra for the company, as MPs I think it's something that we all would support you on to ensure the airline... because we're not only servicing the economic accelerator, but our Caymanian people feel proud to take the airline. This is the comment that made me realise we have to cover it. A person said, "*You know what, I love Cayman Airways, but I can't do this anymore. I flyin' American*" — because they can get off of American and not have to work and burn 500,000 calories before they get to immigration. We have to change that.

I don't know if the CEO can potentially speak to what the cost factor hindrances are or anything like that.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, I thank you for that; also the Member for George Town Central. I consider myself pretty fit, too, and I find it to be a long walk sometimes. To answer the particulars and the details of whether it's cost or availability, I will ask the CEO if he can answer that.

The Chairman: Mr. CEO.

Mr. Fabian Whorms, Chief Executive Officer, Cayman Airways Limited: Thank you, through the Chair.

I bring good news, but bring them reluctantly because we have just instituted a soft launch using Concourse E instead of Concourse F. Concourse E is connected to Concourse D which is the really nice concourse. It will now allow passengers who fly in domestically into Concourse D or E to go directly to our counters at our gates and connect to Cayman if their bag is checked all the way through, so that's a plus.

The other thing is Concourse E is on a finger — it's like a peninsula — so it's a distance out, but it has a train service. We have actually measured the time that it takes and it's going to save the time that a passenger would spend going and coming. We did it for the crews. It's going to shave 15 minutes off the time it takes the flight crew to make that journey, so even though the distance may be a little bit more it's definitely much less walking — the periods that you have to walk. This is still not ideally what we would like, so I'll go back to the question of the cost.

It was never really a question of the cost. It's just how Miami Dade, which operates the Miami International Airport, prioritises their gate usage, and they have to take many things into consideration. We are a very long-time user of Miami International Airport, so we have a great relationship, but we're also a very tiny

user, so it's just the life we live as a small airline; we can't always get what we want, but we've stuck with this for a very long time to try and get here.

I'd like to mention that the replacement for our dearly departed Miami station manager, who was a Caymanian and who was with the airline for a very long time, is also a Caymanian — Mr. Tyrone Welds. Mr. Welds has a very long history with Cayman Airways, well beyond 40 years. As a matter of fact, he was a sitting member of the previous board of directors. He's our new station manager in Miami and he was highly instrumental in pushing the ball over the line for us to get this new gate. We planned to do some PR (public relations) about it — we still can, but now the cat is out of the bag.

As I said, we were just going to approach it from the perspective that it's a soft launch and have the opportunity during this period to get feedback from our passengers. We still have the option to go back to the old Concourse F but we're not interested in that at this time.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central continuing CAL 2.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's our job over here in Opposition to get the cat out of the bag, so I'm not surprised you had to release it.

Further on this distance issue... when we arrive, we're normally at Concourse F, which is a very short distance when you're at the airport. I'm talking about the arrival from Cayman into Miami. The distance is actually when you arrive over there, not when you're coming back home, but now it's going to be switched around, is what you're saying?

Mr. Fabian Whorms, Chief Executive Officer, Cayman Airways Limited: No. When you're leaving, the distance is going to be [farther] now because you have to take a train, but it's not going to be longer in time, right, nor longer in terms of the energy you have to expend. Certainly, when you're arriving now the journey is physically longer; but you're not walking the journey, you are taking a train.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: All right. Well, I look forward to seeing how that pans out. Those are my questions on CAL. I'll wait until the next line item.

The Chairman: If there are no further questions on CAL 2, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as CAL 2 - Strategic Tourism, Regional and Core Air Services in the amounts of \$15,435,000 in 2026 and \$15,435,000 in 2027.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: CAL 2 passed.

El 1 – Cayman Airways Limited

The Chairman: Members, it's hard for me as Chairman to even distinguish now, but I think it's two armies I'm seeing now. I'm seeing the tourism army and I think I'm now seeing the health army waiting in the wings.

That notwithstanding, we have many public servants allotting time here, so I would beg members' indulgence to go to El 1 which is an Appropriation to Cayman Airways so that we can dispatch anything that we might need the staff and members of the Cayman Airways senior management team to be involved with, if members would agree. Therefore, I put El 1 – Cayman Airways Limited. Are there any questions?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: There's one question quickly because I just missed a question. Are there going to be any Christmas honorariums or any cost of living adjustments for the CAL staff for this two-year period?

The Chairman: Member, the government is looking at this matter holistically and we will make the appropriate announcements in the coming weeks.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Well, I'm happy to hear that the government is now rethinking that; I want the Cayman Airways staff to get their cost of living adjustment because the cost of living is very high in Cayman and every one of the hard-working staff there deserves a cost of living adjustment.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central, I said the government is—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Oh, the whole government.

The Chairman: This is something that we've always been doing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: *Pressure bust pipe; gotta apply pressure.*

The Chairman: There's no reconsideration, this is all within—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: But it wasn't there. You said so yourself, Mr. Chair. It wasn't there; so if you're reconsidering—

The Chairman: It's not there and that's the way budgets are typically done. I'm simply saying that you asked the question and you continue to ask this question every appropriation—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Until you announce it, I will continue to ask because our people deserve the cost of living increase. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Wonderful how you find the money in the Opposition.

Lady Member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chairman, I have the same concern except that I would not particularly ask it now. I'll wait for when you come in December for the sweep up and show the wonderful surplus. I think it wouldn't need much consideration to give it to the hard-working civil service that serve the Government, the Opposition, and the general country.

Also to say Mr. Chair, although CAL 1 and CAL 2 are gone; perhaps I can do it under EI 1. I want to go on record to shore up the support from the Sister Islands. I'm sure my colleague is as well. It is our lifeline to the Sister Islands. Although I'm a little saddened to see that the requisite funds aren't in for the upgrade of the airlines, I have no doubt that once the board considers it — it's a prudent and assiduously working board — the outcome can only be one, so I wait for that and eagerly anticipate a positive outcome for the Sister Islands.

The Chairman: Very fair comments. Are there any further questions on EI 1?

Honourable Member for George Town East.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman, I'm looking at this equity injection for Cayman Airways. In 2025, back in September, actually, we voted an additional \$12.7 million for Cayman Airways. When I look at Cayman Airways, it doesn't matter to me whether it comes in an equity injection or a subsidy. I look at the pot and say, what is it taking and costing us to keep Cayman Airways flying? If you look at 2025 it was pretty much \$50 million talking round numbers, and that was a huge jump with the additional \$12.7 [million]. I'm looking at 2026 and 2027 and I'm wondering how in the world Cayman Airways is going to get through these next two years or even just 2026? I look at it and I think it's a foregone conclusion: You're going to need more money to get through, Minister, so I struggle with your statement that you felt it was enough. I wonder why you feel that way.

The Chairman: Feelings are a hell of a thing.

Before the Minister responds, Mr. McTaggart, on page 12 there are a number of one-off items that were wrapped up in the 2025 numbers which included the old \$5.8 million in aged fees, some heavy maintenance and other fees. I just want to make sure we're getting apples to apples when looking at the totals. Certainly, the Minister knows that once the board has done its work, there's a commitment from the government to ensuring that CAL is adequately funded. I leave it to the Minister to say.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: In response to you, Mr. Chairman, I would say that I looked at it and a number of those are fees that we have recurring every year. I mean, you got heavy maintenance costs, the CIAA fees — that's going back even to when I was Chair of Cayman Airways. There was always an issue with the payment and accumulating fees over years.

The Chairman: Minister, if I remember correctly, that \$5.8 million was in eight or nine years. How many years?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: But how many years did it go back because that was a significant clean-up?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Ten years. It had not been paid in 10 years so that \$5.8 [million] was 10 years. Just saying that it was a significant... and that was disclosed during Finance Committee. That is still a relatively significant one-off, but I leave it to the Minister.

That was a section 12.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I see what you're trying to say there, but that wouldn't have been calculated in what the original budget for 2024-2025 was in comparison because what we're doing is a comparison analysis of what you're getting now compared to what you had before because we did a Supplementary on that.

I see what you're saying there, but even these yields are on a yearly basis, not on a decade basis, so Mr. McTaggart's point is still relevant in that even though it may have covered some things, you're still going to get the reoccurring costs on these things which would potentially put him in a difficult position to fund the airline. The most important thing that we can [take] from this is that the government has given commitment that when the assessment is done that everyone here is in support to make sure Cayman Airways gets the necessary funding they need to operate appropriately.

The Chairman: Absolutely. Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you, thank you very much. That's the case.

The Chairman: Hence comfort.

Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as EI 1 – Cayman Airways Limited in the amount of \$10,500,000 in 2026 and \$8,500,000 in 2027 to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EI 1 passed.

The Chairman: I would thank the members of the Cayman Airways senior management team for your attendance to Finance Committee.

Members—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, before they leave...

The Chairman: TAB— Do we have some block votes coming up?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I can't promise you that.

The Chairman: Yes, you can.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Before the amazing Cayman Airways staff leave, I just want to say on behalf of the Official Opposition: we thank you for all your hard work. Tell the rest of the team who fly our turtle that can't fly but flies — we make it magically happen — to keep up the great work and we love them.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Member for George Town Central, thank you very much for that kind compliment. I know you recognise a good thing when you see one.

I also want to make note of Cayman Airways and the assistance we have provided for Jamaica recently with some relief flights. I called the CEO and the CFO on a Saturday evening and they were able to scramble the plane for Sunday morning departure to help with Rotary and Progressive sending over much-needed supplies for the people in Jamaica. I know you had a full board meeting yesterday, gentlemen. I've kept you too many hours late at night but thank you and the team. Keep those planes safe in the air, keep bringing people back and let's get up to 70 to 75 per cent.

BLOCK VOTE:

TAB 1 – Management of Pedro St James National Historic Site

TAB 2 – Management of Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park

TAB 4 – Management of the Cayman Islands Craft Market

TAB 5 – Management of the Hell Geological Site

The Chairman: Members, we have a number of items coming up – TAB 1 through TAB 5.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, after speaking with some of my colleagues, we want to do a block vote after a couple of questions because they're all under the National Attractions Authority. If we can just take them all together, then you do a block vote if that makes sense.

Sorry, sorry, my apologies.

The Chairman: Yes, we are not going to disenfranchise the lady Member for Cayman Brac East. I'm going to insist on upholding her rights.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Oh, and the Member for Bodden Town West.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, the Member for George Town Central's proposition is a reasonable one. I just wanted to ensure the reasonableness extended 90 miles east of East End, and I'm satisfied with his answer.

The Chairman: And you know, lady member, that of all people in this Chamber that will make sure it goes to 91 miles, it would be the Chair.

Members, a few questions on the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority, I think it's now called.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, unfortunately, the attraction has had some interesting media comments. I don't even know how to term them because they went a bit all over the place.

Can the Minister give us an update on what transpired and where we are moving forward? What's going on?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, as usual I thank the Member for George Town Central for a very good question. At this time, I think most people in this honourable House know there's current-

ly an internal audit going on and I'm not privy to answer anything at this time.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Totally understandable. Thank you so much.

The Chairman: Minister, can you then give a commitment that once it's done, you will provide a statement to Parliament at the earliest convenience.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman if it doesn't get to you all before I do, [you have a commitment](#).

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Sounds like a leaky ship, but let's keep going. Sail on.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Oh, sorry, Mr. Tatum. Member for Red Bay.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Sorry to disappoint you, sir. Just a few short questions based on improvements.

Are there any improvements planned for the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, and if so, what are they?

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, did I understand what you just said? Do you want to ask whether there are any improvements across all the attractions?

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Well, most of the questions I have are based on asking what improvements there are.

The Chairman: There you go.
Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Thank you very much to the Member for Red Bay for asking that.

Every day there are continuing plans for upgrades and maintenance. We had issues at the Botanical Park a couple of months ago with some water intrusion, which has been taken care of. At Pedro Castle they have done some fine refinishing to the nice mahogany floors inside the original building. We were also on a tour at the Hell site a couple of months ago and we're looking at upgrading the walkway over the rock formations; but there's always ongoing maintenance to be taken care of.

The biggest thing we will want to plan is how we are going to incorporate the newly purchased property at Pedro, continue to enhance Pedro, and drive traffic there.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Mr. Chair, thanks for that.

I was curious whether improvements were going to be done with Hell because the last time I was there it was not looking too good. I don't know the answer, hence the question: The Hell geological site, is it privately owned or is it owned by government?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. There are three parts that make up the geological equation: one is the McDoom's, one is the Farrington's and one is the Cayman Islands Government.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Red Bay continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Mr. Chair, thank you.

I guess you could ask what proportions, but if it's an important tourism site for us, is there a concern that at some point a private owner may decide to do something with it and we lose some or the bulk of it? I think you know where I'm going with this. We don't want a situation where it's important to us [and] it could be lost.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: I absolutely know where you're coming from. I agree with it.

The previous Minister had the foresight to invest in the Waterfront site there in Town because if you don't get it now you'll never get it again. The two sites that you're speaking about are [owned by] two families. I don't know if they're interested in selling, but I am sure, and hopefully we could reach out to them, if they did want to sell that we have the first option of refusal.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chairman, perhaps I can add to that being the previous land minister.

If memory serves me right, there was an interest in selling to the government. It was a matter of the consideration that needs to be concluded because being more than one family, they still had to come to a decision, but there was an interest to sell.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Thank you lady Member for Cayman Brac East for that information. I know your knowledge, time and experience could be beneficial.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: I will end with this, sir, if I could.

The Chairman: Member for Red Bay.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you. I'm extremely glad to hear that improvements are going to be happening because these are important sites for us and they should never ever be left to run down. There should be constant monitoring and repairs of these, especially if they're important tourism sites. They're important to us as Caymanians as well, so I'm happy to hear it. I'm just hoping that there will be ongoing repair works, not just waiting for them to deteriorate so badly. This applies also to various sites in Cayman Brac. Those aren't here so I won't get on to those, but I'll discuss them with you offline.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Member for George Town West.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker: Mr. Chair through you, thank you. Right now the craft market is not screaming premier destination. Can the Minister state whether there are any plans within this budget to improve the quality, the visitor experience, and the design of the craft market?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. I thank the Member for George Town West for bringing that up because it is one of the areas that we're lacking. The tent that we have there as our craft market is almost one of the first things that our visitors see when they get ashore.

I've spoken with Minister of Planning Jay Ebanks and I would like to consider possibly relocating it and improving that situation because we just put Cardinal Avenue as a pedestrian way. This is to put maybe like small Cayman-style kiosks and line that road up with that and have the pedestrian foot traffic go right through the centre of our Town rather than being in the northern side and skipping out much of the things on the southern side to see, but it does need improvement and we're looking seriously at it.

The Chairman: Member for George Town West.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker: No other questions, Mr. Chair, we can do a block vote if you choose to, sir.

The Chairman: Members, these are the TAB [appropriations]. As agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the following items on the Schedule described as TAB 1 – Management of Pedro St. James National Historic Site in the amounts of \$1,100,000 in 2026, and \$1,100,000 in 2027; TAB 2 – Management of Queen Elizabeth II Botanic—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: The Appropriation Bill has \$1,100,000, so your document doesn't have the correct number, Minister — \$1,100,000 in the Appropriation Bill. I can only read what we are going to vote on in the Appropriation Bill, which would be... so you get a bonus \$100,000.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I can move a motion right now to transfer the extra money someplace else, you know.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Let me start again.

In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the items on the Schedule described as TAB 1 – Management of Pedro St. James National Historic Site in the amounts of \$1,100,000 in 2026, and \$1,100,000 in 2027; TAB 2 – Management of Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, \$1 million in 2026, \$1 million in 2027; TAB 4 – Management of the Cayman Islands Craft Market \$150,000 in 2026, \$150,000 in 2027; TAB 5 – Management of the Hell Geological Site in the amounts of \$50,000 in 2026, \$50,000 in 2027 to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TAB1, TAB 2, TAB 4 and TAB 5 passed.

NGS 1 – Organise, Administer and Execute the Cayman Islands Fishing Tournament

The Chairman: NGS 1 – Organise, Administer and Execute the Cayman Islands Fishing Tournament, \$30,000.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I just want to confirm that...

We did some extra funding in the previous year for the fish aggregating devices (FADs) which we implemented so we can have more efficient tournaments here as a way of a tourism product. I want to ensure that they were installed and that you're continuing to support this industry, as it's another tourism sector.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, thank you for that question from the Member for George Town Central. I am happy to say that not only

has it been installed, but the number of fish people have caught there in the last two weeks and I can't get out is very upsetting.

[Laughter]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: It's been a very, very good investment; many of our local charter boat captains are taking our visitors out there and showing them a very good CaymanKind experience. Thank you, member.

The Chairman: Excellent.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thanks for appreciating the hard work. I'm quite sure you'll do great things as you go along, but I appreciate the recognition.

The Chairman: Are there any questions on NGS 7 – Management of Small Business Development, because I would love to take the next few as a block vote as well

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I actually have a question on small business development, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question whether honourable members approve NGS 1 – Organise, Administer and Execute the Cayman Islands Fishing Tournament in the amounts of \$30,000 in 2026, \$30,000 in 2027 on the Schedule to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: NGS 1 passed.

NGS 7 – Management of Small Business Development

The Chairman: NGS 7 – Management of Small Business Development.

Member for Bodden Town West.

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

Mr. Chairman, in terms of management of small business development, what exactly does this vote entail?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. This is part of the land and sea co-op that has been ongoing for several years now.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Okay, just checking. I was looking for some money for a constituent of mine, but this isn't the vote for it. Okay, Mr. Chairman, we can move on.

The Chairman: That one is coming up in TP 122; you can help them with the business plan, but we'll get there in a minute.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, very open trading.

Any further questions on NGS 57, because I would like to take a —

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: NGS 57, but you were dealing with NGS 7.

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as NGS 7 – Management of Small Business Development in the amounts of \$230,000 in 2026, \$230,000 in 2027 on the Schedule to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: NGS 7 passed.

NGS 57 – Gardening Projects and Landscaping

The Chairman: NGS 57 – Gardening Projects and Landscaping, \$4,000 each year.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I know it's a very small amount but you see when you leave out George Town Central or George Town, we got a bit of an issue; and I think about the beautification committee whereby we fund beautification projects across the island. We fund West Bay, North Side, East End — all places.

If you go to the description in the Plan & Estimates, under the line items of what it's supposed to do it says to “**Assist West Bay Beautification Committee**”. What happened to George Town, North Side and East End?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: And Bodden Town.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Well, okay. If *unna* covered, George Town *nah* covered. Why is there a provision specific only to this District? I don't understand that.

The Chairman: It's a good question, honourable member.

Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. To my knowledge, this is a purchase agreement with the Garden Club of Grand Cayman.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Well, it doesn't say to assist with the Garden Club of Grand Cayman. If you look at what it says, “**These are the projects we wish to continue and start for the period of 2026/2027**”; and I don't want to list all of them, but why does it say, “**Assist West Bay Beautification Committee**”? — By all means, I'm not saying they don't deserve it, but fair is fair and right is right.

The Beautification Committee's \$125,000 for two years, which is a quarter million dollars, also helps with that; so if they want another committee to help they can help the George Town Central's Scranton Committee too. It can't be specific to one area. I don't understand that.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Members, I see the point of principle that has been alluded to and made by the Member. However, I think we all accept that national beautification falls under a different vote; and he is right — I'm not quite sure how this has been described. There seems to be something amiss in the description, but Minister, maybe you can help us.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. As I look at the description, I see that it helps many areas in Cayman. I see a few that are also in the George Town area, but it does not specifically say George Town. There's only one-line item that says West Bay. I see Bodden Town; I see a couple of schools there, even the hospice care centre.

The Chairman: This seems to be quite a bit of work for \$4,000.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: That's a good deal.

[Laughter]

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chairman, perhaps it would be a better deal if the extra \$100,000 that was a scrivener's error was transported to this \$4,000. It might be a bit more meaningful.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: And then share it equally across the districts.

The Chairman: Members, this seems to be somewhat of a holdover, and I think perhaps we need the Minister and this team to clean it up before the next budget because I suspect this has to be a part of national beautification. I would hope so for \$4,000.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I want to note for the record because it's important. I do not want the Garden Club of Grand Cayman to think for one second that I'm suggesting they don't get this money. I'm just confused about the description where it's specific to a West Bay committee. The honourable Backbencher for the Government is fully aware that we took money out of the beautification budget to help a number of committees. What it seems like is the West Bay committee could tap into that as well as this. That's all I'm saying.

The Chairman: Yes, and I was provided a bit of information — by electronic means, information flows very freely; it's good that we're on YouTube.

My understanding is that apparently the Garden Club mainly operates on voluntarism and this is but a small item, but this description seems to be a bit old. They simply get differing groups for the specialist schools and other entities, and use this as a simple top-up. The reason it's so low is that the majority of their work is done by the actual members who volunteer; we welcome the voluntarism, so I think we should support it, members.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, we support it. We just want to ensure the support is adequate.

The Chairman: My understanding is that it is, and perhaps, for the next budget we can look [at it], and they would also have access to [the] national beautification [budget]. I think we can trust Ms. Heather to work closely with the Cayman Gardening Club as she has a real passion.

In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as NGS 57 — Gardening Projects and Landscaping in the amounts of \$4,000 in 2026 and \$4,000 in 2027 to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Excellent negotiation by members of the committee. Thank you very much.

Agreed: NGS 57 passed.

BLOCK VOTE:

TP 12 – Tourism Scholarships

**TP 67 – Sports and Cultural Tourism
Programmes Assistance**

TP 122 – Visitor Experience Development Grant

The Chairman: TP 12 – Tourism Scholarships.
Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, did we clarify that the Miss Cayman Scholarship was going to be addressed, because it's no longer under TP 67? If we're talking about scholarships, and you move the Miss Cayman Scholarship under TP 67, but you have an actual TP 12 for Tourism Scholarships, I don't understand why you would have moved it.

The Chairman: Member, my understanding — and the Minister can clarify — was that it's the sponsorship that was moved to TP 67.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, I think he said that and then clarified it.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Remember it was both, so let's hear the clarification.

The Chairman: Let's get it clarified. Your question is, where is the scholarship amount? Where is the sponsorship amount?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes, but if he has moved the scholarship amount to TP 57 *[sic]* why do that when you have a line item, TP 12, for Tourism Scholarships?

The Chairman: Minister, please clarify the position between the two.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman and Member for George Town Central, thank you for that.

The scholarship will go into TP 12, and the sponsorship will go into TP 67.

The Chairman: Any further questions?
Lady Member for George Town West.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker: Mr. Chair through you, thank you.

Can the Minister identify how many Caymanian students will be supported with the 2026/2027 funding when it comes to scholarships?

The Chairman: Excellent question.
Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, the answer: it'll be based on the number of applications that come in.

The Chairman: How many are currently on scholarships that have not graduated. I think that's in the document.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. The number of scholarships assisted in 2024 was 20; the number of scholarships assisted in 2025 was 21.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker: All Caymanians, correct?

