

Address to the House of Parliament

Her Excellency Governor Jane Owen

Friday, 19 June 2026

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Chief Justice and all the Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great privilege to stand before you once again to open this session of Parliament. We come together today, one year on from the first meeting of Parliament since the election and the formation of the NCFC Government. I congratulate the Hon Premier and all members of the National Coalition For Caymanians on completing this milestone. In this address I will take the opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved, and to look ahead to the Government's plans for the coming year.

But first, I want to acknowledge the important role this Chamber plays in ensuring scrutiny and discussion of the policies put forward by the Government, and the role played by you Mr. Speaker in managing the business agenda of Parliament and ensuring that fulsome democratic debate is flourishing here in Cayman. I also want to thank the Hon Leader of the Opposition and to recognise the contributions of all members of the Opposition, who work assiduously to understand the business of the day and often provide a lively commentary! In all this, it is clear that our Parliamentarians all share one united aim, which is to improve the lives of Caymanians and ensure that these islands continue to flourish to the benefit of all who are fortunate enough to live and work here.

Mr Speaker, I want to commend the work you have devoted to the Standing Orders of this Parliament which have contributed greatly to its smooth running and efficient operation. I note the ongoing work to adopt a Code of Conduct for Parliamentarians, which remains a gap in our governance structures. I hope this House will be able to reach agreement on the Code and that it can be published within this Parliament.

And now let me move on to share some observations on the Government's Strategic Priorities as set out in the Strategic Policy Statement (SPS) with the accompanying budget provisions:

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to see that Cayman's economic position remains strong. Moody's has reaffirmed Cayman's credit rating at Aa3, placing us in the distinguished company of the UK, France and Hong Kong - a signal of confidence we should not take for granted. It is the product of years of careful stewardship, and this Government's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of financial prudence is essential to sustaining it.

As the world faces the challenges of new technologies and AI, I am pleased that the Government also aims to greatly increase innovation and digitisation, including across our public services, enabling better sharing of information and a more seamless customer experience. I know that this aim is shared by the Deputy Governor and indeed the Deputy Governor designate, who will be leading the implementation of several new programmes. The introduction of the My eID programme is one example of this transformation, and I hope that all members of the Parliament are in possession of their new ID cards!

The financial and professional services industry remains the cornerstone of Cayman's economy (and government revenues!) It cements our international reputation, and we continue to benefit from Hon Premier's leadership of this important dossier. All the numbers point to growth as Cayman expands into new markets, and deepens its activity in areas such as reinsurance and family offices. The confidence that drives this growth is hard-won and it must be carefully maintained. I therefore applaud the Government's continued vigilance in meeting and indeed exceeding global regulatory standards as the country prepares for the forthcoming evaluation by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2027. Cayman's cross-government partnership approach to both policy and enforcement has been recognised by international bodies, and I welcome the commitment from Hon Premier to continue to evolve Cayman's regulation in areas such as sanctions compliance, anti-money laundering and virtual assets. Our "legitimate interest access" regime which enables approved enquirers to

receive data on beneficial ownership, has improved transparency, and I am pleased that Cayman is in discussion with the United Kingdom about more streamlined access to the register for law enforcement.

Under the leadership of the Hon Deputy Premier Gary Ruddy, our tourism sector has seen record growth, with visitor arrivals in the first quarter of 2026 reaching the highest quarterly total in our Island's history. New airline routes and increased capacity continue to bolster this success. So, as we benefit from economic growth across the board, we acknowledge the contributions made not only by the financial and professional services industry, but equally by private sector leaders in hospitality, development, healthcare and entrepreneurship as our economy continues to diversify.

Turning to immigration and workforce development: the Government's landmark Caymanian Protection Act represents a significant step in promoting opportunities for all Caymanians and managing the pace of population growth. In tandem, the National Workforce Plan, developed in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, will create more efficient processes and checks in our work permit system, aligning immigration policy with the needs of the economy, as we all benefit from living in a country where there are vastly more jobs than people. The Hon Minister Michael Myles has taken the right path in this complex area – consulting widely as policy and legislation is formulated, and I know this will continue to be his approach.

The Government has also recognised the importance of education and skills development in ensuring that all our young people finishing school, vocational training or university have a clear path to employment. I am delighted to see the Civil Service playing its part by welcoming this year a record number of over 200 summer interns to our ranks. The Hon Minister Rolston Anglin has also focused on improving access to early years education through the Early Childhood Assistance Programme – giving our youngest citizens a boost at the start of their school years - an investment that will pay dividends for the next generation.