The Chairman: Member continuing.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker: Mr. Chair through you. What exactly are the mechanisms in place when it comes to job placements or job expectations upon graduation?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, give me a minute please.

[Pause]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you to the Member for George Town West. We assist with the resume writing, filling out applications, and the recruiting process. They are required to come back to Cayman and they are all Caymanian.

The Chairman: Honourable Member continuing.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker: Mr. Chair through you. No Caymanians have been placed in the Ministry upon graduation?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Member for George Town West, they are free to work wherever, not just within the Ministry.

The Chairman: Or Department.

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker: Mr. Chair through you. The answer is no, is that correct?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, to the Member for George Town West, they will have to apply for a job if it's available.

The Chairman: Any further questions.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Lady Member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Can I assume then that all the members currently within the Ministry are Caymanian?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you to the lady Member for Cayman Brac East, all are Caymanian except for one RERC and one fixed-term contract. The fixed-term contract is a research and digital manager.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Lady Member for Cayman Brac East continuing.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: I wonder whether the Honourable Minister would take into active consideration that for one of the scholarships specific PR could be done for that occupation so that the fixedness — that's a new word. My friend from Newlands would probably wink at that; he's very keen on correct pronunciation. On a more serious note, perhaps it would only be for X number of years. We could have a Caymanian uptake scholarship to go train for that one position and come back.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you, thank you lady Member for Cayman Brac East. I will put that forward to the Ministry and the powers that do the hiring. I'll suggest it and I welcome it as well.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you very much.

I don't mean to be a stickler, but I'm aware that we invest, not just in tourism but in education as well — not just this government, but previous governments — a significant amount in scholarships because they are no longer on bond with government for

various reasons. We have our Caymanians [returning] and floating around getting quite depressed because I've had to talk to several of them. You're right, as Ministers we can't hire them, so either we as Finance Committee put aside money for hiring them, whether it's on an internship, because they get told they don't have experience, et cetera because it's a huge equity investment in a Caymanian as all governments should, but we may now have to ramp it up more.

The Constitution does say under section 55 that we can't hire, but there's one thing that's ring fenced for the elected government and that's finance. We know that there's a problem, and obviously the budget is advanced. I don't have the power to increase it, and I'm reasonable; I wouldn't expect the government to necessarily increase it now, but I would ask the government from an innovative modality to look at creating a vote, whether it's between the Minister of Education or your good self because I'm not sure whether you are administering tourism scholarships or you've given that to the Education Secretariat because there was some variance with that.

I really think that if we are going to be serious about hiring Caymanians, when we come back we have to put the money where our mouth is because we are getting many young Caymanians extremely depressed, not just here but when we go overseas. They would come and meet you at the hotel and there have been some serious issues with depression because some of them just quite frankly don't want to return to Cayman because they feel they don't have a job when they come back.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, if you permit me very quickly. Last night, under the Appropriations to the Deputy Governor, namely OE 141, this budget is allocating monies under the Emerging Talent Programme in the amounts of \$1,125,000 in both 2026 and 2027 for that specific purpose.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would take it that being the accountant or auditor that you are, you would have taken the anticipated amount to subdivide it into that to make sure that they are not remnants on the sidewalk, but they all can have an equal opportunity and stand on a level playing field when they line up at Glass House.

The Chairman: I can certainly say that I'm trusting the system to ensure that everyone who applies does have an equal opportunity for success. Thank you.

Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I'm in a very awkward place right now trying to balance the priorities, so I just want to acknowledge something. The post you just spoke about, there's a human behind it and a civil servant

who is non-Caymanian who has been working very, very hard for DOT, probably one of the best skilled researchers in the Caribbean actually recruited from another country to come help us here. We balance that with the priorities in that we're trying to ensure that Caymanians become the top priority, which they should be.

I say that now because I want the individuals, many of them, to know how much we appreciate [them] while we go through this transition of trying to prioritise our people; because I cannot pretend to sit here like I don't know that it must be such a difficult task to sit here and listen to the transition of who you are in your job that you're currently in. It can't be easy; it cannot. I know it can't be. I am stuck as a Caymanian because I need to make sure a Caymanian is in that post, but I also know that [individual] has been helping our tourism product for so long. I want that person to know we appreciate them.

It's a difficult task to get to know people and appreciate everything they do while at the same time trying to prioritise your people. It's not easy. You all don't know, but he's sitting right in this room while we are talking about him going. I can't wrong us for doing that because we have to prioritise our people, but we're going through some transitions in our country. It's going to be difficult because they are good people. I'll leave it there.

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the items on the Schedule described as TP 12 – Tourism Scholarships in the amount of \$1,450,000 for 2026 and \$1,450,000 in 2027; TP 67 – Sports and Cultural Tourism Programmes Assistance in the amount of \$1 million in 2026 and \$1 million in 2027, and TP 122 – Visitor Experience Development Grant, \$250,000 in 2026 and \$250,000 in 2027 to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 12, TP 67 and TP 122 passed.

EI 49 – Cayman Turtle Conservation and Education Centre Ltd.

The Chairman: EI 49 – Cayman Turtle Conservation and Education Centre.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I just want to confirm that there's no intention to increase the cost of turtle meat for local Caymanians. That's my only question around this area.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you to the honourable Member for George Town Central, not as of today.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman through you. Can the Minister say over this budget cycle we are discussing today, over the next two years, will there be any intention of increasing?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you, sir, the board will be discussing this as we go along.

The Chairman: Honourable Member continuing.

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

I'm certain there would be willingness to even entertain a discussion of necessary further funding for Turtle Farm to ensure that we do not increase the cost, particularly to Caymanians. It is our national dish and I think it would be quite difficult. What you're saying to me today is there is a possibility that turtle meat will increase because you haven't excluded it, period. If there is a possibility, if it's a cost factor, maybe we can reconsider the allocated amount to ensure that turtle meat stays at the price that it's at.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, I thank the [Member] for George Town Central for the recommendation. We will definitely consider it.

The Chairman: Thank you. Honourable Member for George Town Central continuing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: No, Mr. Chairman, I don't think the Minister understands what I'm suggesting.

I'm suggesting for him to speak to his team [and] if the factor of a cost increase in turtle meat is money related, I'm willing to move forward for an Amendment for whatever the difference is so that we can ensure there's not a turtle meat increase so we have to deal with it now. I'm trying to eliminate the potential for that to happen.

The Chairman: Member, what I can say is that certainly none of this has come to Caucus. I can also assure the Member that just like we prioritise multiple millions of dollars, way more than this, to ensure a turtle flies, we will also subsidise the amount to [ensure] our people eat turtle.

In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule, EI 49 – Cayman Turtle Conservation and Education Centre Limited in the amount of \$5 million in 2026 and \$4 million in 2027 to the schedule to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EI 49 passed.

EI 68 – Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development

The Chairman: EI 68 – Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development.

Member for Cayman Brac Central *[sic]*.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Cayman Brac Central?

The Chairman: George Town Central.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: I was just seeing if everybody was paying attention, so class you get full marks.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: My mother likes the sound of that; she always wanted me to run in Cayman Brac.

The Chairman: They created that seat for you, buddy.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I think it'll probably be less... Anyway, let me leave that one alone.

I noticed there is a massive increase for EI 68 from \$82,000 to half a million dollars. I don't quite understand why it was that amount; it has to do with 25 computer combos, website redevelopment, professional camera lenses, video editing computer, data centre. They never did all this for me when I was the Minister. CEO, can you explain?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, can you give some insight into the necessity of the equity investments that are taking place in the Ministry?

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Thank you to the Member for George Town Central. I also looked at this item and the biggest cost factor that has been given to me is the website redevelopment for the DOT.

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as EI 68 – Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development in the amounts of \$500,000 in 2026 and \$250,000 in 2027 to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EI 68 passed.

EA 159 – Waterfront Tourism Experience

The Chairman: EA 159 – Waterfront Tourism Experience

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Almost home, Mr. Minister, almost home.

The Chairman: I think you rounded the base. We're gonna slide in.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: You left \$100,000 in 2026 and \$150,000 in 2027; you know it can't really do anything with the Waterfront plans that were there. You have to explain what the intention is now moving forward.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you and thank the Member for George Town Central once again. We're aware of the fund that has been allocated, but we want to get the property cleaned up to see what kind of repairs can be done to the dock. There are also some seawall foundations there that have holes in them, possibly filling those in. We want to get that ready to see what we can use it for. Right now, we haven't gone to the grander scale, you know; we just want to maintain it properly and go from here on.

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

Through you, Mr. Chair. The Seamen's Park that was going to be placed there next to the Catboat Club is no longer planned then?

Hon. Gary B. Ruddy, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Member for George Town Central, not at present.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: You don't plan to finish the park for the seamen. That's what I heard?

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: At this time, we're just going to clean up the property properly and hopefully get the dock reinstated, and then hopefully we can use it, you know, if Minister Ebanks and I work collaboratively. It's one of the other points of entry we were talking about — bringing tenders and spreading it around from north George Town and hopefully going up to West Bay at some time.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, sir.

I think you're going to get yourself in trouble with the seamen with that because we promised them, and your Chief Officer is fully aware. He should have advised you on that. The Seafarers Park was supposed to go there; now you're saying you're eliminating it. It was part of the agreement to allow this location where the Seamen's Park was before for the craft market to go.

The Chairman: I'm not sure that the Honourable Minister said he was eliminating it. He said there were other considerations and I think both can work hand in hand.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. Well, hopefully he will come back and seek further support and funding later on to do that.

The Chairman: Correct.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: We support you on that.

Mr. Chairman, obviously we are at the end of the appropriations for the Minister now. I was hoping that he would be ever so lenient. There were three questions that didn't fit neatly into any of these appropriations in a general manner. I was hoping we could ask him because it is tourism related, but it could have probably been best asked in the very first line item where policy governs—

The Chairman: Member, you missed the opportunity and you're asking the Chair to give you leeway to ask three additional questions?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes, on behalf of the good people of the country.

The Chairman: Please proceed, member.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much. You see you're such a kind guy. I like you.

The Minister said that he supports continued growth in tourism. Are there any other hotels to be built or coming up that you're aware of, and are you in support in general of more hotels in the Cayman Islands?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you, we're in conversation with the Mandarin Oriental in Beach Bay and I am all for any kind of development for future hotels, high-end hotels in this country. At the end of the day, tourism has to grow not only as a pillar but also as a lifeline for our fellow Caymanians.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Minister.

The other question: in light of the conversation about conference tourism market share opportunities for Cayman — and I see the Honourable Premier is in full support and partnership with you on that — I really want the government to reconsider finding money to support the Lion's Centre redevelopment. The space is big. I think if you talk to DOT maybe they can advise you on it.

While I was Minister, something we wanted to potentially incentivise was a major hotel with conference space because it depends on the square footage components whereby I think the biggest one now is not Kimpton, but the new hotel... Ritz Carlton has the biggest square footage, but it's not really focused on the other tier up that we can get business from that wants to come to Cayman. If we want to get into that market share, we have to either invest in a conference centre or incentivise a major hotel that has conference offerings with larger square footage.

I think we could get local benefit as well as tourism conference business if we were to partner with the Lion's Centre. I'm just trying to see if there's appetite.

The Chairman: I'll ask the Honourable Premier to respond.

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you and through you, Mr. Chair. This good question was raised yesterday or the day before, I think, and I don't want it to get lost because we had a tongue in cheek moment about block voting, so let's just knock it on its head seriously.

It is an undertaking we're prepared to take on board. It connects back to the point I made earlier in terms of the different types of conferences that it is a blessing that is now coming to the country. They're getting larger.

You, or was it the Member for Bodden Town West, who made reference to the Cayman Captive, which is now the country's largest conference and

which is going to happen next week. The Ritz is busting at the seams, which is a good thing, so there's a good synergy to be made between the conference visitors. Once it catches on year after year, they become friends with the taxi drivers and the officers at the hotel. That's the synergy we're looking for, so it's a space that we have to look at.

In addition, you would remember this from last term, we're also trying to figure out whether or not there could be a PGA-rated golf course which also complements financial services. From talking to some of the developers, the difficulty is that it's a loss for them because it's open grounds and you have to pay maintenance and water, so we have to find the right model; but that doesn't mean it isn't worth exploring. Now that we're getting larger, we're attracting more conferences, we're going to have to innovate.

The Chairman: Last question.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, you have been so gentle with me and I appreciate that. The last question is, there's been a big talk and discussion for many, many years about new attractions. I want to make some suggestions for you to consider because we do need to build some new sting-ray cities, if you dare say that.

We've seen models of sinking ships. I think you could consider sinking a plane somewhere else to bring some more dive sites. I [also] know the good people of North Side and East End have always been talking about this other Stingray City. There's a particular place in East End that harbours many stingrays after the fishermen go fishing —

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: They implemented it.

I'm asking the Minister to consider investigating these a bit further. I did speak with Honourable Minister Jay Ebanks who was talking about some of these initiatives, but I think we should definitely dive deeper into the second Stingray City in the Eastern districts because it can help much more business in the East End and North Side and bring more attractions.

What I must say I didn't hear today is many new things. There's much of the same which is good because it makes me feel good that you're continuing the things that I started, but I haven't heard anything new. I got to be honest with you. I'm still waiting for something new to say, what are you going to do? Where is the boldness? Where are we going to step out of it and try something new? I think starting a potentially new Stingray City in East End is a good one or potentially, I know there are some planes that we have captured here that can be sunk as an option if

you talk to DoE. I can't say I got the idea by myself; [Minister Ebanks] was a key component for that. That's it for me.

Thank you so much for today's questioning.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman, thank you for that question from the Member for George Town Central. I think I'd be seeing that over my head all night when I go to bed.

I want to recognise what he's saying about another Stingray City. When I spoke earlier, we touched briefly on that because there is a special spot in East End. This is what I say about growing tourism — we need to expand it across the island as well.

An Hon. Member: Islands.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Islands, sorry, so sorry. Getting it from both sides.

Lady Member for Cayman Brac East, you missed my statement when I spoke about our meetings with the cruise lines and I also want to bring some participation into the Brac.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Heard it on YouTube.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Okay. Good, good. How do I look?

[Laughter]

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Going back to the Member for George Town Central, I do agree and I will be working collaboratively with Minister Katherine Wilks and her department on how we can go about implementing some of these new wildlife attractions in the water and on land, because they are definitely needed, you know. We have to give more to the people who are coming down and just increase their time here.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Final question, the Member for George Town East.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Deputy Premier.

Deputy Premier, you mentioned the Mandarin Hotel at Beach Bay. There is construction taking place right now. Is it the hotel being built or the residences?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: Mr. Chairman through you. Per the knowledge I have received —

and Minister Ebanks, you can correct me if I'm wrong — it is both.

The Chairman: The plan is both, and my understanding is it's just the residences at this stage.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Just the residences, okay. The other question I wanted to ask through you to the Minister and Deputy Premier, I think there was a request or effort to extend Manse Road down to the property to tie in with Beach Bay Road so that there was more than one entrance and exit to the property. Do you know if that has been completed?

The Chairman: I'll direct that question to the Minister responsible for roads.

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

I want to thank the Member for George Town East for the question. It was just recently, while we were in Parliament, that the members from the Mandarin actually wrote to us about the extension of that road wanting to get the go ahead to complete the extension, but it's not going to go all the way up to Mandarin. They're building it pretty much halfway. There is another developer that is in the phase of looking at building out the other section to meet them back, halfway from the Mandarin up to Manse Road, interconnecting these.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Thank you.

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as EA 159 – Waterfront Tourism Experience in the amounts of \$100,000 in 2026 and \$150,000 in 2027 to the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EA 159 passed.

The Chairman: Members, that conclude the appropriations to the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Trade Development. Honourable Minister, would you like to give some brief closing remarks? Brief.

Hon. Gary B. Rutty, Deputy Premier: I promise I'll be brief, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the Premier, thank yourself and thank my colleagues for the guidance and help that you've all provided for me over the last couple of months in preparing this. I also want to thank the Opposition because not only did you question me, but I

also learnt much from that side today as well as that they want to continue to work collaboratively because the end result is we want to ensure a better Cayman for more successful Caymanians.

I also want to thank my Chief Officer (CO), Stran Bodden; the Director of Tourism, Ms. Rosa Harris; I absolutely could not forget Ms. Gina Matthews and the rest of the team in the Ministry; and also our companies like the Turtle Centre, Pedro, Botanical Park and Cayman Airways.

It's a handful, but we're proud of what we have. We have something special here. I'd beat that drum again and we must be proud and continue to preserve Cayman for Caymanians; and we're also willing to share it in a balanced way.

Thank you all very, very much for everything and God bless you.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much, sir.

I just want to take this opportunity to also thank the staff and my former team. Continue to do the great work which I know you're going to do. I'm very happy to hear today that the Minister now thinks we have a good tourism product.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: He knows what I'm talking about.

Thank you very much.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Thank you, Member. Again, on behalf of the Committee, I certainly thank all those who are in attendance, even those who didn't have to get conferred. Thank you for attending this meeting of the Finance Committee.

I'll end with this, and I want the Ministry of Finance to make note. For too long, over the last, I'm going to say, decade and a half probably two decades, we have allowed my old industry because of its direct dollar-wise contribution to the government budget to create a narrative in the country of value to the economy, so we need to have a refreshed look at economic impact and what the true economic impact is using a real economic model because dollars to government revenues is but one measure of value to an economy. We need to do this to ensure that this country truly understands the true impact of three sectors, namely:

- Tourism;
- financial services; and
- development.

I think development is also underappreciated in this country because we don't necessarily see the exact dollar value flowing into government coffers, which is a neat and easy measure. At this point—

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I'm glad you mentioned that because [it's] one of the things I was going to mention to you offline, but since you brought it up publicly, it is fine.

When you're going through the different budget documents and we're looking at the part that deals with the Ministries and Departments, there's an area that deals with risk and just about every single budget document under the impact of those financial risks has the word "unquantifiable". I think if we're going to sit here and run over a billion dollars per year in expenses yet we can't quantify the dollar risk to our budget after spending more than \$500 million in staff costs, something is fundamentally wrong.

I definitely welcome that approach and I know part of your budget reforms will address those issues. I am glad you actually raised it and I'm very happy to hear you say it.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: Thank you, member. NCFC innovating.

Thank you, members; lunch break until 3:15, and please be back on time because we will be starting and I can promise a block vote will be taken once I have a quorum if members are not here.

Committee suspended at 2:26pm.

Committee resumed at 3:30pm

The Chairman: We resume this meeting of Finance Committee. Please be seated.

Before we took the luncheon break, we concluded the Appropriations to the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Trade Development. Now we come to the final group of appropriations — Appropriations to the Minister for Health, Environment and Sustainability. As we have done, we invite the Honourable Minister to provide a few brief remarks to the committee, and by way of housekeeping, Minister, has the statement been distributed physically and electronically?

STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, Minister of Health, Environment & Sustainability, Elected

Member for West Bay Central: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The statement has been emailed and I believe that it's been uploaded on ShareFile; however, the Ministry team does have hard copies which will be provided in short order.

The Chairman: Excellent. Please proceed.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, would you like me to wait until members on the Opposition have received the hard copies?

The Chairman: You're distributing them now.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to share a few brief remarks.

This Budget marks a shift in our approach from reacting to challenges to proactively preparing for them. It emphasises prevention, partnership, and accountability. We are investing in systems that safeguard health, promote equity, and protect our environment for future generations. In this way, we reaffirm that sustainable growth begins and ends with our people.

Mr. Chair, I want to say thank you again for allowing me to share a bit about what this budget covers for the next two years. Our mission is clear: to create systems that transform care delivery, protect our environment, and build a healthier, more resilient Cayman. This vision stands on three pillars: the health of our people, the protection of our natural resources, and the sustainability of our communities. Each pillar supports the others. When our people are healthy, our environment protected, and our communities strong, Cayman is not only prepared for the future but is poised to shape it.

Mr. Chair, I will start by outlining several key elements of the health aspect of our budget, beginning with the National Health Strategy and Plan.

When I assumed this role, I noted the absence of a single coordinated framework for improving population health and strengthening the healthcare system. The previous Cayman Islands' National Health Policy and Strategic Plan, developed in 2012, expired in 2017. Since then, our healthcare landscape has evolved, and so have the challenges we face, from rising rates of chronic disease to the need for stronger public health infrastructure and more equitable access to care.

The National Health Strategy and Plan will unify our efforts to enhance both physical and mental health across all communities. More than a policy, it's a comprehensive roadmap for a healthcare system that is inclusive, resilient, and responsive to every Caymanian's needs. These reforms will also enhance system efficiency and are expected to reduce costs for government over time. This strategy is evidence-

based, community-informed, operationally focused, financially sustainable, and inclusive.

Among our top priorities is the implementation of the STEPS 2023 National Health Survey findings, which will guide our efforts in preventing chronic illness. A key initiative is the Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO), HEARTS initiative, aimed at reducing deaths from cardiovascular disease, which is a leading cause of mortality. This initiative will standardise essential medications and increase public awareness. The HEARTS initiative is designed to strengthen primary healthcare systems by improving the diagnosis, treatment, and management of hypertension and related conditions. The goal is clear: to make HEARTS the standard model of care for cardiovascular risk management across the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Chair, the urgency is clear. In our Islands, nearly 1 in 3 adults has elevated blood pressure and many remain undiagnosed — I'm quite sure mine is high right now.

[Laughter]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through the HEARTS programme, we aim to improve treatment and awareness, especially among younger adults and men who are often less aware of their conditions. We are also enhancing public health by transforming our Public Health Department into an independent entity. This change will empower us to be more agile and accountable, allowing for faster decision-making and better inter-agency coordination.

Since becoming the Minister, I have taken to Cabinet the proposal to separate the Public Health Department from HSA to facilitate a strong and independent National Public Health Department. We have started with a phased approach, which is a Public Health Unit as this does not have any additional financial or civil service implications and will allow us to begin this separation from 1st January, 2026.

Having a National Public Health Department will significantly aid in preventive care; by focusing on prevention, we will implement comprehensive health promotion and disease prevention programmes that target risk factors associated with chronic diseases and heart disease. These are major burdens on our healthcare system; by emphasising community education, screening, and early interventions, we can help residents adopt healthier lifestyles and identify health issues long before they escalate. This proactive approach will lead to a healthier population, reducing the demand for more expensive acute medical interventions, in turn, lowering overall healthcare costs.

The Public Health Department serves as the first line of defence in protecting the health of our population and plays a vital role in:

- Monitoring and controlling communicable diseases, including public health programmes and outbreak response;

- Promoting maternal and child health;
- Conducting health surveillance and research on a national level, which informs national strategies and helps us respond to emerging health threats; and
- Educating the public on nutrition, chronic illness prevention, and of course mental wellness.

This is all done working with international bodies such as PAHO and the World Health Organisation (WHO), to align with global best practises and access technical expertise.

We are also preparing amendments to legislation as part of the transition to the National Public Health Department. The changes will place a clear duty of care on practitioners to report cancer and other specified communicable diseases. This measure strengthens the country's ability to track conditions that affect the health of those who live in Cayman and also supports earlier interventions, and improves how resources are directed to the areas of greatest need.

Mr. Chair, in conjunction with our public health initiatives, I would now like to turn to a subject that is at the top of my Ministry's list of priorities: mental health. As we all know, mental health challenges are rising, especially among our young people. The National Drug Council's 2024 Student Survey revealed that one in four students in the Cayman Islands has considered suicide, and one in eight has attempted it. Many spoke openly at the INSPIRE youth event about loneliness, pressure, bullying, and feeling unseen. Their message was honest and urgent. These young people need safe spaces, support, and a government that truly cares.

We recognise that building a healthy, sustainable Cayman begins with caring for our people - mind, body, and spirit. My Ministry is responding with a renewed focus on prevention, early intervention, and stronger community-based mental health support. This is how we turn concern into compassion. This budget provides funds for the construction of a new mental health facility designed to serve youth and adolescents, as well as adults, in an effort to enhance patient care, improve operational efficiency, and reduce long-term healthcare expenditures.

We also know, Mr. Chair, that something needs to be done to address the pressing needs of the youth population now. That's why our budget also reflects the establishment of a four-bed, age and gender-segregated inpatient ward designed to provide specialised treatment and care for adolescents experiencing acute mental health challenges, while at the same time, we focus on building the mental health facility.

Additionally, we will introduce a mobile mental health nursing team that will provide rapid response via a mobile clinic that can deliver on-site community interventions and crisis support to children, adolescents, and adults. This new mobile mental health

nursing team will bring care directly to the community, ensuring that help reaches people where and when they need it most. Access to care should not be a barrier to services, especially in crisis situations. In introducing this mobile unit, our hope is that people in crisis can get the help they need from qualified professionals in a timely manner. This is preventive mental health care. Having nurses back in the community ensuring that patients receive their medications will prevent what we are currently facing, which is having many patients requiring acute care. This shift will enhance the overall quality of care, allowing healthcare providers to dedicate more time and resources to complex cases that require immediate, specialised attention.

Mr. Chair, as we continue to address our people's growing mental health needs, it is vital that we strengthen the systems of care that support recovery and reintegration. Treatment does not end at crisis intervention or hospital discharge, it extends into the community, where individuals rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose.

The Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre plays a central role in this continuum of care. Through its Advisory Council, the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre is strengthening clinical oversight and expanding its programmes while maintaining its original mission and orientation. The centre remains committed to its rehabilitation model of care, delivering a personalised, recovery-oriented approach that supports residents in developing the skills needed for independent living in a home-like environment. Family and community involvement remain central to the rehabilitation process, and all residents are required to take an active role in programming. I can speak more expansively on the facility's future plans when we get to the output appropriation.

I also didn't expand on the Caribbean Haven facility in my speech; we can discuss it a bit more as we get into the appropriations, but that is another area committed to rehabilitation and support, similar to what I just discussed.

Mr. Chair, we cannot speak about youth mental health without speaking about child safeguarding. I want to thank our partners in education and social development who have led the charge when it comes to this work; but I stand here today to assert that the safeguarding of our children is a priority for Health, and one which will see a much more visible and dedicated effort. It is imperative to have a framework in place to ensure our children are safe, especially in our healthcare facilities, and it's something that will be implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development.

My Ministry team will also be working on the implementation of policies, programmes, and training initiatives for healthcare providers designed to protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation within healthcare settings. Our aim is to strengthen inter-

agency coordination, promote community awareness, and ensure that child protection standards are effectively upheld across the Cayman Islands in every sector. Safeguarding will be incorporated in our work, from the development of standards to training requirements, vetting, and registration. Healthcare professionals are duty bound by the Children (Amendment) Act 2024, to report - yet it has become clear that significant work needs to be undertaken to ensure that this requirement is upheld and all practitioners have policies in place to fulfil this duty.

Mr. Chair, this government is keen to develop solid foundations upon which both we and future generations can build. The development of national frameworks will provide us with foundations that will help to create and maintain high standards of healthcare while modernising the way regulatory work is done. For too long, the Cayman Islands have operated without the coordinated health regulation that our growing community truly needs. It's time we change that.

First, we must acknowledge our starting point: decades of fragmented systems and outdated standards that have left gaps in patient safety and public trust. We owe it to our people to bring order, clarity, and accountability to our healthcare system. I plan to do that by introducing practitioners' codes of practise that hold our clinicians to the highest possible standards. To do this, Mr. Speaker — I keep saying "Speaker", like everyone else; maybe we're speaking something into being here.

[Laughter]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I do not mean now, because you are wonderful Minister of Finance and Education.

To do this, we need greater investment in the Department of Health Regulatory Services (DHRS). We will continue to support that department's Online Service Platform and Process Improvement Project, which will allow it to effectively meet its stakeholders' evolving needs in an efficient and timely manner. The implementation of a digital service platform coupled with process improvements will enhance service delivery, streamline operations, and strengthen regulatory oversight. This initiative will also enable the department to effectively manage growth within the health insurance sector and adapt to ongoing amendments to the Acts and Regulations that govern its mandates and deliverables. I am happy to elaborate on the new digital service platform once we get to that line item, but I am pleased to say that we have already started Phase 1 of the initiative.

My team will also continue to advance the legislative framework that is needed in order to ensure that ours is a modern, responsive and equitable healthcare system. Updates to the Health Practice Act

will also serve to create clinical standards of practise within our islands, ensuring quality care for all.

Work on amendments to the health insurance regulatory framework is ongoing, Mr. Chair. A significant number of proposed changes aim to streamline and improve various operational aspects, including the processes for approving, renewing, and withdrawing of approved insurers. These proposed changes to the Health Insurance Commission will also improve the regulatory processes of employers and employees.

While we recognise the importance of more efficient operations and the need to adopt a more data-driven approach to decision-making, our primary focus remains on addressing concerns about how health insurance is currently being offered and finding practical solutions for a more cost-efficient health insurance system. I look forward to working on that with you, Mr. Chair.

The Pharmacy Act, 2024, which many may remember was a landmark reform that replaced the outdated legislation from 1979, introduced clear licensing requirements for importing, manufacturing, wholesaling, and dispensing of medication. It empowers the Pharmacy Council to approve medicines based on international standards and allows for emergency-use authorisations in times of national health crises. It also bans internet and mail-order pharmacies without a physical presence on-island, protecting our population from counterfeit and unsafe drugs — I want to take a moment to commend former Minister Turner for getting this Act passed.

Subsequent to the Act is the Pharmacy Regulations which are underway and once approved, will allow for the enactment of the Pharmacy Act. These will all be supported by the DHRS' inspection team that has now been expanded to now include dedicated pharmacy inspectors.

Other efforts to modernise our healthcare system, Mr. Chair, will include the implementation of an electronic prescribing system to streamline the prescription process, enhance patient safety, reduce medication errors, and improve coordination between healthcare providers and pharmacies across the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Chair, our health and our environment are inextricably linked. Healthy environments with clean air and water, access to green spaces, and nutritious locally grown food help to support good physical and mental health. I think we can all be proud of the environment that we live in here in the Cayman Islands. Preservation and protection matter everywhere, but in Cayman, they are particularly vital. Our connection to the land, the sea, and our heritage gives us a sense of identity, belonging, and purpose — foundations that are essential for mental health, well-being, and a resilient community. For those who don't think they are connected, just take a drive and sit by the ocean after a long day of work.

Mr. Chair, moving on to a matter that touches every household, every business, and every community in our Islands: waste management — usually discussed within the context of the George Town Landfill.

For decades, we have known that time and capacity are against us. The 124,125 tonnes of waste sent to the landfill last year exceeded projections made ten years ago, which estimated a worst-case scenario of 80,000 tonnes per year. We know this has to do with the population growth, yet it is where we are at. We have the data and models that demonstrate just how quickly our landfill capacity is diminishing. For example, according to data from the Department of Environmental Health (DEH), out of the more than 124,000 tonnes of waste deposited in the landfill in 2024, 60 per cent came from commercial waste, 17 per cent was vegetation waste and 12 per cent was household waste.

By contrast, other small island nations in our region are already diverting more than half of their waste away from their landfills. Barbados, for example, according to their 2009 National Report to The United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development, diverts up to 70 per cent of its solid waste away from the landfill through various facilities for processing metals, construction, yard waste and recycling; and Bermuda diverts almost all its municipal waste through their waste-to-energy facility.

Mr. Chair, we can and must do better. Based on the latest models from the Department of Environmental Health, we now know that if we do not implement an interim plan, we have approximately five to seven years before reaching capacity at the George Town Landfill with limited contingency for emergencies. This is not the first time this has been spoken about in this Chamber; we have heard that for a very long time.

This Government's SPS includes a specific outcome: the development of a sustainable, cost-effective waste management strategy and plan. My Ministry team and I, in consultation with subject matter experts, have reviewed what is already in place, including existing project contracts and land agreements. We are now able to act and we do not have to start from scratch — and I will say this publicly; this is not ISWMS 2.0.

Mr. Chair, as you know, we had to end our project agreement with the Dart-led consortium for the Integrated Solid Waste Management System due to the fact that it was not value-for-money among other nuances that I won't go into today. For those who would like to know more about it, I direct you to the report produced by the Auditor General.

Mr. Chair, we could not move forward with any plan that would place generational debt on our children and grandchildren. The approach must be financially responsible, technically sound, and workable across sectors. The way forward, therefore, requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses waste

generation, waste diversion and waste treatment. This also requires changes in how we consume and dispose of materials. We all have a collective responsibility to reduce the amount of waste we produce. Government can provide systems and policy direction, but the volume entering the landfill reflects daily decisions made in homes, businesses, and commercial operations.

Mr. Chair, we have a proposed ten-year plan, from 2025 to 2035. To start, our goal over the next five years is to reduce the amount of waste heading to the landfill, buying us time to deliver on the proposed National Solid Waste Plan and build a new solid waste facility. We will be prioritising the three largest contributors of waste to the landfill I mentioned: green waste, recyclable material waste, and household waste. The objective is to build new processing facilities and safely manage these major categories of waste.

Mr. Chair, our incremental plan starts with developing both a Recycling Policy and a Business Case for each of the mentioned facilities at the same time; we will begin the required three stage business case for the new solid waste facility and once completed, we can begin waste management works. Rolling out recycling and diverting from the landfill are part of the overall strategy. We have the benefit of beginning work as early as next year (2026) due to the phased approach that will be taken.

We must work together — businesses, households, government and non-government organisations — to reduce the amount of waste we generate. The proposal will promote and encourage recycling, and that is an important component – but recycling on its own won't solve everything. That's why I am proposing a joint, cohesive plan. Prioritising the construction of processing facilities that will have the most impact on waste reduction.

The timeline will be tight, yes, but passing the proposed recycling policy and strategy, which will be developed early next year and starting the RFP and construction of these three priority facilities, will win us time and capacity. With this new Waste Management Plan, implementing facilities to increase recycling, I believe we can decrease the volume of waste going to the landfill and extend its lifespan.

Mr. Chair, the budget allocates \$993,000 over two years for OE 152 - Maintenance of the Completed George Town Landfill (GTLF) Remediation Works Phase 1, and \$2,078,000 in HES 1 for the provision of comprehensive project management, technical, legal, and financial advisory services to support the implementation and optimisation of the National Solid Waste Management Plan.

In addition, within EI 94 we have allocated \$6 million towards our solid waste management plan and programmes, the three separate facilities I just spoke about. One such project is to replace the medical waste incinerator at DEH. Mr. Chair, processing between 500,000 and 800,000 pounds annually, the

medical waste incinerator is the primary system for safely destroying potentially infectious, bio-hazardous waste. The existing unit is approximately 20 years old and does not meet modern environmental or operational standards. The incinerator requires frequent maintenance and costly major repairs, resulting in prolonged downtime each year during which medical waste must be stored. To ensure the safe and sustainable treatment of medical waste, a new incinerator, housed within a dedicated building and equipped with modern emission controls and monitoring systems, is essential.

Mr. Chair, we have also assessed where we can upgrade and enhance equipment and fleets for the Department of Environmental Health's operations. Laboratory upgrades at DEH will enhance testing accuracy, environmental monitoring, and compliance. Modernised waste management improvements will boost landfill efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and ensure long-term sustainability across all Islands. We cannot expect the department to address our waste management challenges with an outdated fleet or inadequate systems.

Mr. Chair, the Cayman Brac Landfill currently operates without a landfill compactor. This is an essential piece of equipment for effective waste management on the Sister Islands. A compactor compresses incoming waste, maximising the use of available space and extending the landfill's operational lifespan. Proper compaction also minimises air voids within the waste mass, which is the primary method for preventing deep-seated landfill fires. Since the introduction of a Bomag compactor on Grand Cayman, no deep-seated fires have occurred. As the Cayman Brac landfill continues to expand, the likelihood of such fires will increase without proper compaction. Procuring for a compactor for the Brac landfill will significantly reduce this risk, improve site safety, and ensure more efficient landfill operations for the Sister Islands.

Mr. Chair, this plan will provide opportunities in our country for jobs in the energy and environment sector, economic diversification, and improve our national resilience.

Colleagues, our country is calling on us to lead —not as separate ministries, not as opposing sides, but as one people with one purpose. The environmental health of our country affects us all, and now we can be part of a real, lasting solution. Let us work together to build these facilities, to strengthen our communities, and to secure the health of our Islands so that the work we begin today endures for those who follow us. This is our chance to turn waste into worth, and commitment into change. The environmental future of our Cayman Islands depends on what we choose to do now, together. I look forward to your full support as we work to make this National Solid Waste Strategy a reality.

Mr. Chair, another Key Capital Project for 2026 to 2027 is with the Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU). As we all know, effective mosquito control is incredibly important to our quality of life — anybody who wasn't sure about that just had to ask themselves a couple weeks ago when our aircraft was down and the mosquitoes were going wild. It's [also] directly related to public health's ability to control diseases that can be spread by mosquitoes, such as dengue fever, Chikungunya, Malaria, and Yellow fever.

The MRCU, like so many of our departments has done an excellent job with the resources they have, but if we want to keep our country free from epidemic levels of mosquito-borne viruses then we must invest in new aircraft. The current mosquito control programme relies on a fleet of two aircraft that have exceeded their optimal service life and the required maintenance is costly. This investment will strengthen our capacity to protect public health and control the presence and increase of mosquitoes. Mr. Chair, we are planning to invest C\$1,800,000 in the procurement of a replacement aircraft, which will significantly improve operational safety, coverage efficiency, and responsiveness during peak mosquito seasons.

Mr. Chair, as I close, I want to reaffirm this Government's commitment to delivering thoughtful, evidence-based solutions to our challenges. Access to quality and affordable healthcare, clean air and water, and the preservation of our beaches and natural environments is not a privilege for the few. It is a right for every Caymanian, and one that we are entrusted to protect. These are essential to building a society where people are healthy, empowered, and able to thrive at every age and stage of life.

To the youth of our Islands — which is why I am here — we hear you. Your voices matter, and we are taking action to support your future. As Maya Angelou [sic] reminded us, **“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”** This Budget reflects that belief. Together, we are creating a Cayman where everyone has the opportunity and support to thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. With that, I open the questioning to HES 1.

Honourable member Saunders for Bodden Town West.

AMENDMENT TO HES 1

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you know, I have a Committee Stage Amendment which was filed exactly a week ago and reads:

“In accordance with Standing Order, 84(3) of the Parliament Standing Orders, 2025, I,

Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West give notice to move the following amendment to the Appropriation (Financial Years 2026 and 2027) Bill, 2025 —

- 1. That HES 1 be reduced by \$1 for 2026 and \$1 for 2027 in respect of ‘Policy Advice and Ministerial Services to the Minister for Health, Environment and Sustainability.’”**

Now, Mr. Chairman, , based on the conversation that you, the Premier and I had about a week ago I think we can all agree that what we wanted to achieve in this Finance Committee we pretty much did, to some extent. I think everyone present knows by now what happened, but for the listening public: I was unhappy with how we abruptly shut down the debate of the budget at the time and I decided in good parliamentary fashion to exercise what I refer to as my “last-lick” provision — as my nieces and nephews know, I don't lose last lick.

As such, I went through and filed an amendment to reduce every ministerial budget of any Minister who didn't speak by \$1 just to open back up the debate on their respective areas. What we agreed was that each Minister who didn't speak would do an opening statement to outline what would have been outlined in the budget debate, because I thought it was something that should have been done to begin with. We sorted that out and we came to some understanding.

Just to set the precedent, since it has already been opened now, whereby I have in essence weaponised the Parliament's amendment process to some extent, I expect that going forward when we're doing second readings and so forth we will get done what we need to get done and avoid playing politics or whatever, because this is serious business.

Mr. Chairman, I recognise this is the last opening statement; I want to commend you for your patience and professionalism during this process.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I know we all sit on different political sides but as you said, inside here there may be three groups — the NCFC group, the PPM's Official Opposition and the independent members on this side; and there are two sides, the Government and Opposition, but at the end of the day is only one Cayman and that is what we are all working for here.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Minister for outlining her policy statement and her plans for the Ministry she is constitutionally in charge of. I am very happy to hear that there will be some focus on mental health. I was speaking to Dr. Lockhart just before we started; [because] of the stigma, we here in the Caribbean have been a bit slow to deal with the issue of mental health.

If you go back to the World Health Organisation's definition of health, which is **"a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"** — it is that part about "mental well-being". That was a definition that came about since 1946. For those in Europe and the Americas who were very active during that time, the year before (1945) would have been the end of the Second World War. Many people in those countries would have seen soldiers come back with PTSD et cetera, and understood the importance of mental health; thus the reason that issue could have been raised 79 years ago.

Not being that active in the war theatre, we in the Caribbean never really experienced many people coming back with PTSD and as such, we never took it as seriously as we should; we put a stigma on it and never gave it the importance it deserves. I am happy to see that Cayman is finally catching up with the world in recognising that and I think credit has to be given to the Alex Panton Foundation and others who have been working really hard to push this issue forward.

The Minister also mentioned a National Health Plan; of course, Mr. Chairman, you'll remember that the last time a National Health Plan was done was when you were in Cabinet. It was your colleague, Mark Scotland, who created such a plan and I really have to recognise Mark Scotland because he has always been passionate about health. It's something he has continued to do even in his private life, so Mark, if you're listening, I want to say thank you for what you have done.

Mr. Chairman, another thing I wanted to [mention] which the Minister kind of touched on in terms of putting together the National Plan, is that in the 2021 Census the top three illnesses were diabetes, arthritis and cataract; if you compare that with the global prevalence rate of these illnesses, you realise that Cayman is well above the global standard, which means that there's much work to be done in that arena. I'm happy the Minister is looking to address those issues and develop a National Plan that would actually deal with them.

Mr. Chairman, the last thing I want to touch on before we get into the other issues is the governance of the Health Service Authority — I was not going to leave that out at all. I want to start by thanking you, as a former Director of the HSA and your team of members who were on the board just before the 2021 government took over. Many people have been saying that I have made this issue a bit political because of whom the Chairperson was, but I want to put something in context, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure it is something you are aware of already, but I'm just going to put it out there so the public can understand it.

In 2020, the total HSA board fees was \$82,215 and its profit was \$1.2 million. In 2021, the HSA board fees for directors were \$192,550 and the

HSA's profit was just under \$8.1 million. In short, if we were to combine 2020 and 2021, the HSA had total profits of roughly \$9.3 million and total board compensation of just under \$275,000. Someone cannot expect me or any reasonable person to go after anyone who produces \$9.3 million in profit and \$275,000 in fees, other than to say thank you.

Mr. Chairman, since you were a part of that board along with other members, I want to thank you for the work you did back then; however, that was in 2020 and 2021. In 2022, Mr. Chairman, the HSA's board fee was \$250,900 and their profit in 2022 — actually there was no profit; there was a loss of almost \$5.2 million.

In 2023, Mr. Chairman, the HSA's board fees were \$250,750 and the profit — actually there wasn't any; there was a loss of almost \$7.1 million.

In 2024, Mr. Chairman, the HSA's board fees were \$326,700 and the profit — none. It was actually a loss of just over \$12.4 million.

Mr. Chairman, when you look at 2022, 2023, and 2024, the HSA had losses of \$24.7 million and total board compensation in those three years of \$828,350. Again, the two previous years had a profit of almost \$9.3 million and less than \$275,000 [board compensation], compared with \$838,000 plus in [board] fees and losses of almost \$25 million.

No one can expect us, as Members of Parliament, to ignore that kind of performance. To see the HSA go from \$8 million in profit — and mark you, the year they had \$8 million in profit, they were budgeting a loss of \$12 million. That means they beat their budget by more than \$20 million in performance. I don't think anyone can argue that back then the board and the management knew what they were doing.

When I see some people get up — and I won't say who (Osbourne Bodden) — who have the audacity and the temerity to attack the HSA management, people who by law cannot defend themselves politically from political attacks, I will do it. When you get up and you talk about how you're going to sue the Member for Bodden Town West, if you take the time to read the Parliament (Immunities, Powers and Privileges) Act, I can legally say anything I want on this mic in this Parliament about anybody, calling anybody's name and you can't sue me. Period. Clearly he didn't read the law either.

Anyway, you know Mr. Chairman, we have been having a really good Finance Committee meeting thus far. We have a Public Accounts Committee coming up that will deal with these issues, deal with these directors who were getting paid more money in a month than there were meetings, and clearing over \$12,000 and change per month to show up and cut ribbons, show up at staff meetings and all that kind of stuff. The Public Accounts Committee will deal with it so we won't here; but I want to say to the Minister that from a governance standpoint it is something that really needs to be dealt with.

I just want to close off by publicly thanking Ms. Lizzette and her team at the HSA for the work they have done, and for remaining calm and professional despite all this. You did not call those board meetings, nor pay yourself all that money. All you did was look after your patients and your employees, so on behalf of the people I represent in Bodden Town West, I want to thank you and your team for the work you have done. I hope you continue to do it.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: With that, Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my amendment.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I take it that the response to the Minister's statement has been made. I now open questions on HES 1.

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Sorry. I'm happy to do the questions under the headings, if that's how you would like to do it, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: No, Leader. We've set a precedent, so if you have specific questions on the statement, please proceed.

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

Mr. Chairman, through you. I thank the Honourable Minister for the opening statement. Lots of encouraging information in there, as we've heard from other ministers as well. I'm sure that we'll get into some nitty gritty with the different headings but something that I noticed was glaringly missing from your opening remarks, which the Honourable Deputy Premier mentioned earlier, was the beach re-nourishment or [addressing] the beach erosion.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair, through you. To answer your question, we haven't allocated any funding for the beach re-nourishment because —

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Let me finish what I was saying then, Mr. Chair. That is probably a typo in terms of the description.