As we gather here today, Mr Speaker, we are all too aware of the pressures that weigh upon our residents in terms of cost of living, housing and

traffic. The Government has recognised the need for short and longer term solutions to these challenges.

The introduction of Cayman's first housing policy is an important commitment, led by the Hon Minister Jay Ebanks, to addressing one of the most pressing concerns facing families on our islands, making home-ownership more accessible and helping us make our existing housing stock more sustainable and therefore cheaper to run, and in better repair. The Government's infrastructure plans focus also quite rightly on improving the transport network and easing congestion so that all our population can get to work and school more easily. Evolving plans for public transport solutions will be a game changer in this area. In addition, the Government and I have all heard loud and clear the public outcry against negligent driving and are considering ways to improve enforcement of our rules against driving under the influence of drugs or drink, distraction by a mobile device and excessive speeding. I believe we are united in our determination to make all our roads safer.

I could not address this Honourable House without speaking to the matter of health and wellbeing. Under the leadership of the Hon Minister Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, the Government is expanding mental health services for young people. I urge the Minister to continue her "whole of society" approach to mental health, which includes developing the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre into the world-class residential facility our community deserves. Meanwhile the Government continues its focus on further streamlining and improving primary and tertiary health care and ensuring that insurance options are sufficient to cover the needs of all our residents.

Sport is a key component of health and wellbeing, and Cayman's prowess in many disciplines continues to impress and to propel our reputation for excellence internationally. I'm sure you all join me in congratulating our many outstanding sportsmen and women, and look forward to Cayman's participation in the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Glasgow next month. For my part, I did the Flowers' Sea Swim in 55 minutes last week – not the fastest, but I was proud to support the Swim Free programme which

aims to make our children safer, while promoting the important relationship Cayman has enjoyed with the sea for centuries.

Mr Speaker, Cayman's natural environment is one of our greatest assets and one of our most important responsibilities. The designation of six new areas for environmental protection, the advancement of an anti-litter law and the single-use plastics ban are welcome steps. I am also glad that the Government has announced its plan to maintain Little Cayman's airport at its current site and to carry out the upgrades which will be necessary to meet international safety standards. Cayman's bid to have Little Cayman's marine protected areas designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site continues to have the strong support of His Majesty King Charles, who remains keenly interested in all our conservation efforts.

As we contemplate the Government's agenda, I also wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the partnership that we enjoy between the executive and the private sector and our many charities. I have the privilege of being patron of several organisations, and I know that the money they raise and the work that they do has real impact, for example in cancer support, meals on wheels, protection of vulnerable people in our society, education, inclusion and support for animals and the environment. I know that this Government is committed to developing these partnerships further so that we can all benefit from the large pool of expertise and commitment that the whole Cayman community represents.

Mr Speaker, as we contemplate with confidence the growth and development across our islands, it is wise to consider the crucial role played by our uniformed services in ensuring that residents, businesses and visitors enjoy a very high level of safety, with relatively low levels of serious crime compared to many places in our region and indeed the world as a whole. It is easy to take this for granted, but it is only made possible through the leadership of Police Commissioner, Kurt Walton, in partnership with many others, including Coastguard Commandant Robert Scotland, CBC Director Bruce Smith, Prison Director Daniel Greaves and Fire Chief Randy Rankin. I note that the RCIPS detection rate for violent crimes stands at over 50% – this is the kind of ratio that most jurisdictions aspire

to, or should i say dream of. Most strikingly, over the past 18 months, 28 dangerous offenders were all convicted and sentenced to a combined total of 400 years in prison – a clear demonstration of our mantra that violent crime will not be tolerated in Cayman.

I know that all Honourable members of this House join me in paying tribute to all of our uniformed and emergency services who serve every day, often putting themselves at risk to keep us all safe. In the same vein, and as we gather together at the beginning of hurricane season, Cayman continues to prepare and plan for handling crises – whether natural or man-made. We applaud the efforts of all the staff and volunteers at Hazard Management Cayman Islands, the Cayman Islands Regiment and our “Gold, Silver and Bronze” leaders who manage our strategic and tactical response.

We know we also face some pressures in the security arena, including the volume of cases moving through the courts, overcrowding in our Northward Prison, and the potential inflow of migrants from neighbouring countries including Cuba. The Government, and the Hon Minister Nickolas Da Costa in particular, are making steady progress in mitigating all of these risks.

Another area where the Government has recognised the need to make progress is Safeguarding of our children and vulnerable adults. The Hon Minister Isaac Rankine and his team have established of a working group to revise our legislation to better protect our communities, including from online harms. I hope we will also have a Children’s Commissioner in place before the end of 2026.