What we have agreed to as a government is that the private landowners on the Seven Mile Beach waterfront have agreed to form a foundation company. They have already retained an engineer and they are working on developing the design for the construction of the replenishment. Where the government will fit in

will be first of all, as it relates to dealing with reviewing and approving of the coastal works application as well as, from a tourism standpoint, to work along with the foundation company as we talk about a funding mechanism for the future maintenance and upkeep of the beach re-nourishment.

As of right now, the discussions that have taken place with the cross-ministry approach (Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Environment) is that they feel quite comfortable they will be able to source the funds to replenish the sand.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition, continuing.

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

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, for clarity. I think I answered the Leader of the Opposition's question, but to Mr. Bryan's question: yes, this is a typographical error. This line item deals with iguana culling and various environmental services and research.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: When we get to the line item we can ask.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I was just going say, when we get to line item we can discuss it in this entirety.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition, continuing.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you to the Honourable Minister — I hope I didn't miss it in the split second that I was chatting.

Thank you for that response; however, I don't believe that the southern end of Seven Mile Beach is the only or will be the last area where we will have coastline erosion. Are there any intentions, as was discussed, to put in place a fee of some sort or to develop a sinking fund that we can continue to deal with these matters when they arise, as well as for the maintenance of the affected areas on all three Islands?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through you, Mr. Chair, we have had discussions among ourselves as government as it relates to some of the potential methods that could be used to provide funding, but

that hasn't been a policy decision that the government has made at this time.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition, continuing.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. I would only say that I would encourage you to strike while the iron is hot, as they say, while people are willing to entertain it because you never know, Minister; you fix the southern end and you don't know what that's going to create on the northern end. There are other parts of all three islands that are seeing erosion as well.

Can the Honourable Minister give us an update on progress with the Marriott project — whether they are moving ahead on their own?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. Yes, Mr. Leader, I can confirm that the Marriott has submitted a coastal works application for the replenishment of the beach, and it successfully passed through Cabinet quite some time ago.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition, continuing.

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

Moving on, Mr. Chairman. I want to speak to the landfill a little.

First I want to ask, are you still satisfied with the timelines that have been given, because when I was in the government five years ago they were telling us 5 to 7 years on the landfill and as you rightfully noted, that's when we were anticipating 80 tonnes versus the 124,000 tonnes that we're seeing now. Are you still confident that we have the ability and the time to go through this 10-year plan with the current landfill?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

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

Yes, I am confident that hopefully with the rollout of our separate recycling facilities starting with green waste; and as we start having discussions nationally, moving into more recycling and getting the country sensitised to recycling and diverting the recyclable items from the landfill, yes, we will still meet the target that has been set out. However, I will say that we do have a contingency plan if it doesn't happen as there's still spill-over space on site 4.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition, continuing.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you to the Honourable Minister in that response.

Also, Minister, you said the objective is to build new processing facilities to adequately and safely manage these major categories of waste — commercial, landscaping, and residential. Are we creating new tipping sites and if we are, where would the locations be?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

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

That is correct. We will be creating new sites. We are still exploring the Crown-owned properties. As we all know, the facilities that are at the landfill have already benefited from an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), so we're hoping that we can utilise the space that is there. That is one option. Of course, we have the ability to look at other Crown-owned properties as it really isn't residential garbage that we're talking about but green waste. We saw how that operated post-tropical storm Grace whereby we had the separate depots within each district; residents were dropping off their green waste and it was being shredded.

We're still trying to determine the location, but one of the options is to do it and just to enlighten the public as well as to share with those members who might not be aware, originally a part of the plan was to have the same said facilities set right at the location of the landfill.

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

Yes, I knew there was going to be vegetation and construction waste, et cetera, but what about the dirty stuff? The rotting food, the stinking stuff, the stuff we were going to burn, the stuff that creates the flies and the smell across West Bay Road — where will it be going?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: That is actually still being worked out. The first one we are focusing on will be the green waste and as we continue to do the policy and take it through Caucus and Cabinet and do each of the required investigations, we will determine where.

I just want to clarify, are you talking about garbage or about the recyclables, because the garbage will continue to go to the landfill site until we determine the new location for whatever the solution will be; once we've conducted the three-stage business case.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition, continuing.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Okay, thank you.

I just want to ensure I get this right in my mind. When you spoke here, you talked about next year and being able to start next year, but I assume then that the strategy is to start separating the waste in order to slow down the amount that's going into the current landfill to give you enough time to carry out the 7 to 10-year plan — am I understanding that?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you. Yes, that's correct; because I was reading a speech, let me clarify a little more for the public to properly understand:

- the waste management solution that will replace the landfill is going to cost over \$10 million, which means we will need to do a three-stage business case;
- As most members know, it typically takes 18 months to 2 years.

While that is being done by the Ministry staff, we have taken the approach to work on separate facilities for the diversion component and the reason I said it will start as soon as next year is that we've already approved the policy guidance document through Cabinet, and now the team is working on the policy document.

Once that's completed for those facilities, we will do the individual business case and then start procurement for those separate entities, which we hope to be able to do — Hang on one second.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, I just wanted to make sure that I didn't misspeak. We will be able to complete the policy and strategy in 2026 and then go into dealing with having the first facility started in 2026 with the aim to have that completed by 2027, which would be the green waste facility. Then, like I say to my team, walk and chew gum at the same time; we'll also have to be working on the material recycling facility.

Something we've already determined is that the household waste recycling, as I mentioned in my speech, is going to take a bit longer for the public to get more accustomed to recycling. We're going to focus on expanding the facility that is already on site for recycling and then continue with those components. I hope that clarifies what I was saying in my speech.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Through you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Minister. I'm getting a better picture of it because I know that we talk about strategic business cases, outline business cases, procurement, RFPs, engaging contractors — I've never seen any-

thing done in government without \$2 million and a committee and two years. I would be impressed if we could have a new landfill in a year's time. It is still ambitious, but you have to be ambitious. Time is against us, as you said.

The household recycling component, Minister — many of us, and possibly yourself, in the more densely populated areas of our constituencies are having trouble getting them to keep their garbage in a bin, much less in separate bins, particularly when [collection] is just once per week.

I understand eventually you will need trucks with separate bins for the collection, or separate trucks, but there's much work and it will take every single person in here as representatives. We will take some licks. I can tell you that. We will take some licks in our constituencies trying to get persons to conform to separating their trash, putting it out on the right days, et cetera. Like I said, I have trouble getting them to keep it in a [bin]. Sometimes you have to go out and buy enclosures or bins for them to keep the garbage in.

I offer you my full support as long as we continue to be informed. We understand the transparency — the trust issue — once we take out the politics of it, because this is a national issue. It is a real issue for us all. Nobody else wants it in their backyard; unfortunately, it's literally in my backyard, in my constituency; but no one else wants it in their backyard.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I want to say—

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Before you do Mr. Chair, may I just have permission to respond to the comment the Leader has made about the waste receptacles?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Just to say this is something I've been discussing with Director Simms and his team. I heard it earlier through the debate how some members were talking about concerns with rodents.

Many of us really dislike to see the condition when a dog or chickens get at trash so as we move towards an independent or standalone legislation, which I'm working on — actually the drafting instructions have already gone to the legal drafting team; we will be looking at those sorts of requirements. Of course, we would have to look at how we roll that out, because there are certain areas where persons simply just can't afford a garbage container.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, it's something that we need to have on the radar and we will be looking at in the future.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank my Honourable Leader for giving leeway.

I'm so happy that the Leader highlighted how you're doing the groundwork for a fundamental, proper approach to this, but what I am worried about is that it does take a long time for us to do this. I'm really worried about what my leader just highlighted, which is trying our best to leave politics out of this. I'm wondering if this is the appropriate time for us all to agree to have a bipartisan committee, led by you, so no matter what happens, whenever it happens, [even] in elections, that we all agree on the same approach that it doesn't get stopped or stalled, because it's going to take a long time.

I don't know if the Government is willing to do that. I know my Leader has said similarly; we need to resolve this once and for all so that we have a solution for waste and are not at risk of an election. I don't know if the Minister or the government will entertain such a thing.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, if I might respond.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: This is the approach this administration does intend to take. It is an area on which I planned to reach out, especially as I'm quite aware that, as Mr. Hew said, it's in his backyard.

Yes, I think with many of the long-term plans that we see, we need to ensure that there is continuity so the plans can continue. I'm certainly happy to, and it's actually a conversation that we've been having, [namely], having a more collective approach with some of these larger projects.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Two things; I'll give you both. You can answer those, and I think I'll be able to move on from the landfill and from your statement.

First, would you mind giving us an update on the tyre removal? If you were just feeling the mosquitoes when the plane broke down, I've been feeling the mosquitoes for about three or four months continuously even when the plane was flying. We know that the tyres and other things in the landfill are large contributors to the reproduction of the mosquitoes. Can you give us an update on how that procurement process is

going? I know this is probably the second or third attempt at it.

Second, you have heard my appeal for an oversight committee/body to monitor the landfill process. Have you given that any consideration?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start with the first question: Where are we with the procurement for the removal of the bulk metal or scrap metal, both in Cayman Brac and —

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Sorry?

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: I said tyres.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yeah, well this is what it encompasses — the removal of the bulk scrap metal as well as the stockpile of tyres. I just double-checked to give an update because I suspected it would be something members would be interested in knowing; the procurement process has been completed and we hope to have a contract awarded. Definitely before the end of the week, the contract will be awarded.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Through you, Mr. Chairman.

That is fantastic news. Let's hope that we get all the other government entities in line so there are no hiccups with this. I speak openly about things like the port, et cetera, so that we all understand that the important thing is to get rid of this garbage not to make money from getting rid of it. I struggle to understand this idea that in dealing with the largest environmental crisis this country faces and has faced, you want value for money in doing it. If we can get it out of here, let's pay to get it out of here. That's my feeling.

Thank you for that, Honourable Minister, and for being open in your answers. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: No problem. Mr. Chair, sorry, though I wrote it down, I still didn't answer your second question about the Oversight Committee. I know that when I worked on the project during the previous term, many of the findings that came from the EIA report referred to needing to have mechanisms in place for air quality control. As we move into having legislation — I'm hoping that as we work towards having a new waste and recycling solution we will also have standalone legislation to govern it; but even if it isn't legally required, I certainly would not shy away from having an Oversight Committee.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Minister. Just to say that this is nothing against the DEH either. I think it would actually be helpful because when we talked, you spoke about the compactor. If there was an oversight or regulatory authority or an oversight board monitoring the landfill, they would have had that independent report saying we need these compactors. They would also have that independent report coming to you or to the government of the day saying we need the budget for X amount of material to do the capping — you know, every 24, 48, once a week, whatever is needed in Cayman. It just creates that check and balance for the Department of Environmental Health and the government so there's transparency and there's no finger pointing when something goes wrong to say I wanted it in a budget, but they wouldn't give it to me or they didn't ask for it in the budget.

I think it's too big of a... I want to say crisis. I do believe it requires some oversight that ensures that both sides — the elected government and the Department of Environmental Health — are being held accountable and are on the same page.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, MP for Red Bay.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I'll start with mental health on pages six and seven of the statement. The members might recall that during the Strategic Policy Statement I mentioned that I wasn't seeing anything specific about youth mental health or a youth mental health facility, so I implored the government to ensure it was included. I'm happy to see that it is here, sir.

As I said to the Minister, I'm also extremely happy to see the other things that will be there: the four-bed facility, as well as the mobile unit. Could the Minister please say when she's expecting that four-bed facility to be up and running?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Member, for your question. We've been busy talking about the works and I know we were waiting on some approvals from Planning; but before I misspeak, I want to double-check with the team that it is still the case. Can you give me just one minute?

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: That is the case. The application is with the Planning Department now, and subject to Planning's approval, we hope to have it completed before the end of next year.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Mr. Chair, thank you — and the facility's location?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, we looked at a number of locations in the hospital and the location that was easiest for transition was near the Women's Health area and the Paediatrics. What will happen is that the Paediatrics Unit will be relocated upstairs, which has now been retrofitted into sort of a... Let me just double-check that things haven't changed.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I'm still in good shape, still the same.

[Laughter]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: It was important to note that the reason this location was best suited is that it's immediately adjacent to the mental health ward.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I agree with that. I think the location is probably a good one for what I would call a temporary facility.

The longer-term facility — the same two questions. When do you anticipate the start of that and the completion of it? I'm assuming that what we have in the budget is only the bits for the plans and so on.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you. As we get through the line item, it shows where we don't have anything budgeted for 2026 because again we're looking at going through the whole three-stage business case so we're looking at starting construction in 2027.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, sir. What's in there now is mostly to get through the business case part of it and plans?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: When we get to that line item, we can go back through it in its entirety, but if my memory serves me well, we don't have anything budgeted for 2026. The capital is set aside for 2027, which is when we plan to start construction.

As it relates to the services you just mentioned, they would go under professional fees, not capital.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you for that. Looking at page seven, the Minister wrote here that I can speak more expansively on the future plans of the facility (the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre) once we get to the output appropriation; do you want to do that now or later?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, if it's okay, I'd like to leave it to when we're with the appropriation because I'm sure other questions will come up at that time. I'm excited, though, I'll tell you.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, you shouldn't curb the Minister's enthusiasm. Do we go to the output?

[Laughter]

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: I'm far from doing that, sir.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, sir.

The landfill — Minister, I want to take my hat off to the folks at the DEH. It's a hugely important role they perform, often underappreciated, so I just want to take a moment to thank them for it and say they have my utmost thanks, appreciation, and respect. I'll use that as a jumping off point.

In terms of the new facilities for the recycling — if it was said, I missed it, if you wanted to discuss it later on. Was the question asked earlier as to where those facilities will be located? Actually, I think I'm recalling; some would be at the current landfill, I think, and you need to find places for the others. Correct? Alright.

Cayman Brac landfill: I just want to ensure, will the metals that are there be baled and shipped to Grand Cayman to be shipped off from here, or how exactly will that be? I think I may be wrong, but is there a baler there?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, if you can just give me a minute, I want to confirm with Director Simms if they're going to be baled. I know for sure they're going to be shipped, but I want to confirm. Give me one minute please.

[Pause]

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

Once the contract is awarded tomorrow, what it encompasses is that the metals will actually be shipped. There will not be any baling taking place in the Brac; they'll just be shipped off. I will say that I was really happy to go with Director Simms and see for myself. That is how I could appreciate the fact that it needed to be dealt with urgently, because it's quite high — equally the tyres. I'm happy the contract will be awarded tomorrow.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Minister, thank you, and I thank Mr. Simms as well.

The one other point I'll make is that I'm extremely happy to see that the new Pharmacy Act with the Regulations will come in, I think you said in 2024. It was long overdue. I will leave it at that, sir.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to clarify that the Pharmacy Act was already passed. It just hasn't commenced as yet.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Okay. I just wanted to clarify.

APPROPRIATIONS TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

HES 1 - Policy Advice and Ministerial Services to the Minister for Health, Environment and Sustainability

The Chairman: Members, we would turn our attention to the appropriation groups to the Honourable Minister. We begin with HES 1 - Policy Advice and Ministerial Services to the Minister for Health, Environment and Sustainability. Are there any questions?

Mr. Saunders, MP for Bodden Town West.

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

Through you, Mr. Chairman to the Honourable Minister. What is the government's policy on the culling of cats?

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, every time I hear anything about cats, I think about Minister Jay's missing pet.

Mr. Chair, to answer the member's question, there are different methods by which the cats are euthanized:

- by total anaesthesia followed by lethal injection;
- precise transcranial shot administered by a licenced rifle operator; or
- chemically induced hypoxia.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Sorry, go back to that rifle one for me. That's the one I'm interested in.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West, I figured that might have caught your attention.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I have a strong community in Beach Bay that actually feeds many of these cats and many constituents who are pet lovers and pet owners. Through you, Mr. Chairman, to the honourable Minister, the option of using a gun, where did the recommendation come from?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through you, Mr. Chair.

Let me just clarify that that option is not used in Beach Bay. That option is used in instances on the Brac, on the Bluff, or in some instances in Little Cayman.

I hear you about your residents and your constituents not being happy about hearing of anything being shot. I, myself, cringe at the idea of any living creature being shot; but after your question the other day, I started to speak to my team, to the director of DOE, and I have determined that this practise is not uncommon. It's the same way that we deal with our cows when we're getting them ready for Christmas beef or when we're ready to deal with the turtles — I wasn't aware of that.

The scientific evidence that has been used to determine this process sets out it is the most humane way to deal with euthanizing an animal. However, since you asked the question, I think we need to look at why we are needing to euthanize animals? What I'm pleased to share is that many members who I work with on the government side have been very passionate about advocating against animal cruelty, so we've been having discussions about the Animals Act, and Minister Ebanks earlier this week got his budget approved, which included two cat pounds. Once we can get to the place of having pounds, it re-

moves the need for having to look at euthanasia in this fashion.

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

The Chairman: Minister, the member asked a two-part question.

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

The Chairman: Yes. I know it is a very emotive topic for many cat lovers in this Chamber; he asked where [the recommendation] came from?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: For the record, I'm no cat lover but I certainly didn't like the idea when I first heard about it until I became aware that this is the process by which it's done. To answer your question, the decision was made by the National Conservation Council (NCC), as they are charged with the conservation and protection of endangered species in accordance with the Constitution and their Act.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West, do you need a minute to compose yourself?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chair, from what I understand, they have these cats in a cage, helpless and then being shot. It's one thing if we're doing something to feed — I mean, I don't eat cat at Christmas versus Christmas beef is two different things; you know what I mean? I'm not getting into that debate, but the scariest part for me, Mr. Chairman, through you to the Minister, is these types of recommendations and where they come from. The very name says conservation, preservation, and now we are talking about elimination?

[Pause]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: You know what, I'll leave this alone. Somebody else can take it. I'll leave this alone.

The Chairman: Lady Member from Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wonder if the Honourable Minister could satisfy my curiosity as to who the legal perpetrators of the Brac cats' euthanasia are. Is it under contract or done by the department itself?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, can I ask for just a moment to confer with my team?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is conducted by DOE staff who have been trained and licenced.

The Chairman: Honourable member, continuing.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, can the Honourable Minister confirm whether there are any funds in this budget for the purchase of rifles by DOE?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I need another minute, please. That's not something we discussed. I just need to confirm.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I've been reliably informed there's nothing in this budget relating to the purchasing of guns.

The Chairman: Thank goodness.
Honourable member, continuing.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Just to be absolutely clear, have any funds from the 2024/2025 budget been used for the acquisition of these additional rifles? What type?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I need another minute, please, Mr. Chair.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I have been advised that there have been funds used to purchase air rifles but this would have been in previous budgets — and its air rifles designed to deliver instantaneous painless execution.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, can the Honourable Minister say when was the last time, if at any time at all, that members of the DOE staff were trained by the Gun Club?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I've been advised that the staff was trained many years ago. We would have to seek confirmation to determine if there's been any recurrent training.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Honourable member, continuing.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: In light of the very detailed presentation that my Lady Minister for West Bay has done, I will phrase my final question as follows: When you're seeking that information, ask the relevant team whether "22 rifles" rings a bell. I'll speak to you offline.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Switching away from the murder of cats, Mr. Chairman, through you to the Honourable Minister. Where are we with spear gun licences? That was something I passed in this [House] and there are already a couple of Motions I can recall, which dealt with this issue.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair again, I just need to refer to the Director for a quick moment.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I will say to the Member that it's a matter that needs to be taken back to Cabinet for reconsideration under this new administration.

The Chairman: Member, continuing.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Maybe I should have said this first — what is the current Government's policy with regard to the issuance of spear gun licences?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I need to just stay standing. Just give me a minute please.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. The current position right now is that renewals are being granted; however, no new applications are being approved.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West, continuing.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, in short, there is no government policy then in terms of granting new spear gun licences. I just want to understand that.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: There is a process. Just give me one minute to confer.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. I've been advised there was legal advice from the Attorney General's Chambers which is about to be submitted to the Department of Environment — it's with the Ministry right now. Once that has been sent to DOE, it will be sent to the National Conservation Council for them to implement.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, continuing.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I am sure you're familiar with section 44(3) of the Constitution and other members inside here who are Members of Cabinet or have been a Member of Cabinet, understand section 44(3) of the Constitution that deals with policy. I will leave that as is.

The Premier isn't in the Chamber, but I will discuss it with him once he returns.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify that Minister Ebanks has been in discussions with me and it's one of the areas where we need to ensure that we have some sort of regulations or clear guidelines to the public on how and which applications can be processed.

I will have a look at the advice that has been received from the Attorney General's Chambers, and then we will determine how to move forward.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Through you, Mr. Chair to the Honourable Minister.

The most important part starts with the government's policy position. If it's a yes, then you do what you need to do to make it happen; if it's a no, then it's dead. If the policy is that the government is going to start reissuing licences, that's fine. That's what we are looking for and why we said "the government's policy". It has nothing to do with DOE or the National Conservation Council — it is the Government's policy.

The Constitution is clear in that it is the remit of Cabinet and Cabinet alone. There's nothing to confer; the Government is either going to move forward with it or not going to move forward with it. The process afterwards is a different thing. Is the government going to move forward or not? It's just a yes or no.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair. Thank you, member. That's a good point to make.

I can say that I haven't brought a Paper to Cabinet or Caucus to discuss with members what their position would be with regard to spear gun licences. I certainly know how Minister Ebanks feels, but we would need to take it to Caucus to determine the government's policy position and then move it forward.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much for that, Minister.

As a note of explanation, barring the Minister for Home Affairs, the Minister for Caymanian Employment and Immigration, the Deputy Premier, and the Minister of Finance — though I know he supports it because he's a West Bayer.

The Chairman: True.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Barring them, I think every other member of government was a part of the last Parliament when it passed unanimously for us to move forward, and I know the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Minister of Caymanian Employment would support it, so I think we have support to move forward.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, it would be very irresponsible for me to say the Government's policy position without ensuring that all the members are on the same page. Now, I would imagine we might be, but I'm not going to publicly say that today without knowing for sure. I might get myself in some trouble.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Okay. That's fine.

Through you Mr. Chairman, to the Honourable Minister. What is your position on it?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I'm a saltwater girl. What do you think?

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Alright, that's all I need to know. That good enough for me.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, can I quickly ask the Minister to define what "I'm a saltwater girl" means? I don't know what that means.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Do you support the spear gun licence or not? I think you need to answer, Minister, I apologise.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. I don't have an issue with issuing the spear gun licences; however, a reckless thing to do is to sit in Parliament and say a personal position when you work with and represent a government. Perhaps I should have said *I will withhold my position until I have liaised with my colleagues*; but I'm not afraid to say that today.

What I will say to the members is: it's risky business. The last time I was with someone with a spear gun, we got chased by a shark. That was my beloved father.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much, Minister, for giving a bit more clarity.

Mr. Chairman, I think we're avoiding some undercurrents — and we all know it's happening; and I'm so tired of it, to be honest with you. There's an internal battle between the political viewpoint on this matter and the Department of Environment's viewpoint. There are bodies in there who do not support it and are doing everything they can to stop the process from happening, over and over again. We've been going through the spear gun licence thing from when I was first elected, when I was in Opposition the first time, hold on for a second Minister, I apologise — but if they want to murder cats, they don't need a policy directive for it.

Mr. Chairman, this is the House of Parliament. The people elected the 19 Members here to carry it out, and we all agreed with it. The Member here, now the Minister, voted for it before. We have to stop doing this. Technocrats cannot control the people's will. We are the people's will. The people send us here to deliver.

Now, Madam Minister, you notice I have been teasing you all week about questions. I'm not troubling you, right? I'm not troubling you. I'm not going to ask a pile of questions because you're my friend, you know that, but we have to stop this. You either are going to deliver on the spear gun licence or tell this country you're not going to do it. The reason you don't want to do that is because you know that many Caymanians want the spear gun licence, but the people behind the scenes are dictating whether we should have it or not. That's not fair.

Can you put a timeline on when this is going to be resolved, please?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I'm sorry to disappoint the Member. What you're imagining in your mind, the contention that you think exists on this Government bench, is not what you have pictured. The discussion as it relates to spear gun licences has not been a priority to date. Why? Because we've been dealing with the budget — we've been focusing on other matters.

Of course, it's something that we're going to discuss. Certainly, it would be in my best interest to advocate for it. As I just said, and everybody knows, the constituency of West Bay Central is built with water sports operators, but I'm not going to sit here today and tell you a policy position that has not yet been discussed with this administration.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I owe the Honourable Minister an apology and I owe this Parliament an apology and I owe everyone listening an apology.

I asked about the government's policy and I completely forgot that there is already a law that says it should be done. It is section 5, under Part 2 of the National Conservation Council (Licence and Permit) Directives (2022 Revision) that deals with the licensing of spear guns. I apologise, Mr. Chairman; I raised an issue that should not have been an issue.

The question should have been how many spear gun licences have been issued as per the law. That's my question because actually, the law is already there, so I do apologise.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question. That was asked earlier.

I've been informed by the Director that there are no new licences issued; they've only been issuing renewals at this stage.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, through you to the Honourable Minister. What section of the law is being used to deny Caymanians who meet the criteria as required by the [said] law approval for a spear gun licence?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. I've been advised there is a provision in the law which sets out that the Cabinet would determine the

process as the law isn't prescriptive to that. That is the reason why it hasn't progressed.

The Chairman: Honourable member for Bodden Town West, continuing.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, by the look on your face, you want to ask the same question. I will give way to you to ask the relevant question.

The Chairman: The Chairman has been doing a good job so far.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Staying out of the mix.

The Chairman: I have stayed completely out of the discussion. Members have every right to ask their questions and I have been very lenient in my leeway, so please proceed.

[Long pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. I think the safest response at this stage is to say that Cabinet just needs to deliberate on the provisions that have been put forward so we can get that implemented and the applications can start to be processed.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West, continuing.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I am at a loss for words, so I'll just leave it at that.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I have a concern in my neighbourhood, from the people who live on my road.

I don't want to talk about it from a perspective of murdering cats, because I would hate to think such is happening, but can you tell the listening public how to resolve stray cats in their neighbourhoods and what that process is. I've had complaints in my neighbourhood as well.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I've been advised we are not culling cats in Grand Cayman.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Oh? Okay.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central, continuing.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, if the Spot Bay MP would give me way?

The Chairman: Lady Member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Is there an overriding reason why we are doing it in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman because I think the Member for Bodden Town West had many IONs [I'm only noting].

I could also [cry] discrimination. These days everybody seems to have a right under the Constitution; because I can tell you, it's an issue — and I know Little Cayman started about the iguanas, et cetera, but what's the issue in the Brac, because chickens are a much bigger issue over there than cats.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you.

The reason why it's not being done in Grand Cayman is that presently there is a judicial review which prevents the culling from taking place in Grand Cayman. The reason why they're continuing to do it in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman is that the feral cats are eradicating protected species, such as the Boobies.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Through you, Mr. Chair and then I'll turn you back to MP Bryan.

With the help of her attending staff, is the Minister in a position to say approximately how many cats have been given the exit order?

[Laughter]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, can I have a moment to confer with my team, please? I think I might have it here, but I want to double check.

The Chairman: Okay. You could provide it in writing.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you.

I've been reliably informed that 209 in Little Cayman in total and 49 in Cayman Brac in total. That is not just for this year but since the process started.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: All I can say, Mr. Chairman, wherever the 49 were in Cayman Brac must have been some very, very hungry cats based on the justification why we are killing them.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central.

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

I have two questions. I'll get to another animal shortly, but I'm confused; you're saying that our judicial system is telling us that you're allowed to carry out culling in Cayman Brac, but you're not allowed to in Grand Cayman?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: That's correct.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: On what basis?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Let me confirm with the team.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: That can't be right.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. There was an undertaking made that the culling of the cats in Grand Cayman would not take place until the completion of the animal pound.

We are in the process of having the Animal Pound Order approved by Cabinet. Once that's done, hopefully we can establish the cat pound; however, the reason why they've been allowed to continue in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman is from a protection or conservation perspective whereby, as I mentioned earlier, it's in relation to the protection of the endangered species' birds.

The Chairman: Lady Member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thought it was my last one but — is there another colony of Boobies except on The Bluff, Cayman Brac, which is the highest at Spot Bay? I can see Little Cayman.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Apparently they also nest on the beach below The Bluff.

The Chairman: Member for Cayman Brac East.

[Inaudible response]

The Chairman: Honourable member for George Town Central, do we have much more on this?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: No.

The Chairman: I think we have exhausted the cats.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: *They guh nine lives, y' know!*

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yeah.

I'm going to ask the Minister whether she's willing to provide the directives on their authority to cull to members so we can see it in writing, because I'm challenged as to how it can be a legal directive — I'm not a lawyer, so I'm going to assume you're right; but can we have it sent to us so I can see based on the advice you were given? Not today, but at another time.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Through you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I certainly can. It was done publicly with the recent meeting of the NCC, but *I will commit to providing it in writing.*

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Just to be clear, you're saying that the Courts said that you could not do the culling in Grand Cayman, but the grounds upon which you were allowed to continue to cull in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman were the protection of endangered species.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. It's getting a bit convoluted in my mind. Can I ask the member if he can please repeat what exactly he wants me to commit to providing in writing?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I think we covered that part. You said you would provide in writing —

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Can you please repeat what, exactly? I want to ensure I provide the right information to you.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. The authority by which the Courts have directed your department to continue to operate in two islands, but not in the other one; particularly being allowed to continue to cull in Little Cayman and Cayman Brac while in Grand Cayman, you're not. The directive or ruling or hearing. I just want to see it for myself if that's okay.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can commit to that and I am happy that the Member repeated what he was requesting because at first that's not what I understood you were asking for. Thank you.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: For clarity, that's what you were saying, right? That is the case from your advice.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, that's what I've been advised so I'll get that provided to this Committee.

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

Okay, moving on, Mr. Chairman. Can the Minister say whether we are going to remove the half a million dollar fine for feeding chickens? I admit that I was a part of the government that implemented that fine, whereby if you were caught feeding chickens after a third infraction — up to a half a million dollars for feeding chickens.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. The member took me back down memory lane because I forgot about the whole chicken fiesta myself.

[Laughter]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: What the Director has reminded me is that what you're referring to as it relates to the half-a-million dollars fine is just the maximum penalty set out in the National Conservation Act, but it isn't anything specific to the chickens.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: What is it specific to then?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: It's just the penalty for any infraction for individuals who fail to comply with the Act, you can be fined up to a million dollars — sorry, half a million; but we can increase it to a million if you want them to. We can change that.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, and that's any infractions of the National Conservation Act. Correct?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: That's correct.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay; so technically, a person could be charged half a million dollars for feeding chickens.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: The matter would be taken to Court and it would be left for a judge to determine if it would be a reasonable charge to charge someone a million dollars for feeding chickens.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. May I suggest that such infraction [penalty] doesn't cover feeding chickens? I think it is kind of nonsensical.

In all honesty, Minister, you remember the fiasco; you just said I took you down memory lane. We were laughed at in the media for it. Obviously, that was not the intention — I don't think it was what we wanted, but it sounds illogical. Maybe consider amendments to that or separate categories for different infractions. I mean, you have worse criminal offences in the country that don't amount to half a million dollars, right? I just ask you to look into it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Thank you.

HES 1... Member for George Town West

Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden, Deputy Speaker, Elected Member for George Town West: Mr. Chair, thank you. Through you, I'm glad we're over the cat discussion.

Mr. Chair, with the ongoing community complaints about delayed garbage [collection], can the Minister identify whether this budget increases DEH staffing or from an operational standpoint to take care of the delayed garbage [collection]?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I can almost answer that question confidently, but I'm going to call on the amazing director for DEH. If he can just come to the side so I can speak to him for a minute.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. I just wanted to double-check with Director Simms and he confirmed that we really haven't been having many delays recently. Sometimes we'll get a complaint that a garbage truck has not come by the home only to find out that those individuals may have forgotten to put their garbage out earlier and they missed the garbage truck.

[Even] when that does happen, they still circle back at a later time to pick up the garbage; however, there are occasions where, as typical with equipment that is being used frequently, you might have a truck that's down here and there but we're confident that with the budget we have we can continue to operate in a timely manner.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Minister, can you tell me if the public is supposed to have their garbage bins on the main road?

What does the law say about that, because you have many people who put their garbage frames outside of their fence onto the road and as you're driving down the road, you see these bins on the road.

I don't know what the law says about that, because most other places will [require] a little indentation at the front of your yard. What are the rules on that?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. I'm glad you asked that question. I touched on it a little earlier, just to say that in the absence of having standalone legislation for DEH, right now we're relying on the Public Health Act, which is what touches on where DEH has its governing legislation. Once we have this standalone legislation, maybe we can start looking at further requirements.

I can say that as Minister, having spent time speaking with the Director, it is a concern of mine because I certainly don't want to see Cayman, Cayman Brac or Little Cayman infested with rodents, and that happens when the garbage isn't put out properly. We all know that we have dogs and chickens and cats that will sometimes strew the garbage. It doesn't look good; it isn't appealing. Then, from a safety standpoint as it relates to the DEH staff, we have many injuries whereby our waste operators go to pick up the garbage; sometimes it is very heavy, so they injure their backs. Sometimes they have to go into properties to take the garbage out, and it's wet, and they slip and fall.

Certainly, a national position needs to be taken at a later date on how we store garbage before it's collected. It is a practice that we see throughout many countries. Cayman is a very rich country. I think we're all proud of the robust infrastructure that we have, so it really shouldn't be anything to be ashamed of as a Minister to say that, yes, I want to see us disposing of our garbage in a certain fashion.

It's something we're going to look at, but before we get to a place of a requirement, we will start to talk to the public. We'll encourage members of the public to go and purchase certain equipment, as it relates to the storage containers. It is something that we've also looked at with the department in terms of trying to roll it out to the public; but right now, our focus is on addressing how we deal with the disposed waste first. From there we can look at the storage and containers and so forth. It is something on the radar, Mr. Bryan.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Minister. Through you Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central, continuing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: There's no law right now that specifies where you can put your garage? I know you can't put it on the road.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I stand corrected. Our amazing Director — who is celebrating his 35th anniversary today as a civil servant —

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes! Congratulations, Mr. Simms, that's a very long time to be embedded in the civil service, so we appreciate you.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: What Director Simms advises is that there are standalone regulations that speak to how a resident should bring their garbage out — that you should bring it out and remove the storage container and store it back in your property, but it doesn't say how you should store it for it to be collected by the operators.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: The homeowner's responsibility is that you should put your garbage out, not expect the garbage collectors to go and take it from your property. You're also responsible for putting the container back once it has been collected by the garbage operators and for keeping your driveway clear.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to ask the Honourable Minister if she would allow for the Director to give answers rather than going back and forth, because I now have many more questions on this and it would probably be helpful.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, certainly; I don't have a problem and I'm sure he doesn't either.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I know, he's a pretty awesome dude.

Mr. Simms, good evening. I heard the Honourable Minister give a description of what the rules say, where it should be. Maybe you can give a better narrative. You know the formalities, introduce yourself and your position before you speak.

Mr. Richard Simms, Director of the Department of Environment Health: Richard Simms, Director of the Department of Environment Health.

Through you, Mr. Chair, the Garbage Disposal Regulation does provide for how persons should put out their waste. It says that you are to put out your waste the night before the scheduled collection and once the collection is done, you are responsible for taking up your bin and putting it back. I try to encourage my team to replace the bins as a professional courtesy, but the regulation puts the onus squarely on the property owner.

In terms of your question in relation to clear passage, there should be no enclosure fixed on the roadway. They should be fixed to the properties.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Oh, thank you. I think that was the heart of the question I was trying to get to. I've seen circumstances where a person will have their gate out front, but they have their fixed garbage containers — not the garbage bin, but like a square box they put the garbage bins in, literally outside of their property and it stays there all the time. I'm asking whether that's legal because it's outside of their property line, which is now the Roads Authority's property. Is that legal?

Mr. Richard Simms, Director of the Department of Environment Health: Through you Mr. Chair, that's absolutely not legal, because they're actually putting stuff in the roadway. Matter of fact, my team of environmental health officers has been instructed to look specifically at enclosures like those so we can serve the necessary abatement notices on the property owner to make those corrections.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you for that.

The Chairman: Just for clarity to the listening public, Mr. Bryan, if you would allow, because some of the public may think and say I've never seen a garbage closure on the road. This is just beyond the road shoulder that is still in the legal thoroughfare of what is considered the roadway.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That does clear it up. I'd only encourage the listening audience to be mindful of that because we are starting to see a habit of people putting fixed containers outside on the roadside, not into their own property.

Thank you so much, Mr. Simms. That answers my questions. I have a question for the Minister again though.

The Chairman: Before that — Mr. Director, can you also speak to whether garbage can simply be placed in a bin or if it should be bagged?

Mr. Richard Simms, Director of the Department of Environment Health: Through you, Mr. Chairman. According to the regulations, it only requires you to place a bag out, not necessarily a bin. That's what the regulations require — just a bag, at a minimum.

The Chairman: Right.

Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Simms, I want to publicly thank you for always being very professional and responsive.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I had an issue earlier; you take calls and get things done and on behalf of the people I represent, I want to say thanks to the team, also, for the very good job they're doing. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Richard Simms, Director of the Department of Environment Health: Through you Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Saunders for your kind compliments. I owe it all to my team of professionals in the Department of Environment Health, so I'll certainly pass on your kind compliments to them. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes. True, Leader. I want to echo that, Mr. Chairman. Hopefully we can get that cost of living adjustment for those hardworking staff you have down there who keep us clean.

The Chairman: No honorarium?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: The honorarium too. We want to ensure that they get that as well.

Mr. Chairman, I filed a question a couple of months ago — silly me, I filed it a little differently technically. I said, can the Minister say if the government's policy is to make any amendments to the National Conservation Council? What I meant was: is there any government policy on changing the National Conservation Act? Can the Minister answer that?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you, I'll answer the member very similarly to how I answered you before, which is that we haven't got to the stage of any discussions in Caucus about amending the National Conservation Act. Again, going back to this imaginary division that you think we have, we haven't even started to talk about it yet, so sorry to disappoint you.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I'm not going to catch the ball you threw at me; I love you too much. I'm going to stop there. I won't say anything.

The Chairman: Members, we seem to have exhausted HES 1, HES 2, HES 7, HES 8, HES 9 and HES 10. I know the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has questions on the mosquitoes.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Actually, there is one about the second one. Is the government committed to the Paris Agreement?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Forgive me, yes, the Paris Climate Agreement. That's what I just said, Paris Agreement; she didn't understand what I meant. The climate change agreement that was signed in Paris.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, just the line of the member's question confirms that a lot of understanding still needs to take place with the public as it relates to — did you say the Paris Agreement?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes, ma'am.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: What the Cabinet did was approve the extension for the agreement to be extended to the Cayman Islands. We would be the second OT [Overseas Territory] that would have it extended to us. What hasn't really been mentioned is the number of Caribbean Islands that have signed the Paris Agreement. We have Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent... I mean, when I attended the last regional conference I was truly surprised to realise we were probably the only country in the Caribbean region that hadn't signed the Paris Agreement.

What I want to point out is that in 2007 Cayman signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol which committed us to decreasing emissions, so we aren't committing to anything we haven't already; if you have a particular concern maybe you could elaborate a bit more on what you feel we haven't committed to yet.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Well I can promise you I'm not imagining this one.

You just said we're not signing anything we haven't already; if you had already signed it, you wouldn't have signed this one. That being said, I'm

coming from a genuine place. We all want to protect the environment, we all want to protect Cayman Islands and I just want us to be in a pro-environment position.

The simple fact is there are people in this country who have concerns about some of the things that we sign up to that put many regulatory hurdles in the way for — I would hate to use the word "growth" because it has such a negative connotation these days; but there are limitations in it. I'm certain once they heard about it, your members probably got messages too, about what the implications of signing it mean for Cayman's future. Not only the positive, obviously, we all know about the positives because it's intended to have a positive and sustainable environmental effect, but sometimes there are limitations or hurdles perceived to be derived from these agreements.

I guess the question is, have you done any assessments or any feedback from the public on it?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. Again, going back to what I said earlier, we aren't doing or committing to doing anything that we haven't previously committed to in our climate change policy.

As it relates to the annual greenhouse gas reporting, and I made sure to get some facts so that I could clarify this, it says here that the reporting of our annual greenhouse gases to the UK Government is an existing commitment under the previous arrangement I just mentioned. DOE already collates all necessary information for the annual inventory and submits it to the UK. This inventory helps us understand our emissions across the economy and craft (which we've done) our National Energy Policy and climate change policy.

The Paris Agreement commits the Cayman Islands to increasing our ability to adapt to undeniable adverse impacts of climate change and foster a climate resilient and low-emission development pathway that does not threaten food production. We have a steady and impressive track record of disaster risk management, but now this action is further bolstered by a long-term road map to resiliency under the climate change policy which, again, we've already signed up to.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much. I'm just giving you an opportunity to try to share the position. I've said it; it's in the public record. There are some people who have concerns about the limitations. If the government doesn't want to hear those, it's fine.

I want to move on to the last one in this area.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central, continuing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The bull-rush at the end of the airport runway. Have we had a resolution in respect to the safety components for the airport and planes arriving and landing with the birds?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I'll have to refer to the director on that; I'm not quite familiar. Give me one minute, please.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. I've been advised by the director that DOE has been working closely with CIAA [Cayman Islands Airport Authority] to develop a wildlife management committee, and they have been having discussions with an expert who deals with wildlife management around airports and situations as such.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much.

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central, continuing.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I said, I put it on the record and I continued to ask. If anything goes wrong, I did my part.

There is a mental health thing that I want to ask. I'm so happy, Minister, that you are heavily focusing on mental health. My only thing is... it's like the mental health support continues to flush in and rightfully so. This is a global thing, so it's not Cayman only, right? What is causing this abundance of mental health issues across the globe? Have we identified things? I think we're putting things in place for people who are having issues to talk about it, to support them, housing, all the different things, but are we addressing the root causes of it?

I'm not a doctor, so I don't know, but Dr. Lockhart is here; other doctors are here who know about this stuff. I think we need to start addressing the root causes of things. For example, my kids don't play video games because in my mind, too many video games; *run 'em in the bush, go pick some guineps*, because I never had any mental health issues — at least I don't think so.

I'm wondering whether there are things outside of the support — if [someone has] mental health problems which are related to other issues, have we identified them and are we doing something to stop them from having mental health issues, is what I'm saying?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Like social media.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Like social media even, yeah. Does that make sense?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you.

I'd like to liaise with the clinical director for our mental health facilities and the CMO, and then I'd like to answer the member's question, but since I've already asked Mr. Tatum if we could discuss his questions about mental health facilities once we get to it, I'm just going to ask you, Mr. Chair, if we could move to the mental health line item.

The Chairman: Minister, if you feel more comfortable, since this is a very technical area, you might want one of your technical staff to answer the question.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask Dr. Lockhart if he can respond to these questions.

The Chairman: Welcome to the Committee, Dr. Lockhart, just state your name and position for the record and then answer any questions members may have.

Dr. Marc Lockhart, Clinical Director, Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Marc Lockhart, Psychiatrist. I'm currently the Clinical Director at Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre in East End and the Chair of the Poinciana Mental Health Advisory Council.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you so much, Dr. Lockhart.

I think you may have overheard my question and its intent. The government is doing a great job focusing on mental health and having the support systems there whenever it's identified. I guess the questions are:

1. what are the [support systems]; and
2. does the government intend to find out the root causes behind mental health [issues] today?

Dr. Marc Lockhart, Clinical Director, Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre: Through you, Mr. Chair.

Excellent question, sir. That brings up some valuable information we've been seeing quite a bit in the media.

First, I'll start with the recognition and identification of mental health concerns and compare it with where things were 20, 30, 40 years ago. A big example is today's recognition of the significance of the early onset of mental health challenges. If we go back to when many of us were children, you would hear about rude children, bad children, children who couldn't learn or weren't smart enough, and so on. Many of

those issues stemmed from unrecognised, unappreciated, misunderstood mental health challenges, so in a sense the world has come a long way in terms of understanding mental health conditions.

The seminal reference guide that we use to diagnose mental health conditions is generally accepted as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Conditions (DSM) — we're now at the DSM-5. We have over 300 different diagnoses in that manual today and many of these have come [about] through [significant] research and development over past decades in terms of recognising the subtleties and the origin of mental health conditions.

Most experts in the mental health field recognise that mental health or psychiatric conditions are really more childhood conditions, in a sense. We're dealing with their manifestation in adults, but we know that up to 50 per cent of mental health conditions have their initial origin before the age of 12. Up to 75 per cent of mental health conditions have an origin or a manifestation before the age of 24.

I greatly respect this honourable House and the Ministry and what is being done in terms of recognising — and I've been hearing [so] from all of you, honourable members — that as a country we need to focus on early identification. Our children are mostly in schools; that's where they are, that's where we can locate them unlike adults, whereby some are unemployed, some are at home or working in different places. We know that during school terms the majority of our children are found in these institutions, and many of us in the mental health field feel that's where we should direct some of our resources: health resources, identification and other focuses in terms of eradicating or identifying these conditions to ameliorate or reduce the manifestation later on.

For example, many of you have identified today that what we're doing here is being broadcast on YouTube and it'll probably be on YouTube for, I don't know how long, years or whatever, highlighting the significance of technology. Technology is a double-edged sword when it comes to mental health. Though none of us is advocating that it should be eliminated, it is very dangerous. We're even hearing so day-to-day with what we're seeing with AI, the benefits but also the serious dangers it poses for mental health conditions and for dissemination of information and ideas; both positive and negative. That's another thing that we've been seeing.