As we look ahead to the Parliamentary agenda and the Government’s policy choices over the coming year, we can also be confident that good governance and the rule of law will continue to guide our decision-making. I am grateful for the work of the independent bodies that oversee public life in Cayman - the Attorney General and his Chambers, the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, the Director of Public Prosecutions and of course our Judiciary under Chief Justice Margaret Ramsey Hale.

We also benefit from the quiet but significant work of our independent Commissions, which all play a role not only in ensuring compliance with, for example, international human rights law, but which also reach out to explain and educate our students and the wider community in, for example, how the Constitution works. The Commission on Standards in Public Life and the Anti-Corruption Commission will be launching a campaign next month to remind us all how we can best satisfy the high standards of transparency and accountability which have won Cayman respect and confidence on the international stage.

And as we mark over a year since the last election, I would also note Hon Premier's stated intent to reform our elections law, including as it pertains to campaign financing rules -an issue raised by both the international and the domestic observer missions following last year's election. A new Election Boundary Commission will be announced shortly with the aim of reporting in the spring of 2027, providing enough time for this House to review our constituency borders in time for the next election.

None of this work of government would be possible without the dedication of our civil servants, who are responsible for implementing the decisions made by the Government and by this Parliament. They are often unseen, but we all benefit from their policy skills, customer service and project management. Today I want to mark a moment of particular significance: the forthcoming retirement of the Deputy Governor and Head of the Civil Service, and my friend, the Honourable Franz Manderson. Our Deputy Governor has led the civil service with distinction, professionalism and integrity; his commitment to making lives better for the Caymanian people has defined his long and remarkable career. On behalf of all who have had the privilege of working alongside him, I know the whole House will join me in extending our congratulations and respect.

I am equally delighted to extend my congratulations to Mrs Gloria McField - Nixon, who will become our new Deputy Governor on the 8th July. I have every confidence that she will lead the Civil Service with the same excellence and dedication that has characterised her whole career, and I look forward to working closely with her in the months ahead.

As I draw to a close, I invite you all to reflect on Cayman's position in the world and our relationship with the United Kingdom. This year we witnessed increased fragmentation of the global order, and a significant deterioration in the international security and governance architecture. The Cayman Islands will need to quickly pivot to shield ourselves as best as possible from these impacts. I am pleased that the Government has had the support of this House in taking swift interventions to insulate our residents from the shock of fluctuations in fuel prices due to global geopolitical events, which is a major driver of the cost of living locally.

The United Kingdom continues to guarantee Cayman's external security, offering the benefits of Britain's strong relationship with the United States, and the UK's global reach at the UN including as a permanent member of the Security Council. I was delighted to see the UK's Blue Belt environmental programme expanded in Cayman this year, providing finance for a research expedition into some of our deepest waters, which unearthed one or two hitherto unseen creatures from those depths. The UK will continue to support Cayman as we approach sea border negotiations with our neighbours, and as we continue to battle against the flow of drugs and weapons in our region.

Over the past year we have welcomed visits by our Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty, The All-Party Parliamentary Group made up of representatives from the British House of Commons and House of Lords, and the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, who attended the Overseas Territories Speakers' Conference last month – very ably organised by you Mr Speaker and your staff.

On his visit to the United Kingdom last autumn for the Joint Ministerial Council, the Hon Premier and his delegation engaged with the top levels of the British Government including Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, and a meeting with His Majesty King Charles at a special small reception at Buckingham Palace, where we were able to admire the splendid room behind the famous balcony at the Palace. These visits – and there are more besides – demonstrate the high level of engagement between our governments, and the respect and commitment that lies behind that.

Tomorrow, I travel to the United Kingdom for our annual meeting of Ambassadors, Governors and High Commissioners around the world – I always find a high level of appreciation and interest in Cayman, not just as a financial centre but increasingly as a strong Caribbean island whose influence continues to be felt beyond our borders. I believe there is also a recognition that the way in which Cayman manages its relationship with the United Kingdom as an Overseas Territory, through partnership and through respect, is a beacon for others to follow, bringing significant benefits to both sides. On a personal level, I am particularly grateful to all members of the Government (present and past) for their patience and friendship as we work together.

Mr Speaker, I have had the honour and privilege of serving as Governor of these extraordinary Islands for three years now, and every time I stand in this Honourable House, I am struck by the same sense of pride in what Cayman is and what it aspires to be. The people of these islands display strong resilience, a generosity of spirit and a determination to build something good for future generations – and that is truly inspiring.

To you Mr Speaker, and to all the Honourable Members of this House, thank you for your service, your dedication and your commitment - it is a privilege to serve alongside you.

God bless this House, and God bless these wonderful Cayman Islands.

ENDS