Let's even roll back a bit from the mental health standpoint. Before we even had the cell phones and the internet, many of us grew up with our parents saying, *be careful of TV; you're watching too much TV, you're taking in too much information from that static medium*. That can have negative consequences also on the development of coping mechanisms and other residual effects that can affect mental health.

There are also theories regarding environmental toxins and other contributors that may be af-

fecting our children's mental health and our mental health in general, in terms of the types of food we eat, the processing behind it, the hormones that are put in certain types of meats that we get overseas, and so on.

I could go on and on, but I don't want to...

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Well, doc, I'm thankful for you to give us a synopsis. I guess what we should recognise is, we have to go into the identification process further, but after identifying it the next step is, what are we doing? That goes into the other ministries which the Minister can speak to; but Minister, before you say that, I just want to know that we are on the way with the steps necessary to eradicate — which is first acknowledge, identify and then try to mitigate throughout those early years. I'm hoping that's what you're going to say next.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, thank you.

Through you, I'd like to thank Dr. Lockhart for giving that detailed breakdown. I'd [also] like to ask, through you, whether our Director, Ms. Judith Seymour, who heads up the Counselling Service, could speak a bit about what you are asking as it relates to what we are doing, because oftentimes I think people don't realise how much is already being done.

The Chairman: Ms. Seymour.

Ms. Judith Seymour, Director of the Department of Counselling Services: Judith Seymour, Director of the Department of Counselling Services. Thank you for the question.

I want to echo some of what Dr. Lockhart spoke about in terms of the impact of children's experiences on their adulthood. There's been some seminal research done on Adverse Childhood Experiences called the ACEs. What that research has demonstrated is that, for persons who develop mental health problems, you can track back to see how many adverse childhood experiences they score, and it gives you an indication of their mental health. That is looking at some of the causal factors.

I think you should also be aware, from the National Drug Council's perspective, that in the beginning their student drug use survey really used to look at what the prevalence rates were. They are doing a much more detailed analysis now to look at why young people are using drugs. What are the antecedents to that? What are their life circumstances that lead them to make those choices? That kind of information is allowing us to be able to develop programmes.

You mentioned, for example, social media and the impacts of the digital world. At the Family Re-

source Centre, we offer workshops for parents to be able to navigate those challenges with their children, in addition to obviously then also offering therapy for families at the Counselling Centre.

We have tried to create workshops and programmes. We also have specialist parenting programmes for parents themselves whose mental health may not be as stable as it needs to be, so we can teach them how to effectively parent their children and break those cycles with the limitations they have. We are taking a very preventive approach by analysing the antecedents to some of the behaviours that we're treating.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Ms. Seymour, thank you so much.

I think it's so sad that we haven't done this. I don't think I heard it, but Happy International Men's Day everybody. It had to take a woman to remind us of that.

It is all too familiar for me with respect to the struggles or the experiences from a childhood perspective. I think much of what you do should trickle into everything else that we're doing, because I would hate to assume, with the increase of mental health issues we've seen amongst our children — is it a reflection of our failures with our children? I don't know if that's a fair question or not.

Ms. Judith Seymour, Director of the Department of Counselling Services: It is a bit loaded.

I think you acknowledged at the start of your question that the increase we're seeing is a worldwide phenomenon. We recognise, for example, that COVID and the pandemic had a significant impact on people's mental health. We had children who were isolated, children who were not at school — adults who were isolated; and I think we're now seeing the impact of that worldwide.

We've also had many disasters across the world; those things impact mental health as well. I don't think that we can say that it is a failure on our part. Like I said, I think the system is actually paying much more attention not just to the behaviour but to why the behaviour is happening so that we can start to treat it.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Fair enough, and I'm going to stop here because we could talk about this all night. It's a very complex problem.

Would it be fair to say, though, that the majority of mental health issues are due to the quality of life of the individual? Is that fair?

Ms. Judith Seymour, Director of the Department of Counselling Services: The quality of their life at some stage, yes, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: All right. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and thank you Minister for allowing that.

I hope that kind of knowledge trickles down to improve what we're doing as Government, as Opposition — as Members, because I'm starting to see so many people stressed out till they get to the point of mental health issues. A person you may have never thought would have a breakdown; or maybe not have any history of negative childhood experiences, but like you said, it's a global thing. The pressures of working too many hours, the cost of living, the pressures of expectations, social media — all of it together.

We need to talk about our people's quality of life from a holistic perspective, because otherwise this mental health phenomenon is only going to get worse, and worse, and worse. I'll stop there.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you, I could not resist asking Dr. Lockhart this question since he's here. It's something that's been on my mind, namely, the impact of loneliness in many societies.

It is often said that the four worst things that can happen to anyone are being sick, old, poor and alone; and we saw back in 2017 or 2018 thereabouts, that the UK even created a Ministry of Loneliness. We have now seen it through social media itself, whereby everyone has this fear of missing out — everyone is just scrolling and looking. I came across something a while back, and what it said is that when most people are scrolling, they're really trying to end their loneliness.

I'm curious, so I'm asking in the context of whether this is something that we as legislators need to start focusing on now? I recognise there may be other symptoms and causes, but loneliness is one in terms of trying to have more community activities or more events to bring people together, where people can be in a social environment and so forth. Is this something that we need to start focusing on more?

I would like to have your thoughts on something like that, Dr. Lockhart. I'd really appreciate it.

The Chairman: Dr. Lockhart.

Dr. Marc Lockhart, Clinical Director, Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre: Through you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that question, sir.

I know that our CMO could probably elaborate a bit more on this, but I know that in the last few years, the former Surgeon General of the United States actually spoke about loneliness being a public health issue. We are social creatures as human beings. If you look at a world map of population density and different centres, you'll see that most humans on

the planet congregate in certain areas. You have large spaces in the world where there are no humans in a sense.

While as a personality [trait], many of us may be on a spectrum of being more introverted or quiet or don't necessarily interact much, we still need human contact; it's extremely important. It's a fundamental part of our functioning and not just for humans but for many animals. I remember hearing a researcher say years ago that if you separate puppies — not to go back on the topic of animals...

[Laughter]

Dr. Marc Lockhart, Clinical Director, Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre: If you separate puppies from their mom and feed them but do not interact with them in any way, their survival time is diminished and there's a higher incidence of them dying because of the lack of socialisation and contact.

I want to piggyback on what my dear colleague, Ms. Seymour said, about the adverse childhood events. I think it's very important for all of you honourable members to hear this, because it plays a major part in all you're doing. Many times when we talk about adverse childhood events, there's a belief that we are talking about the most severe component, which would be physical or sexual abuse perpetrated against the child. Research has shown that:

- having a parent who has a substance abuse problem is an adverse childhood event;
- coming from a home with a single parent is a form of adverse childhood event;
- having an incarcerated parent is an adverse childhood event;
- being in an environment where you may have both parents but there's significant arguing, tension, discontent is an adverse childhood event.

Are we saying that down the line every single childhood event necessarily leads to a serious mental health issue? Not necessarily, because there are other factors — personality, resilience...

On the other side of this coin in a sense, we have positive childhood events, or PACEs, so you have Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs), and Positive Childhood Events. Where I'm going with this is two-fold.

1. We can focus our energy a bit more on identifying situations that exist, which are adverse childhood events, to direct resources and identification. A quick example: we would know in any elementary school in our Islands which children may have a parent who is incarcerated, which children are not getting a hot meal before school, which children, in a sense, are living in day-care, and so on, and start to

identify those kids from an early age in terms of resources they may need and provide them with support.

2. On the other side, we know that positive childhood experiences can help to counteract some of those ACEs and negative childhood events, [like] having an adult who is able to supervise, monitor, or interact.

There is an interesting study by a colleague of mine at Stanford University that looked into the impact of just a positive statement. Many of us can think back and give an example of a time when we were younger when an adult who we looked up to said, *You can do it. You have the potential. I believe in you. I know you can do much better than what you're doing and I want you to do well.* Many of us can remember it. I'm sure everyone in this room can almost point out an adult, a football coach, an uncle, a grandparent, somebody who believed in you and motivated you. That's where [groups] like Big Brothers Big Sisters, and other types of NGOs, associations, and contacts are extremely important.

Recently I heard talk about the quality of day-care — I think there just was a conference in terms of what our children are being exposed to. A large segment of our population today is picking up their children from day-cares. What is being said to those children? What are they hearing? How are the adults interacting with them? Those are all positive interventions that can help to counteract some of these adverse childhood events. That gives all of you, honourable members, the remit and the information to be able to support and supplement those types of programmes and those types of interventions.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank Dr. Lockhart for that answer. I realise that I need to come see you, not as a patient, don't get me wrong, but because I have so many questions in this regard.

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I want to thank you and say something publicly because a couple of years back someone very close to me, like very close, literally went zombie-mode — completely snapped. It was a shock to my family.

I can tell you Dr. Lockhart and many [others] were instrumental in bringing her back to reality and I just want to publicly thank you. It was something I never thought I would have seen. I'm talking very, very close to me and I know you would recall. I just want to say thank you very much for what you did.

Dr. Marc Lockhart, Clinical Director, Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre: Through you, Mr. Chair.

You're very welcome, sir, and I appreciate those warm words.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, Member for Red Bay.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have something on climate change before I get to mental health, but I'll first say very quickly, sir, that it was very good to hear us move from animal welfare to people's welfare. I really enjoyed that conversation.

A question on our climate change policy. If you humour me, sir, I'll just read from a March 2022 *Compass* article entitled, "Cayman 2050? How surging seas could redraw the map" which says: "**Sea-water laps at the southern shore of West Bay island. Waves wash over the sunken remnants of Seven Mile Beach. To the east, a vast wetland stretches from Savannah to Gun Bay. The isolated Colliers Isle sits at the centre of a brackish lagoon. It is high-tide 2050 and Grand Cayman has splintered into a chain of multiple tiny islands, separated by shallow waterways carved by surging seas.**" The article then says, "**This visualisation is based on mapping data from US-based Climate Central – a group of scientists and journalists...**" set up to do work like this.

I have no issue with signing up to the Paris Agreement; all of that is good stuff, but my question is, sir, has any work started on what we may need to do with regard to sea defences? I don't know if this will happen in 2050. Do I personally think it's a possibility it will happen at some point? Yes, I do, so have we started looking at some of the things that will really matter to us? Not that other things don't, but things like sea defences.

Does anyone think we will be able to prevent any of this or how much will we be able to prevent? If we are to prevent it, the thinking and the work need to start now, so if I could have some thoughts on that, I would be grateful.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, can I just have a minute, please?

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you, if it is okay, I think I would like to have the Director give a little information in relation to what's being done.

The Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Director of the Department of Environment: Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Director for the Department of Environment.

In terms of what's being done for climate change, I think the climate change policy that was recently adopted by government outlines a number of areas of focus for work in terms of climate change adaptation.

No concrete decisions have been made in terms of whether we need to implement sea defences. The policy starts from the perspective of protecting those natural defences that we already have and that's the approach that most countries are taking: mangroves, coastal mangroves, looking at setbacks for construction that respect what's happening now as well as future climate.

I know the Ministry is also developing a climate resiliency scorecard through a project that's being funded by the EU. Part of that will be to help us to understand how projects and policies, et cetera, stack up against future climate risk and whether we ought to be taking and building in adaptation measures to our national planning and our national policies.

In terms of actual work, as a first step we are trying to implement those procedures and approaches that are laid out in the National Climate Change policy. Looking forward, the government will be working across the department, the Ministry, et cetera, to look at what future measures we might need to implement.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you, sir. I'll move on to mental health.

The Chairman: We have a range of outputs and mental health can be taken at HEA 12 - Mental Health Services, so let us get some outputs.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: That's fine. I will close on that topic then sir, if I could.

I appreciate what was said, all that you mentioned needs to be done here, but I believe we all know that nothing we do here is going to stop sea-level rise — all that we're doing needs doing, but it won't stop it. We do need to start looking at adaptation and mitigation. If we don't start now, we won't get to a point where we have some idea of what we should be doing. I'll leave it at that.

Thank you very much.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Tatum for that very, very important intervention.

Members, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approved the following items on the Schedule described as HES 1 - Policy Advice and Ministerial Services to the Minister for Health Environment and Sustainability in the amounts of \$9,880,268 in 2026 and \$11,321,824 in 2027.

HES 2—

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I have a question on HES 2, sorry.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: HES 1 passed.

HES 2 – Health Regulatory Services

The Chairman: HES 2. Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and apologies for slowing you down, but it is something that has shown on my radar quite recently. It regards companies on the island purchasing health insurance coverage for their employees by using overseas companies. I would like to know from what standpoint some of those overseas companies that are basically selling insurance to these companies in the Cayman Islands are licensed to do so.

The reason I ask is that the one that has showed up on my radar basically required employees to pay 100 per cent and then seek reimbursement. In some cases, the employee can't find the money. Recently, it happened to one company I know where something really bad happened to the employee. I won't say it publicly, but I will speak to the Minister about it offline and [disclose] the name of the company and exactly what happened. I would just like to understand the process that allows these companies to sell this and for companies to put this kind of financial stress on their employees.

For full disclosure, I reached out to Mervyn Conolly, who is in charge of the Health Insurance Commission on this issue, but because of what has happened since I reached out to him, I am now raising it in this forum. It's bad.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can I have a few moments to liaise with the team?

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. I'm hoping that my short, concise answer will assist. If not, I'll come back with supplemental answers.

We only have jurisdiction over the SHIC policy; as it relates to any other services (overseas providers), there really isn't a regulatory guide in that regard. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Technically, no, but I'm going to tell you to move on from this, because I've put it in the public domain.

I think from a labour perspective, I'll speak to the Minister for Employment and also you offline, but I can tell you, having employees trying to find thousands of dollars to pay upfront and then wait sometimes 4 to 6 weeks to be reimbursed, completely goes against what we intended when we want people to have health insurance. Some employees are afraid to speak up [for fear of] victimisation; that's why I didn't mention the incident here.

I looked back at the census and I realised that we had close to 1,000 people who literally listed overseas providers as their primary healthcare provider. It slipped my radar at the time, but once this incident popped up, it really became a serious issue for me — and Premier, you said there are [other] situations you are aware of also.

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, if I could comment.

The Chairman: Honourable Premier.

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: It's funny because the member for Bodden Town West and I hadn't discussed this in our entire meeting, but just at the beginning of this week, I had almost the exact same situation. Someone stopped me to say that the policy at their workplace had changed, moved to an overseas company, and now the employee has to pay first and be reimbursed [subsequently].

The stress it puts on an employee in an already high cost-of-living environment... I told them I would undertake to talk to more than one Ministry to be able to resolve this, because it does not sound right at all so you have our undertaking that we will look into this.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I think that is the right approach. At least the people affected can take comfort knowing that:

1. it is on the radar; and
2. we will be dealing with it.

The Chairman: Members, I announced during my contribution to the budget debate that I am setting up a bi-party committee that is going to review National Health Insurance and it's for this. This is yet another example of why the Government is taking this approach.

We will not come to the end of this term kicking this can down the road. It was being kicked before I entered this House in 2000. It's still being kicked. We have to do what we have to do. We have a unique environment; we have a unique economy. The Government simply has to do what it has to do and get the work done.

BLOCK VOTE:**HES 2 - Health Regulatory Services****HES 7 - Collection, Recycling and Disposal of Waste****HES 8 - Public Health Services****HES 9 - Environmental Health Monitoring Services****HES 10 - Emergency Response Services****The Chairman:** [I put the question for—]

- HES 2 - Health Regulatory Services in the amounts of \$3,287,301 in 2026 and \$3,428,550 in 2027;
- HES 7 - Collection, Recycling and Disposal of Waste, \$10,904,842 in 2026 and \$11,802,008 in 2027;
- HES 8 - Public Health Services, \$3,346,702 in 2026 and \$3,389,321 in 2027;
- HES 9 - Environmental Health Monitoring Services, \$1,560,684 in 2026 and \$1,564,569 in 2027;
- HES 10 - Emergency Response Services, \$165,790 in 2026 and \$166,172 in 2027.

All those in favour of those items being part of the Schedule to the Bill, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.**The Chairman:** The Ayes have it.**Agreed: HES 2, HES 7, HES 8, HES 9 and HES 10 passed.****HES 11 - Mosquito Control Services****The Chairman:** The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you had a question on HES 11.**Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition:** Yes, Mr. Chairman, thank you. Through you to the Honourable Minister. First, let me acknowledge your comment that the government will be purchasing another aircraft; that's fantastic news.**Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks:** Yes, sir. That's correct.**Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition:** I had a chance to see a social media video of the Minister with a drone over larvicide sites. I think it was actually in the dike road behind my house— which is good news, keep testing it there. That is all good news. Then I saw your description here; you had a reduction in the budget for MRCU [with] the explanation that for previous budgets it has fallen below the \$10 million.

I just want to ensure and hear it from you, Minister, that you are very comfortable with this. There are reasons you can be below budget, and I ask these questions because this was a very difficult year for mosquitoes. You know, there's a section of my constituency along the peninsula as we call it, [that] I rarely hear from but this year I heard from them loud and clear because of mosquitoes. I just want to ensure that the reasons we're below budget are not because we ran out of materials or products, et cetera. I just want that reassurance Minister.

I also note that I think the mosquito season started a bit earlier than usual this year.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Just give me one moment please.*[Pause]***Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks:** Mr. Chair, through you. I guess predicting the mosquitoes is like predicting the weather; we will hope and pray that we don't have 'a bad year', as they refer to it at MRCU.

A reason there was a higher number before was because of the purchase of the larvicide and because we only had one aircraft. As it relates to the larvicide, Mr. Chair, it might be best if I get Dr. Wheeler to explain this in detail or in the interest of time, I'll be guided by you. Simply put, we feel comfortable that the \$10 million should cover the year and we'll see.

*[Laughter]***Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks:** If the member seeks further elucidation, I'll ask Dr. Wheeler to elaborate.**Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Minister. I don't want to drag him on. Unlike the no-see-ums, the mosquitoes we can see and feel.

Through you, Mr. Chairman to the Minister, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Dr. Wheeler for his accessibility and always getting back to me. It makes dealing with my constituents much easier when I can give them a detailed response. He's always upfront and forthright, and we never hear a complaint. If he says the plane is down, I tell my constituents that the plane is down and they're satisfied, so I just want to go on record in thanking him for always responding and being upfront with us. Thank you.

The Chairman: Mr. McTaggart, member for George Town East.**Mr. Roy M. McTaggart:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Minister. We keep talking about

one plane, but as far as I know, we have two. Am I correct?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you, yes, you're correct. The second aircraft is down because the engine had issues that needed to be repaired, so we're down one aircraft and now we're seeking to purchase a new one. I think it's safe to say, and I spoke about it a little bit in my statement, that they're ageing out.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Okay, I fully support the move to get a new plane. Those planes we have there are quite old and worn out and the aircraft reliability is simply no longer there. We don't need one, we need two, so I would encourage you to see whether you can find the money, because otherwise we end up with the same situation we have now, where the one plane breaks down.

Those two old things are just not working or not airworthy. I believe it would just make eminent sense to allow MRCU to acquire two planes. It would give them the reliability and redundancy they desperately need.

The Chairman: Thank you very much members.

I would propose to take the vote on the rest of the items down to medical care for indigent and see if there are any questions.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Can I ask one more question?

The Chairman: Certainly, Mr. McTaggart.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Through you to the Minister. We have one pilot, am I correct?

[Inaudible response]

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Two pilots. We still have the Caymanian pilot though?

[Inaudible response]

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart: Okay, that's all I needed to know. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, honourable members.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, any particular reason why we don't have two Caymanian pilots?

The amount of money spent in the last administration on Caymanian pilot scholarships, I'm certain we can... Matter of fact, here's a question. Any succession planning for the other pilot?

The Chairman: Very good, honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. We have one full-time pilot who is Caymanian and a contract pilot. What we're hoping to do is to recruit a new pilot as we look at acquiring a new aircraft.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: When does that contract end?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: You're referring to the part-time contract?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Correct.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, it expires in December of this year, but there is an intention to renew it at this stage.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chairman. Minister Michael Myles is a strong advocate for transitioning and I know he is working on this collaboration with kids [sent] away to school. We gave out a number of scholarships over the last five years in a pilot scholarship programme that I started. I'm certain that you can find a young Caymanian who's coming home. I would encourage you and Minister Myles. I know it's kind of short notice for the end of this year because December is around the corner, but by the end of 2026 we should be able to put a Caymanian pilot in that seat.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I thank the member for his observation. We are working collectively as a team to look at succession planning utilising the workforce database that Minister Myles is working with his team to provide to each of us.

BLOCK VOTE:

HES 18 - Counselling and Support Services

HES 19 - Public Education and Social Issues

HES 21 - Environmental Services and Research

HES 22 - Residential Mental Health Services

The Chairman: Members, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the following items on the Schedule described as—

- HES 11 - Mosquito Control Services in the amount of \$10,155,000 in 2026 and \$10,354,000 in 2027;
- HES 18 - Counselling and Support Services in the amounts of \$6,225,770 in 2026 and \$6,245,957 in 2027;

- HES 19 - Public Education and Social Issues, \$230,678 in 2026 and \$226,437 in 2027;
- HES 21 - Environmental Services and Research, \$8,099,726 in 2026 and \$8,513,223 in 2027; and
- HES 22 - Residential Mental Health Services in the amounts of \$11,478,152 in 2026 and \$12,740,613 in 2027.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Mr. Chairman, that's the one I have a question on.

The Chairman: There are four other items with mental health services, including HEA 2 [sic] - Mental Health Services, as wide open as you can get.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: HES 11, HES 18, HES 19, HES 21 and HES 22 passed.

The Chairman: HEA 2 - Medical Care for Indigent.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Mr. Chair, could I ask at the next opportunity that you recall that I have a question on mental health.

The Chairman: Yes, and I said to you to wait for HEA 12. It is what I indicated.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: HEA 12, okay. I saw it under HES 22— Okay, fine.

HEA 2 - Medical Care for Indigents

The Chairman: HEA 2: In accordance with Standing Order 83 (3)—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, there is an ongoing issue that causes much delay for persons who are getting services from the DFA [Department of Financial Assistance], [namely] waiting on doctors at the HSA to certify a person's ability to get care based on the doctor's medical opinion, which holds up the process.

When I was Minister [with responsibility] for DFA, I was trying my hardest to streamline that process a bit better because it takes easily over a month for DFA clients to get processed. Have we done anything now to get it streamlined further? The former Chief Officer would probably be fully aware of what I'm speaking of. It may be beneficial now that she's the Chief Officer for this to see if there's any progress in that area.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I just ask for a moment to converse with the team.

[Pause]

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, if I could give a brief intervention.

The Chairman: Honourable Premier.

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: The member for George Town Central and I would have shared the same pain on this so he knows I know the background of the issue. I want, with everything in our power, to finish this not this term but in the next six months.

This is as a result of a historical hangover of the definition of indigent in the Health Insurance Act and who signs off on it. You get it signed off not on the advice of the Minister for Social Development, but on the advice of the head social worker who right now in our world is Paulinda, Director of DCFS [Department of Children and Family Services]. You enter through DFA with the application, it goes to HSA, then it goes back to DCFS, then it finally gets to CINICO.

We talked about this in the prior Caucus [where] at least we could all agree that DCFS should not be part of the process. The definition was crafted back in the day when there was a medical social worker at the hospital. We need to amend the definition. You have other amendments coming, but this is one of those areas where if it's taking too long, you just need to bring this amendment and work on the rest [later]; to amend that definition and [bring it to the House].

The difficulty sometimes is wanting to know whether the workload will then shift to another agency. The DFA — they probably briefed you as well — has a very good solution for data sharing so that you don't have to have all the staff housed and the work can be shared up equally. The point that we're trying to get to is that the client or the applicant has one single point of entry; then data is shared to expedite the decision. It starts with that statutory amendment.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Premier, for that intervention.

Just a further investigative question. There's always this discrepancy of opinion, not under indigent, but on whether somebody can work or not. I've had clients whose back is hurt and they physically can't do anything else — they feel they can't work anymore. Matter of fact, you guys may be quite familiar with this case — I think the Deputy Premier is: A Caymanian who now walks around with a heart monitor, who came from the industry of physical work, not a computer type or whatever, and says, *I don't know how to do anything else.*

Granted, the doctors have done amazing things and kept him alive walking with the monitor — but to get a job anywhere else? Yet a doctor rightfully says, *I technically can't say you're indigent because you could potentially be... answering the phone*. Now, the probabilities of an almost 60-year-old person with a heart monitor getting a job in Cayman are almost nil, but we won't sign off and say the person is indigent to get help from the DFA; so I'm having issues where the DFA wants to help [and] they are obligated based on their rules, but the doctor won't sign off on it.

We need to almost centralise this point too, like could there be a certified authority, like a doctor within DFA, coinciding with other doctors who could potentially overrule a different opinion and have other social factors involved? What we have is that people are afraid to make conscious decisions, and make sense logically, to give support to people because the only thing they're relying on is the doctor and the doctor is not going to jeopardise their licence. What a person can do to work is a very subjective matter; somebody could be bedridden and technically work in some capacity, so this description of work is affecting the DFA's ability to give services and help.

I don't know if there are any viewpoints on that. Are you thinking about it? How do you plan to address it? Because it is an issue.

The Chairman: Honourable Premier.

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: Briefly, because this falls slightly outside of health in the sense that it would impact the Social Development Minister.

The person would be assessed as financially indigent — in the case I think you and I have had in the past. The money is out of it because it's clear they can't make an income. The question is whether or not they are permanently disabled, so the question might come back to *if you're able to move around or use your mind, are you disabled*, because there could be some sort of work you could do — answering phones or whatnot, so it gets into a grey area.

I take the point. We won't be able to answer it today, but we have to reshape the definition of what you mean by permanently disabled, because they might not be able to really do anything. Technically they could pick up phones, but are you going to find a job for that? I take the point.

The second thing is, in terms of the overall service level and in terms of centralising it, because that was the word you used which I think is correct, it would then maximise the services and turnaround time if we get this housed in the right departments. The amount of time it takes the Director of DCFS to sign off on these, which really, she shouldn't be a part of the equation, pulls her away from her day job. The stress on the staff by not having this aligned properly is also impacting the service delivery of their primary functions.

We have to get it sorted.

The Chairman: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(3), I put the question to honourable members that we approve the items on the Schedule described as—

- HEA 2 - Medical Care for Indigents in the amounts of \$28,300,000 in 2026 and \$25,300,000 in 2027; and
- HEA 6 - Medical Services in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman in the amounts of \$4,161,000 in 2026 and \$4,161,000 in 2027.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, I had a question on HEA 6.

The Chairman: Can we then take the vote on HEA 2? All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: HEA 2 passed.

HEA 6 - Medical Services in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman

The Chairman: HEA 6.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Taking a close analytical look on page 286 of the budget, I see that \$4,161,000 has remained constant in 2025, 2026, and 2027. I would ask whether the Honourable Minister could confirm that after taking a deep dive it was found that things weren't too bad at the Faith Hospital; or is it the case that they were bad and we didn't get the funding — and that's not directed to you personally. I'll follow up and put it in a better perspective afterwards.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. Thank you to the member for the question. As we prepare the budget, I've been advised that this line item should take care of HEA 6 as it relates to medical services in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, but as we see with health many times, these cases could change. We are rolling out preventive care as it relates to the Hearts Programme, so we're going to be focusing on ensuring access to healthcare for persons before they get to a place of needing to rely on HEA 6.

The Chairman: Member, continuing.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you Mr. Chair, and thanks to the Honourable Minister.

Numbers don't normally lie, so I'm very happy today to see that the numbers have remained constant because during the lead up to the campaign, if you weren't living in Cayman Brac and having access to the wonderful services that we have at Faith Hospital, you'd be looking through a microscope for the better days coming, because this was one that was beat to death.

The Chairman: Well, I'm happy that my colleague, the lady member from Cayman Brac East is happy.

With that, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the following items on the Schedule: HEA 6 - Medical Services in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman in the amounts of \$4,161,000 in 2026 and \$4,161,000 in 2027.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: HEA 6 passed.

The Chairman: Members, at this hour I would propose we take a 30-minute break.

Committee suspended at 7:07 p.m.

Committee resumed at 7:19 p.m.

The Chairman: Honourable members, we're reconvening this meeting of Finance Committee. Please be seated. On the Appropriation Schedule we have reached:

HEA 10 - Ambulance Services

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

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

Mr. Chairman, through you to the Honourable Minister. I notice on the purchase agreement, HEA 10 deals with HSA 23 - Ambulance Services. I couldn't help but notice the note at the end of HSA 23 that says, "**Note: Output scope expanded to cover EMS station serving the Eastern districts, providing over 7k non-emergency patient transport. EMS rates have not increased since 2002/2003.**"

I am trying to understand how the operation of the HSA works in that regard and if it is a situation where the EMS service is now being subsidised in something else.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, if I could just have a minute to discuss this with the CEO.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. The process is the same but as it has been established that many of the calls were for non-emergency care, a different method of transport is being utilised for patients who do not require emergency care.

The Chairman: Honourable member, continuing.

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

Mr. Chairman, through you to the Honourable Minister. If a non-HSA facility wants to use the ambulance, what is the current process?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, just one minute.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, could I ask the member to repeat the question please?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: If a patient needs to go between hospitals or originates from a non-HSA hospital, what is the process in terms of the ambulance being used?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. To answer the member's question: Typically, those facilities have their own vehicles for transport; however, there was a period of time where one of the private facilities' vehicles was down and they utilised the HSA's vehicles. The services were purchased; they weren't done for free.

The Chairman: Honourable member, continuing.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you very much. In purchasing that service, how is the price determined to ensure it is, basically, the market value?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you, the charge that was determined was just the labour of the staff by way of time and a half, plus the additional ambulance charge.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much. Through you Mr. Chairman to the Honourable Minister. What is the internal approval process for when the ambulance is used by another non-HSA facility? Who approves that the ambulance can be used for that?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, this approval was in consultation with the Board.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Let's say Health City or another hospital needs to move a patient and their ambulance is down and they're using the HSA's ambulance, are you saying the use of the HSA's ambulance has to be approved by the board?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I can say that this is the present arrangement; however, I will tell the member it is an area we are looking to change as we move into a more National Public Health regime.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Through you, Mr. Chairman, to the Honourable Minister.

Are you saying that if there's a person who needs to be moved at 10, 11 o'clock at night, they have to get the Board's or a member of the Board's approval — to move somebody at 10, 11 o'clock at night?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I need to confirm this.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. I need to get further clarification on this, give me one second please.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you, the current arrangement is that whenever the private facilities are down an ambulance, they typically would express their need through the CEO and then she would seek approval from the board. This is typically done throughout the day, it's not on a case by case basis; however, in the absence of having that arrangement in place, the patient would typically be transported to the HSA.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yeah, Mr. Chairman, your eyes are rolling just like mine.

Mr. Chairman, through you. Under what section of any law, whether it be the HSA Act or the Public Authorities Act, does the board get involved with the day-to-day operation of something as simple as a patient using an ambulance, bearing in mind that 9.5 out of 10 times it's a Caymanian patient being moved from Health City. Where does the board get into this?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to seek further clarification from the CEO, but as I just said to the member, this is an area we are looking to rectify.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Through you, Mr. Chairman. When did the process change where the board got involved?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you, let me just speak to the CEO, please.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. I've been advised by the CEO that this is the second episode since 2025 that approval needs to go through the board. Prior to that, if a facility reached out and asked for support because their vehicles were down, it did not require board approval.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West, continuing.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Through you Mr. Chairman. Just out of curiosity, when this meeting happens with the CEO to give the approval, is this one of those meetings that is also charged \$750?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, before we get into that line of questioning, let me just clarify what I said earlier that this is the only — it's not like it was done before. This is a new request. The CEO just clarified that to me.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Okay, thank you. When they meet with the CEO to discuss this new request, is the HSA being charged \$750 for that meeting?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I am reliably informed that they are not.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank God, because if it went with the ribbon cutting I'd be pissed.

Mr. Chairman, I will leave this because, like I said, we have the PAC (Public Accounts Committee) coming up and we'll dive deeper into this then.

The Chairman: Members, I know there's a request from Mr. Tatum to ask certain questions about mental health. Can members give an indication of other items? Once he's done, I would like to take a [block vote.]

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: I have one on what we were just discussing.

The Chairman: Ambulance Services.

Lady member for Cayman Brac East, questions on HEA 10.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair to the Honourable Minister.

For clarity, when any such said request comes in, does it go to the CEO or does it go to the board; and if it goes to the CEO, what type of environment obtains at the HSA that the CEO would feel coerced to report to the Board, because I consider this an operational matter. That's very unusual for good governance.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, can I just ask for a moment to converse with the CEO?

[Pause]

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chairman, we can move on by consent.

HEA 11 - Services at District Health Centres

The Chairman: HEA 11 - Services at District Health Centres.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, no, I'm just going to get to HEA 12 and then we're going to...

Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I notice that HEA 11 which deals with district health clinics deals with outputs HSA 31, HSA 32, HSA 33, HSA 34, and HSA 35. Is there a clinic in West Bay right now because I noticed in the budget West Bay went from zero all the way to \$500,000. That kind of jumped out to me in terms of the forecast for this year.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you. Of course, Mr. Saunders' keen eye would catch that. The reason is that the West Bay District Clinic

has typically been self-sufficient, so there hasn't been anything budgeted for the district clinic; however, now we have rolled out the dialysis service and there is an increase in patients, plus we're looking at additional services. That's the reason why. There wasn't a line item before for West Bay and it was included in all of them.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much. This begs my next question. I noticed HSA 31 that deals with services at the Bodden Town Clinic is getting \$250,000; for HSA 32 that deals with East End Clinic, they're getting \$100,000; HSA 33 for North Side is getting \$200,000; George Town at HSA 34 is getting \$3,026,000; and then HSA 35, West Bay for \$500,000.

I am curious as to why Bodden Town is at \$250,000 and West Bay is at \$500,000. What are the differences in services being offered between the district clinics for Bodden Town and West Bay?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, thank you. At present, it subsidises the dialysis unit which was just—

Sorry, one minute.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: For clarity, it subsidises the operational cost.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Operational cost of the clinic? For clarity, West Bay is offering a different suite of services than Bodden Town.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, as of right now, we have the dialysis unit there. We do intend to expand the services. That's the next clinic that will have the dialysis services eventually.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Okay, back up now, because the funding for both years for Bodden Town is \$250,000 and for West Bay it's \$500,000. I'll have to ask the question now for my Caymanian dialysis patients, not just in Bodden Town but even East End and North Side. We do recognise the issue of dialysis and we see where diabetes [patients] and others have their own issues, but from that standpoint, when can we expect dialysis service to be in Bodden Town?

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. One of the conversations I've been having with the CEO and her team is about each of the different district clinics and the fact that Bodden Town and West Bay have the highest volume, save for George

Town. In terms of the dialysis unit in Bodden Town, right now space is the issue, but it is the area where we would want to put dialysis. As it relates to another district clinic, it's just not something that is forecasted at the moment.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Well, recognising that Bodden Town, East End and North Side represent the eastern districts which, on a population basis is greater than West Bay, is there any intention under this budget to expand dialysis service to the eastern districts in the next two years? That will also serve East End and North Side — for your members who are sitting in Cabinet.

The Chairman: Well, it would serve the patients; hopefully my Cabinet Ministers don't have to get dialysis.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: After these questions from Kenneth, they're *gonna* need it.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. We didn't have any present plans, but given the concerns the Member has raised, we will certainly look into this.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you very much. I'm looking forward to coming back here if you need a section 11 — well, you guys can do section 11 or 12 — to approve the funds to move dialysis to the eastern districts. I welcome such at any Finance Committee, any time.

Thank you.

HEA 12 - Mental Health Services

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, Member for Red Bay. You had questions on mental health services.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: On mental health facilities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair to the Minister. Minister, you indicated that at the appropriate point you would prefer to respond to my questions on the timeframe for the completion of the permanent Youth Mental Health Facility, as well as the location. You also indicated in your report that you could speak more expansively on the future plans of the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre facility when we got to output Appropriation. I guess we're here. I'd be grateful to hear from you on those.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Red Bay. Your questions are confined to HEA 26, HEA 29, and Poinciana, am I correct? There is a specific output group for Adolescent Mental Health Hub and Inpatient Adolescent Mental Health — HEA 26 and HEA 29;

because I would prefer to take a block vote up to that point.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: That's fine. You tell me when you want me to address those.

BLOCK VOTE:

- HEA 10 - Ambulance Services**
- HEA 11 - Services at District Health Centres**
- HEA 12 - Mental Health Services**
- HEA 16 - Geriatric Services**
- HEA 17 - Medical Care Beyond Insurance Coverage/Uninsured**
- HEA 18 - School Health Services**
- HEA 19 - Medical Care for Chronic Ailments**
- HEA 20 - Public Health Programmes, Investigations and Treatments**
- HEA 21 - Medical Internship Programme**
- HEA 23 - Provision of Anti-Retroviral Medication**
- HEA 24 - Provision of Psychological Trauma Diagnosis and Treatment for Children**
- HEA 25 - Management and Maintenance of Cancer Registry**

The Chairman: Members, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the following items on the Schedule described as—

- HEA 10 - Ambulance Services, \$3,716,000 in 2026 and 3,716,000 in 2027;
- HEA 11 - Services at District Health Clinics, \$4,076,000 in 2026 and \$4,076,000 in 2027;
- HEA 12 - Mental Health Services, \$5,835,000 in 2026 and \$5,835,000 in 2027;
- HEA 16 - Geriatric Services, \$4,000,000 in 2026 and \$4,080,000 in 2027;
- HEA 17 - Medical Care Beyond Insurance Coverage/Uninsured, \$2,000,000 in 2026 and \$2,040,000 in 2027;
- HEA 18 - School Health Services, \$2,500,000 in 2026 and \$2,500,000 in 2027;
- HEA 19 - Medical Care for Chronic Ailments, \$1,360,000 in 2026 and \$1,387,000 in 2027;
- HEA 20 - Public Health Programmes, Investigations and Treatments, \$2,500,000 in 2026 and \$2,500,000 in 2027;
- HEA 21 - Medical Internship Programme, \$287,000 in 2026 and \$287,000 in 2027;
- HEA 23 - Provision of Anti-Retroviral Medication, \$492,000 in 2026 and \$501,000 in 2027;

- HEA 24 - Provision of Psychological Trauma Diagnosis and Treatment for Children, \$208,000 in 2026 and \$208,000 in 2027; and
- HEA 25 - Management and Maintenance of Cancer Registry, \$136,000 in 2026 and \$136,000 in 2027.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: HEA 10, HEA 11, HEA 12, HEA 16, HEA 17, HEA 18, HEA 19, HEA 20, HEA 21, HEA 23, HEA 24, and HEA 25 passed.

HEA 26 - Adolescent Mental Health Hub

The Chairman: HEA 26 - Adolescent Mental Health Hub. Mr. Tatum, MP for Red Bay.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you. Do you want me to repeat the question? It's with regards to the timeframe for the completion of the new facility and the location.

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

Mr. Chair through you, just to be clear, the member is asking about the interim adolescent facility or the long-term facility?

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: The long-term, you responded on the interim.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I just want to make sure. We are hoping to start the long-term facility in 2027; if all goes as planned, we're hoping it should be completed by 2029.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Through you, Mr. Chair — and the location?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through you, Mr. Chair, the location is across from Pasadora Place, a property which is already owned by HSA.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, where did you say was the spot I would ask the other question, sir? I was originally looking at doing this per the report that has to do with the Minister giving details on the future of Poinciana.

The Chairman: Is it just in regard to Poinciana operations?

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: It was with regard to what was on the report, where she said I can speak more expan-

sively on the future plans of the facility when we get to the output appropriation.

The Chairman: Minister, if you could speak to that now and then we'll take a block vote for the remainder.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: If members can indicate where they have questions next.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, do you want me to go ahead and answer before you put it to vote then?

Just to answer the member's question, the bed capacity at the facility is 54. There are a number of 9 cottages, 6 residents per cottage. Presently, we have 3 occupied.

Poinciana remains a bridge between hospital care and community life, which helps residents rebuild confidence, stability, and independence. Rehabilitation is more than recovery; it's about giving people the tools and support to thrive after treatment. One of the areas that is going to be focused on at the facility is a comprehensive dual diagnosis and long-term residential programme which will give people integrated care at home and keep families together while they're receiving treatment.

I think this one is particularly important to many of us in the room; it relates to our Senior Care and Dementia Programme. The intention is to create a dedicated Dementia and Neurocognitive Programme at the facility which will give seniors and their families the dignified, reliable support that they need and, in doing so, building compassionate systems that care for the respect that we want to show to our elders.

I know I have been personally touched by this disease and I think many of us have. This is allowing our seniors who have been diagnosed with dementia the ability to go to a facility where they are taught how to manage living with this new diagnosis — oftentimes there's a transition period when they get their diagnosis and their medication — just for them to adjust and allowing them to have that space to do so with the care of physicians and the psychiatric care.

In addition to that, something we're hoping to roll out in the early part of the New Year is a Senior Day-Care Programme. Poinciana already has a bus, so the bus will collect seniors.

Again, going back to the functional goal that the business case spoke of when it was originally finalised for this project, is ensuring the facility is functional. I think this is a wonderful move forward. We've heard much recently about the cases of dementia on the island and the fact that we do have an ageing population, so I'm really excited to see the way in

which the director and the clinical director are moving the facility forward.

The Chairman: Mr. Tatum, continuing.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you very much.

Are we expanding the facility then, or using what's there now?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: We're utilising the facility which has been underutilised because we didn't have adequate staff; [because of] the way the cottages operate, you have to hire staff in clusters — in order to open a cottage, you have to have a certain amount of personnel. I can elaborate more if you'd like me to, but what we are doing now is increasing the staff complement. All that's required is to increase the staff complement so that we can continue to open another cottage.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: I thank the Member for that. It is good news. Dementia is a huge problem now and it's going to get much larger, so that's good to hear. Could you repeat for me? I didn't write it down. Did you say the long-term youth mental health facility will be finished in 2027?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: No, sir.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: I didn't think so.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I wish I could say that we would be finished in 2027. We're hoping to start it in 2027 and hoping it will be completed by 2029.

Mr. A. Roy Tatum: Thank you.

The Chairman: Where on the appropriation Schedule do members have further questions? Otherwise, I'll take a block vote.

[Inaudible interjection]

BLOCK VOTE:

HEA 27 - Provision of Molecular Biology Testing Services

HEA 29 - Inpatient Adolescent Mental Health

HEA 30 - Mobile Crisis Intervention

NDC 1 - Policy, Prevention and Education, Research and Information, Dissemination and Evaluation

NGS 4 - HIV/AIDS and First Aid Public Education Programmes

NGS 53 - Palliative Care Nursing

The Chairman: With the cooperation of members whom I thank, in accordance with Standing Order 83 (3), I put the question as to whether members approve the remaining items on the Schedule described as—

- HEA 26 - Adolescent Mental Health Hub in the amounts of \$1,200,000 in 2026 and \$1,200,000 in 2027;
- HEA 27 - Provision of Molecular Biology Testing Services, \$2,000,000 in 2026 and \$2,000,000 in 2027;
- HEA 29 - Inpatient Adolescent Mental Health, \$1,454,456 in 2026 and \$1,498,090 in 2027;
- HEA 30 - Mobile Crisis Intervention, \$684,796 in 2026 and \$684,796 in 2027;
- NDC 1 - Policy, Prevention and Education, Research and Information, Dissemination and Evaluation, \$1,105,000 in 2026 and \$1,146,000 in 2027;
- NGS 4 - HIV/AIDS and First Aid Public Education Programmes, \$40,000 in 2026 and \$40,000 in 2027;
- NGS 53 - Palliative Care Nursing, \$300,000 in 2026 and \$300,000 in 2027; and
- NGS 55 - Tertiary Medical Care at Various Local and Overseas Institutions—

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, I have a question on that.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: HEA 26, HEA 27, HEA 29, HEA 30, NDC 1, NGS 4, and NGS 53 passed.

NGS 55 - Tertiary Medical Care at Various Local and Overseas Institutions

The Chairman: NGS 55, lady member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I note that the Appropriation for 2026 is \$43 million and the same amount for 2027; I also note that in 2025 it was \$55 million which, if my calculations are right, is about a \$12 million difference. Take this tongue in cheek, is that where we got our \$11.1 million surplus shown on page 34?

The Chairman: No; the answer is no, lady member.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Having said that, this is an opportune time for the Honourable Minister, and perhaps your good self, to explain what we're going to be doing differently to ensure that we've kept what the Minister wanted — a transparent budg-

et. I can't blame her for that; the previous Minister wanted that to but consecutive governments, including the former Premier, myself, and others have put in an X factor and then come back for section 11(5) or section 12. This takes it a bit further, but is this one of the examples where it's under-budgeted for the same reasons as other persons did it?

This is probably more for you, Mr. Chair, than the Minister.

The Chairman: Member, thank you very much for the question. We budgeted at just over 80 per cent for a number of reasons.

1. The Minister is going to be rolling out a number of different services to try to get our community healthier — that won't happen overnight;
2. We have also committed to looking holistically at our National Insurance framework.

We believe that if we do this correctly and if we are committed to ensuring that National Healthcare is going to be taken seriously, we are going to wind up in a situation where the government looks much more strategically and wholesale at how we go about procuring insurance and reinsurance nationally, in the truest sense.

We all know that for the longest time, we have allowed the private sector to mandatorily cover healthy people, including children. They reap the profit, but as soon as a child either reaches its lifetime maximum or acquires some chronic ailment, they wind up on the government's doorstep. When healthy adults reach that point or reach the age of retirement, the premiums spike so high that they wind up on the government's doorstep.

This review — by putting together a true national plan where we take the Standard Health Insurance Contract and make that a level of service that the vast majority of Caymanians will look at and say this is good health coverage, and combining it with what we already know we are paying directly out of pocket versus insuring our country properly, we believe we can save costs. Doing what we're doing [now], we're simply on a pay as you go plan where we simply keep funding, funding, funding and there is no end in sight.

That's why I have said to the Premier and colleagues publicly that this has to be a bipartisan committee. This is not the Government doing any form of research and then coming in the committee room and saying to the Opposition members, *here's what we found*. The research has to be a true bipartisan approach; the Government will then have to make a decision about what true national healthcare is going to look like and how we are going to cover the vast majority of our population.

I can't say it enough. I think all of us have seen the evidence for a few decades and we know where some of the cracks are; but at the same time, I

think we have enough brain power in the private sector, at CINICO, and certainly in this House, that we can perform a comprehensive, bipartisan review and ensure that we do what is best for the country.

There are going to be people who will be upset — I do not go into this with any blinders on; but I think you know me well enough to know that what is in the best interest of Cayman is my priority. What is in the best interest of the public purse should be all of our priority. We combined all those factors and this is where we've landed. Once we've come out of that review, we will see where we land.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman for that very well-articulated pontification with which I fully concur and wish to publicly associate myself; but my real question was whether or not it can be realised next year.

I understand where you're going with it; I'm just levelling the ground and preparing the playfield because I want to ensure that when the Honourable Minister comes back for the other 20 per cent, there's not an adversarial environment for it and that the public would not think she has overspent, which is not the case.

The Chairman: I thank you very much for that very fair assessment. I believe in setting aggressive targets because when you don't, we become wishy-washy and we kick the can down the road. I think with real will we can get this review conducted expeditiously and move forward. Is there a risk that it might not all be realised in 2026? Absolutely; however, if we give ourselves an aggressive timeline, it will force us to do the work we have to do.

Any further questions?

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

The Chairman: One thing we can say, the Member for George Town Central is a nice guy.

[Laughter]

BLOCK VOTE:

NGS 55 - Tertiary Medical Care at Various Local and Overseas Institutions

NGS 74 - Preservation of Natural Environments and Places of Historic Significance

NGS 92 - Alzheimer's and Dementia Association of the Cayman Islands

NGS 95 - Multiple Sclerosis Foundation of the Cayman Islands

TP 44 - Temporary Poor Relief Payments for Young Parents Programme

TP 73 - Other Health, Environment and Sustainability Programme Assistance

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the remaining items on the Schedule described as—

- NGS 55 - Tertiary Medical Care at Various Local and Overseas Institutions in the amounts of \$43,000,000 in 2026 and \$43,000,000 in 2027;
- NGS 74 - Preservation of Natural Environments and Places of Historic Significance, \$570,000 in 2026 and \$570,000 in 2027;
- NGS 92 - Alzheimer's and Dementia Association of the Cayman Islands, \$125,000 in 2026 and \$125,000 in 2027;
- NGS 95 - Multiple Sclerosis Foundation of the Cayman Islands, \$25,000 in 2026 and \$25,000 in 2027;
- TP 44 - Temporary Poor Relief Payments for Young Parents Programme, \$50,000 in 2026 and \$50,000 in 2027; and
- TP 73 - Other Health, Environment and Sustainability Programme Assistance, \$200,000 in 2026 and \$200,000 in 2027.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, I have a question on TP 111.

The Chairman: All those in favour of the aforementioned read output groups, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: NGS 55, NGS 74, NGS 92, NGS 95, TP 44 and TP 73 passed.

TP 111 - Climate Resiliency Programme

The Chairman: TP 111 - Climate Resiliency Programme. Lady member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Honourable Minister, I wonder if she would take this opportunity to say what the \$200,000 in 2026 is for and why it is not needed for 2027.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, through you, can I ask for a minute please?

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you, I think I can safely answer by saying that, as

some members might recall, we were going through the public sector buildings assessing them to determine their energy efficiency, and doing energy audits and retrofits; then providing the staff with training to strengthen technical capacity across the public service. We budgeted to continue the programme for 2026, but we didn't have a commitment to do it for 2027.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank the Honourable Minister for that clarification because I couldn't find it in the very detailed notes; hence, the reason I asked. It jumped to 112 in your explanatory notes, so you might want to rectify that when you put it out to the public.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank the member for pointing that out. I'll ensure that the team edits that to provide an explanation.

What I can say as well is that we previously did quite a few of the public sector buildings' energy audits including this Parliament and, I think, some of the post offices. I think many of the major big buildings have already been assessed and that's why we hadn't considered 2027.

BLOCK VOTE:

TP 111 - Climate Resiliency Programme

TP 112 - Community Support Programmes

OE 15 - Pan American Health

Organisation Subscription

OE 66 - United Nations Caribbean

Environmental Programme

OE 103 - Caribbean Public Health Agency

OE 127 - Caribbean Association

of Medical Councils

OE 133 - Oil Spills Tier 3 - Annual Fee

OE 152 - Maintenance of the Completed George Town Landfill Remediation Works Phase 1

The Chairman: Continuing with our approvals of the output groups. In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I put the question to honourable members to approve the following items on the Schedule—

- TP 111 - Climate Resiliency Programme, \$200,000 in 2026 and nil in 2027;
- TP 112 - Community Support Programmes, \$200,000 in 2026 and \$200,000 in 2027;
- OE 15 - Pan American Health Organisation Subscription, \$15,000 in 2026 and \$15,000 in 2027;
- OE 66 - United Nations Caribbean Environmental Programme, \$7,500 in 2026 and \$7,500 in 2027;
- OE 103 - Caribbean Public Health Agency \$20,000 in 2026 and \$20,000 in 2027;

- OE 127 - Caribbean Association of Medical Councils, \$1,500 in 2026 and \$1,500 in 2027;
- OE 133 - Oil Spills Tier 3 - Annual Fee, \$75,000 in 2026 and \$85,000 in 2027; and
- OE 152 - Maintenance of the Completed George Town Landfill Remediation Works Phase 1, \$498,000 in 2026 and \$498,000 in 2027—

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: I have a question on EI 29, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: All those in favour of the previously read appropriation groups, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 111, TP 112, OE 15, OE 66, OE 103, OE 127, OE 133 and OE 152 passed.

EI 29 - Health Services Authority

The Chairman: EI 29 - Health Services Authority, nil in 2026 and \$5 million in 2027. Are there any questions?

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you Mr. Chair for recognising me shortly.

The Chairman: Lady member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, sir. I just wanted to ascertain that it was not a scrivener's error for the zero in 2026; and if not, what was the justification for \$5 million in 2027?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you to the member. Thank you for your question. It wasn't an error; the reason there isn't anything in 2026 is because we looked at the timing and by the time we did all the procurement as well as the plans, and to go through planning, we suspect that it would take us the majority of 2026 to complete that phase, then we would start construction in 2027. That is why the \$5 million is there.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: I take it then that all the preliminary plans have been already paid for that you couldn't do next year in anticipation of starting on how long it takes to get things through the system, procurement and otherwise.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Just one minute, Mr. Chair.

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To answer the member's question, we've started preliminary discussions but are at the very initial phase of the plans and HSA would be paying for that from their OpEx.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West.

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

Mr. Chairman, through you to the Honourable Minister. What major capital projects does HSA have planned over the next two years?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, can I converse with the CEO please, just to double-check?

[Pause]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair through you. Can I just clarify from the member, can you be a little more descriptive — when you say major, do you mean anything over a certain threshold, \$10 million?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Okay, I will help you out. Please turn to page 537 of the Ownership Agreement.

[Pause]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, I am sure when you read the statement of cash flows, you know the number that I'm looking at.

The Chairman: I also see the balance sheet and the cash and cash equivalents.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yeah, and you also see what it is for depreciation; you see the non-cash-type stuff.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: You know the number I'm looking at. I'm just curious as to what is driving that number?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, in the interest of time, is the HSA's CFO here?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Mr. Chairman, in the interest of time, they can send me the list at a later date. I don't want you all to accuse me of not being nice.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Member, I turn your attention to page 506 where you'll see your Bodden Town dialysis clinic.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Oh, it's coming out!

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: With that, in accordance with Standing Order 83(3), and given the fact that the Minister of Health is looking out for the district of Bodden Town, I put the question to whether honourable members approve the following items—

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, before you move off of that, the stuff on 506 doesn't add up nowhere close to that number.

The Chairman: Oh no, there's more, obviously.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Just so we're clear.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: As long as Bodden Town is getting a new hospital and dialysis clinic, we're good. Continue, you can take the vote.

BLOCK VOTE:

EI 29 - Health Services Authority

EI 94 - Minister of Health, Environment and Sustainability

EA 30 - Cemetery Vaults - Grand Cayman

The Chairman: We approve the following items on the Schedule described as—

- EI 29 - Health Services Authority, nil in 2026 and \$5,000,000 in 2027;
- EI 94 - Minister of Health, Environment and Sustainability, \$15,564,000 in 2026 and \$8,483,000 in 2027;
- EA 30 - Cemetery Vaults - Grand Cayman, \$620,000 in 2026 and \$672,000 in 2027—

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: No; I filed an amendment for EA 146, Mr. Chairman.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yes, I have an amendment there.

The Chairman: We'll take the aforementioned three items on the Schedule to form part of the Bill. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EI 29, EI 94 and EA 30 passed.

EA 146 – Land Purchase for Conservation

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town West, you've indicated that you filed an amendment. I don't see it in front of me.

AMENDMENT TO EA 146

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I'll read it.

I sent it from 13th November, 2025. It reads: **“Notice of Committee Stage Amendment. In accordance with Standing Order 84 of the Parliament Standing Orders, 2025, I, Christopher S. Saunders Elected Member for Bodden Town West give notice to move the following amendment to the Appropriation (Financial Years 2026 and 2027) Bill, 2025 —**

1. That EA 146 - Land Purchase for Conservation be transferred from the Appropriations to the Minister for Health, Environment and Sustainability and be transferred to the Appropriations to the Minister for Planning, Lands, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure.”

The Chairman: Member, you've moved an amendment for the transfer of an output group; however, we have already taken the vote on the appropriations, so we wind up with a small conundrum in that we need to ensure we approve the output group before we transfer it. That's why I was trying to get through them and then come back, because I remembered you had filed a Motion. I would rather take the vote on the output groups because we need to have them approved before we can transfer.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: I think we can actually do the amendment before you take the vote, because then you take the vote.

The Chairman: If we take a vote and we transfer it to a Ministry that has already been disposed of, I would think that that would cause us a small issue, versus just approving the item as part of the appropriations and then agreeing to transfer that approved item to another Minister. If I understand it, that's what your Motion is seeking to do.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: May I, Mr. Chairman?

I understand the logistics of the sequence that you just explained, which would probably be the path of least resistance at this juncture. I haven't seen the Motion; I'm sure it's being circulated, but the amending Motion has to be voted on and disposed of. If it's the Government's position, for example, that you don't agree with the amended motion, then it's a fait accompli. Otherwise you'll have two Motions on the Floor at the same time.

The Chairman: Perhaps we're splitting hairs. Quite honestly, as long as we are aware that we still have not approved this item and members agree that we have to circle back and approve it with no issues being raised...

The Mover has moved a Motion. Does the Mover wish to speak to the Motion?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, we have a Ministry that is responsible for lands constitutionally, and I don't think it's in the best interest that we start having different ministries within core government owning real estate, because it defeats the purpose of having the Ministry of Lands which has the Lands and Survey Department and all the support, et cetera to go with it. If this is the situation, you might as well have other ministries start buying real estate. There's a reason we specifically have a Ministry of Lands.

Regardless of what the land is being used for, it is still land and I think it should be under the Ministry of Lands.

The Chairman: Thank you very much and the Government's position is that we're in agreement so I put the question to the Committee —

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I do apologise, but you're in the middle of a debate; you have to ask if any other members wish to speak.

The Chairman: I just thought that at this hour, given the fact that we are in agreement but... Member for George Town Central, I know it has been a little while since we heard from you.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: I recognise the Member for George Town Central.

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

The reason I had to contribute to this, even though there's agreement, is that this is a new area of test, this provision within the Standing Order. As long

as I've been here, and this is my third term, [this provision] has not been used. It's important that we recognise the provisions available to each member to do so, because I'm very mindful of the 2027 Sitting for the 2028-2029 budget, in the event any shenanigans happen again, because we will be going through the process of filing the relevant Motions where every member will be subject to a debate.

It goes well now when it's all in agreement, but in the event that the next time around when a budget debate needs to be done and members decide to try the, *I don't want to explain all the facts of what I'm doing and I'll go down in Finance Committee and read a statement* — be minded. I'm not trying to be difficult in any way, but the intention for this Sitting was to be a bit more difficult than the good Member for Bodden Town West has done, because we could have had a debate on every single one of these ministries all over again as per the Standing Orders.

I'm glad to hear there is agreement. I think it'd be important to hear from the Honourable Minister herself as to the acceptance of the Motion that has been moved before this committee and what exactly the parameters of that acceptance would be, because I would love to vote in favour. What does acceptance mean? Is it specified that the whole output group will disappear and the money will just go to the other output group, because I don't even see the need for this line item to be honest with you. As the good member highlighted, we already have a place where government buys land.

With that in mind, I would just want to hear the specifics as to what this agreement is. I don't think we should just go right back to the Mover of the Motion, but obviously, I'm at the mercy of the House and each member's privilege per the Standing Orders. I would like to have clarity as to what the agreement is so I know, myself, as one of the members of this Committee, how to vote.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Does any other member wish to speak? *[Pause]* does any other member wish to speak? *[Pause]* does any other member wish to speak? *[Pause]*

If no other member wishes to speak, does the mover wish to exercise his right of reply?

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Government for accepting the motion to move all land purchases into one Ministry of Lands.

Thank you.

[Crosstalk]

EA 162 - Protected Area Management

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83(3), I move that honourable members approve EA 162 - Protected Area Management, \$50,000 in 2026 and \$50,000 in 2027.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EA 162 passed.

The Chairman: EA 146 to be appropriated to the Minister responsible for Lands.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Amendment to EA 146 passed.

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83 (3), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve the item on the Schedule described as EA 146 - Land Purchase for Conservation, in 2026 \$50,000 and in 2027 \$50,000. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EA 146 passed.

The Chairman: Members, this concludes all appropriations of all output groups having been approved by the Committee.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: I recognise the Honourable Minister responsible for Health, Environment and Sustainability.

[Crosstalk]

[Long pause]

The Chairman: Members, we'll take a two-minute recess, but stay in our seats; then explain what the Minister is seeking to do.

Committee suspended at 8:33 p.m.

Committee resumed at 8:36 p.m.

The Chairman: I call Finance Committee back to order. Please be seated.

Members, I must admit that when I received a copy of the Motion I thought it had gotten distributed to members. I did not realise it was still sitting here at the desk and hadn't been distributed. My proposition to the Minister is: The House has to come back in December and members now have a view of what the Minister is going to be seeking to get approved in December. This is a Motion that can be moved at any point in time and she'll move it at that point.

Please ignore the line on cat eradication.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: In accordance with Standing Order 83 (4), I shall put the question as to whether honourable members approve of the Schedule, as amended by Finance Committee, forming a part of the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: The Schedule, as amended, do form part of the Bill.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, I know we are almost done. Have you formally withdrawn this Motion?

The Chairman: The Motion has not been moved.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay. Was it submitted?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Was it submitted? No, you have to do a formal removal if it's been submitted. You heard Chris do it three times already for this Sitting. He didn't have to move it; he had to withdraw it.

Madam Clerk, has this been submitted?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, it had not been circulated.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Okay, if it's circulated that's a different thing from submitted with the signature on it, to you.

I think for a good administrative process, it is on record that there was a submittal, right? I don't think we can get around that. I think for clarity, just say that it's being withdrawn until a later date. You can't pretend like this document isn't live; it is live. I don't

even want to get into what's in the document now, because we're double-dipping money for Botanic Park yet we already voted on Botanic Park. I don't understand that.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Health, Environment and Sustainability...

[Pause]

The Chairman: For clarity and the Chair's sake, can the Honourable Minister say whether or not this Motion has been signed and submitted to the Clerk? Because the copy I have is unsigned.

[Inaudible response]

The Chairman: It has been. Minister, at this point, can you withdraw this copy of the Motion and we will then have to deal with it at the next Meeting of the House.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I move a Motion to withdraw the Resolution.

The Chairman: Thank you.

All those in favour of the Motion being withdrawn, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, can I have a division, please?

The Chairman: A division on the withdrawal?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yes, sir. Thank you.

The Chairman: Madam Clerk, can we have a division on the withdrawal of the Motion?

Division No. 2 of 2025-2026

Ayes: 15

Noes: 0

Hon. André M. Ebanks
Hon. Gary B. Rutt
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks
Hon. Isaac D. Rankine
Hon. Nickolas T. A. DaCosta
Hon. G. Wayne Panton
Ms. Heather D. Bodden
Hon. Michael S. Myles
Hon. Joseph X. Hew
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan
Hon. Pearlina L. McGaw-Lumsden

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly
Mr. A. Roy Tatum
Mr. Roy M. McTaggart

Absentees: 3

Mrs. Julie J. T. Hunter
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour
Mr. Christopher S. Saunders

The Chairman: Results of the division: 15 Ayes and 3 absent. The Motion stands withdrawn.

Agreed: Motion withdrawn.

CLAUSE 1

The Chairman: Thank you Madam Clerk.

In accordance with Standing Order 83(5), I put the question as to whether honourable members approve clause 1 standing part of the Bill.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Clause 1 passed.

CLAUSE 2

The Chairman: The question is whether honourable members approve clause 2 standing part of the Bill. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Clause 2 passed.

CLAUSE 3

The Chairman: The question is whether Honourable members approve clause 3 standing part of the Bill. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Clause 3 passed.

The Chairman: Honourable members, we have approved the Schedule and clauses 1 through 3 forming part of the Bill; therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 83(7), I shall put the question as whether I as

Chairman of the Committee do report the Bill to the House.

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

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Bill to be reported to the House.

The Chairman: This concludes the proceedings in Finance Committee. Before ending, I give the Minister of Health, Environment and Sustainability an opportunity to say thank you to her staff.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Chair, I would like to take a minute to thank all the staff that work under the remit of the Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability. I want to also just take a moment to thank the Member for Red Bay for acknowledging the DEH staff for their efforts.

I just want to say that I'm proud of all of our essential services that fall under the remit of the Ministry. We have medical staff, we have the MRCU teams, and we have the DEH garbage collectors. Many of them often go unnoticed, so as I go into thanking the team here, I want to take a minute to pause and thank all of those who I think we often forget are busy working. I wanted to just thank them.

Through the scrutiny of the budget that is for the remit of my Ministry, taking away from these deliberations today, I'm going to take the policy on spear guns to Cabinet for approval as soon as possible, as well as a review of the current method of euthanasia of cats.

I would also like to thank Chief Officer Tamará; Director Simms, who we all heard today is celebrating his 35th anniversary as a civil servant; as well as our Director, Judith Seymour, who has been a civil servant for 37 years.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Twenty of those years she has been with the Counselling Services. Also, Director Gina, who works very hard with her DOE team; Doctor Wheeler, who I got to appreciate even more recently in all the hard work they do with MRCU; CEO Lizzette and all of her staff, her CFO; CMO Wolf, who is new but has come and fit right in; she was actually ready to stand in tonight for any questions that would have been asked on public health; and then Director Lockhart and Mullings, and all of their teams. It's a big team, but I really wanted to take the time to acknowledge them earlier today. and

I think some of them are still here. Many of the staff were up in the gallery. They took this deliberation of our budget personally, and they wanted to be here

to offer support, to learn, and to see the process live. I thought that fit with what Mr. Speaker has been doing with making Parliament a place where people want to be.

I want to say thank you to each and every one of you. I think I've done more than enough today, almost 9 o'clock, but I'm happy for the questions. It's given me an opportunity to share with the members of the public what we are going to be doing as it relates to the Ministry and all the works that are under my remit.

With that, I say thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman. You know I can't help it.

The Chairman: We do know.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Member for George Town Central.

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

I just want to say thank you to the amazing staff of the Minister's portfolio. We here in the Opposition do appreciate all the hard work that you do as well. A special appreciation for the Minister herself; she handled herself well today. It is not easy all the time to take difficult questions and keep your composure and don't get upset because you know all the hard work your team does. I think she did an amazing job, so shout out to you; but particularly to your team that makes you look good.

Guys, keep up the good work. God bless you and have a good weekend.

The Chairman: I thank all members. It's been a robust series of questioning over the last week. I think the public has been well informed about the details of the budget. I think scrutiny is a hallmark of any solid democracy, and it illustrates that our system works.

I thank all of you as members; thank you for all your support. I know every once in a while, as Chair, I have to take deep breaths, so I thank all of you for being patient with me in my first tour of duty in this Chair. Certainly, I hope there wasn't anyone that I made feel any way; if I did, I apologise, but this Committee is a serious one and our work is very, very important.

Last, but by no means least, let me also thank Madam Clerk and all the assistants who sat in. Thank you for all your support. You have much work to do to finish the report, but the good news is, as we all know, they always work as we're going along. Most importantly for me personally, I want to thank the Financial Secretary and the entire team — Mr. Matthew

Tibbetts, Ms. Anne Owens, Mr. Michael Nixon for all of your hard work.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: I want to thank Karen Rivers, those in the budget unit... I know I'm going to get myself in trouble, so I'm going to stop there. I just want to thank all in the Ministry of Finance who have got us to this point. Much hard work has gone in, many hours, many weekends in the office. Work that we don't see and we often take for granted when we get these documents and are able to go through them and perform our work, so — most important work. Also, the finance units in every Ministry and all the SAGCs, because your work feeds up to the Ministry and gets the job done.

Premier, do you want to offer a few comments?

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: I think you covered it adequately, Mr. Chair. I think we only left out thanking you.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: No need for that. No need. This is my job; don't thank me for doing my job.

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: No, but we have to thank you for doing it well.

An Hon. Member: I agree with that!

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: You even conceded that the Member for George Town Central is a nice guy.

[Laughter]

The Premier, Hon. André M. Ebanks: You're laying it on thick, sir, so thank you. It is a thankless job to balance budget, to corral leaders... You've been a fantastic partner to rationalise a budget and get the job done and get the country here. Thank you, sir.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: Thank you.

It leaves for me to ask all honourable members to meet tomorrow, 20th November, in the Committee room at 11 a.m. to approve the Report of the Committee. The Clerk has told us she will be ready — we have a fantastic Clerk and her team; let's get it out of the way. Unfortunately, a number of us have a huge funeral in the district of West Bay, so Members, in true collaborative fashion, let us meet at noon on Friday to consider the report.

The House will then be called at 2 p.m. so we have the Third Reading of the Appropriation Bill. I call this meeting of Finance Committee adjourned until 12 noon on Friday.

At 8:55 p.m. the Committee adjourned.