

Speech *from the Throne*

On the Occasion of the
Convening of the Legislature



*Building a Fairer,
More Stable and
Affordable Bermuda*

Delivered by

His Excellency the Governor
Friday, 14 March 2025



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

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HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR
MR. ANDREW MURDOCH

14TH MARCH 2025

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, thousands of Bermudians cast their votes in the February General Election. A third, successive mandate cemented the people's trust in the Government and endorsed the vision for building a fairer Bermuda.

The people of Bermuda have entrusted this government with a renewed mandate—a mandate not just to lead, but to listen, to collaborate, and to build a more inclusive Bermuda where every voice is heard, every Bermudian has a stake in a shared future, and where every Bermudian will not merely survive, but thrive.

While this election reaffirmed support for that vision, it also serves as a reminder of the work still to be done. In the months ahead, the Government will act urgently to tackle Bermuda's stubbornly high cost of living, further strengthen the economy, and ensure that the government serves every Bermudian with fairness and accountability.

CREATING AN AFFORDABLE BERMUDA

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, no economy is immune to the effects of global inflation and rising costs. Bermudians are feeling that pressure daily. The Government must act decisively to tackle this problem, ensuring that duty relief reaches the people, who need lower costs, and not just corporate bottom lines.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, food prices are shocking and there seems to be no respite from the ever-increasing costs. The Government has taken steps to reduce costs for grocers and wholesalers importing goods into Bermuda with the expectation that these cost savings would be reflected at the register. To ensure that such reductions are passed onto consumers and not to profits, the Government will implement fair pricing control and pricing transparency measures while expanding the categories of essential goods accruing 0% import duty. Further, the Government will amend the Cost of Living Commission Act 1974 to expand the investigatory powers of the Cost of Living Commission to examine the books and records of all businesses involved in the supply of food and other essential goods. For far too long business has profited at the expense of everyday Bermudians and the sunshine of public scrutiny cannot just apply to the Government, it must also apply to those on whom Bermudians rely to purchase the goods to sustain themselves.

Recent experience in specific sectors in Bermuda has decreased the choice of Bermudians in the marketplace. These actions seldom result in reduced costs, and the lack of regulation increases the risk of harm to the local consumer. Therefore, the Government will review and amend the Regulatory Authority's mandate to oversee both regulated and unregulated sectors, ensuring transparent pricing, fair competition, enhanced consumer protection, and the power to prevent unnecessary concentration of market power in key sectors.

As the government ensures that those supplying essential retail goods treat Bermudians fairly, the government must ensure that financial services entities treat their customers fairly. The Government will continue to strengthen laws to protect mortgage and lending customers facing financial difficulties and update the Lender Code of Conduct to ensure more fair borrowing practices. The Regulation & Competition Authority will be empowered to impose penalties on financial institutions that do not abide by the codes of conduct.

The Government will work with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and industry stakeholders to review home insurance regulations and explore policy reforms that allow homeowners to select appropriate coverage levels based on realistic risk assessments. The goal of these changes is simple, to lower this expense for Bermuda's homeowners.

To further tackle the cost of energy, the Government will advance amendments to the Electricity Act 2016 to limit categories of recoverable expenses that Belco is allowed to pass on to consumers and will empower the Regulatory Authority to implement fairer pricing on retail electricity tariffs. The requirement for a mandatory connection to Belco will be reviewed to allow for a more diverse and independent approach to energy generation.

SUPPORTING BERMUDIANS THROUGH ALL STAGES OF LIFE

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, every generation is defined by unique socio-economic factors that dictate how lives are lived and how we interact within our community. This "sandwich generation" is working, raising their children, and concerned for their education and development, all while caring for ageing parents. The Government's commitment, as outlined in its election platform, is to support Bermudians through all stages of life. The approach will be people-centred, focused on ensuring that every Bermudian has the tools and opportunities not just to survive but to thrive.

The legislation to implement an Education Authority will change how public education is funded, governed, and led. Execution on the critical work to transform public education will continue as signature schools develop and mould our young people for their eventual careers. Amendments to the Education Act 1996 will enhance and strengthen inclusive and special education for children with additional needs and disabilities.

For students and their parents who are looking for additional options to fund higher education, the government will expand access to funding for Bermudians to obtain tertiary education, such as the establishment of a hardship education fund, increased scholarships, and government-supported partnerships with financial institutions and the private sector. The Government will reintroduce a guaranteed loan programme, with additional legislation that will allow for the immediate garnishment of wages should persons not repay their guaranteed loan.

Relief for families who are caring for their ageing parents, will come through the construction of at least one new senior daycare facility. This will reduce the expenses of these families as they seek care for their loved ones during the workweek.

Additionally, the government will make parental leave available to a legal guardian or adoptive parent, and amendments to the existing regime of paternity and maternity leave will be made to provide increased flexibility for parents in the critical early time of a child's life.

It is essential that Bermuda's most vulnerable children, those who are in care of the state, are best cared for. While the staff have done an admirable job, more must be done to update laws and invest in additional facilities to ensure that our system is fit for purpose. With increased mental health challenges in our adolescent population, the Government must do all that it can to ensure that these young people can overcome their circumstances, become successful adults and parents of the future. Therefore, the Government will conduct a full review of the Children Act 1998 to update the Act to ensure that its provisions are in keeping with modern best practice, flexible enough to handle the additional dimensions of caring for children in 2025.

HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

With the creation of a ministry devoted to housing solutions, the Government has ascribed the highest priority to the development of affordable housing for Bermudians. The expansion of housing supply in Bermuda is critical to our future economic fortune, and the Government will leave no stone unturned in this effort.

In addition to partnering with the private sector to offer rent-to-own programmes and completing the amendments to the Landlord and Tenant Act to support mutually positive rental relationships, during this Session, the Government will advance amendments to the Acquisition of Land Act 1970 and the Bermuda Housing Act 1980 to provide for a more efficient, streamlined means by which to address vacant and derelict properties. These units will be returned to the housing stock, providing additional housing for Bermudians.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, in recent years, the bedrock neighbourhoods of Mary Victoria Road, Alexandra Road and Cedarpark have been forced into a “band-aid” existence. This unique and proud area cannot be adequately served in this ongoing, piecemeal way. Therefore, the Government will develop a master plan for these areas to address long-running issues, including water & sewage, lighting and general home improvement.

The Private Roads (Improvement) Act 1969 and the Private Roads (Lighting) Act 1984 will be amended to provide greater authority for the Minister responsible for public works to act in the interests of general safety of a residential area in the installation of traffic calming measures, mirrors and other modifications aimed at making our neighbourhoods safer.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, the institution of a corporate income tax for Bermuda presents an opportunity to implement meaningful reforms to Bermuda’s tax regime that will ensure the burden of taxation is fairer while also ensuring that Bermuda’s economy remains competitive and local businesses can thrive.

The Government will ensure that these new funds are managed prudently to reduce Bermuda's debt, while also making the required investments to upgrade Bermuda's infrastructure and improve the delivery of public services.

Bermuda will be able to accomplish these two fiscal necessities while also building a sovereign wealth fund to the benefit of all Bermudians through strategic investments. Therefore, in this session the Government will establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund for Bermuda with an independent board to invest excess proceeds from the Corporate Income Tax for the benefit of future generations of Bermudians.

Tax reform is key to tackling Bermuda's cost of living and cost of doing business - and during this session, the Government will implement the recommendations from the forthcoming report from the Tax Reform Commission to ensure that appropriate fiscal guardrails are established for the new revenue from the Corporate Income Tax.

With the recent compensation agreement reached with public sector unions, it is now time to ensure that public sector pensions are sustainable for the future. Accordingly, the Government will introduce amendments to the Public Service Superannuation Act 1981 that will eliminate the growing unfunded liability to taxpayers and ensure the Fund's stability into the future. The amendments will also restore the annual cost of living increase for public sector retirees which has been suspended since 2014.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, the record growth in the international business sector has undergirded the local economy. The success within the IB industries confirms Bermuda's position as a jurisdiction of choice. This success is achievable in other sectors and the Government is committed to fostering the necessary environment for the growth of local businesses. In keeping with the 2025 Platform undertakings, the Government will:

- (i) Continue the implementation of Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy to drive business expansion, support entrepreneurs, attract investment, and develop local talent.
- (ii) Complete the implementation of cooperative legislation and establish a Registrar for Cooperatives, supported by a dedicated Government department to administer and promote the sector.

- (iii) Develop and implement a National Entrepreneurship Strategy and a Digital Entrepreneurship Strategy that will support an expansion of small and medium-sized business ownership focusing on women, youth, and Bermudian business owners.
- (iv) Advance Bermuda's position as a digital finance hub by supporting voluntary digital identity solutions and innovation-friendly regulations to attract more investment while ensuring Bermudians benefit from new opportunities.
- (v) Cut red-tape by streamlining business setup and operation processes while finalising a "one-stop shop" for registration and licensing to encourage entrepreneurship and new local businesses.

Recognising the protracted and sometimes acrimonious debate around the Government's marine protection intentions, the Government will pause the implementation of new marine protected areas until an agreement is reached with local fishermen on better enforcement and fairer data collection rules to support any new marine protected areas.

Bermuda's tourism industry continues to rebound, but the Government is determined to do more to support investment in Bermuda and during this session the Government will advance amendments to the Tourism Investment Act 2017 to include smaller guest houses as well as health and medical tourism sites, making these developments eligible for the suite of concessions available under the Act.

TRANSFORMING HEALTHCARE COVERAGE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, the journey to universal healthcare has been a challenging one, interrupted by 2020's declaration of the global pandemic and the ongoing need to make the existing, inefficient system still deliver results for our people.

While the work continues to implement a universal healthcare system focused on efficiency, prevention and primary care, guaranteeing that every resident has access to necessary medical services with reduced co-pays, the Government will expand HIP to include an annual preventative doctor's visit and examine the options to expand specialist coverage under FutureCare.

The government is committed to ensuring that our hospital resources are readily available for those in need of acute care which includes transitioning patients who no longer require acute care to suitable alternative care settings. This approach is crucial for freeing up acute care hospital beds, reducing extended wait times in emergency room for those who require inpatient stays, and managing the BHB's operational costs effectively.

To support this transition requires affordable long-term community care, designed to ensure that support is directed to those who need it most. Following these initiatives, other measures will be introduced to facilitate the timely discharge of patients from the hospital once acute care is no longer necessary. These actions are vital in maintaining accessible and timely hospital care for those who require it most.

The power to discharge may free up space in the hospital, but if persons have nowhere to go that will only increase stress on families. There are currently 4 care homes that are in various phases of development, and the Government is committed to expanding the interest free loan scheme for home modifications for seniors and the disabled.

A comprehensive review of the Mental Health Act 1968 will be undertaken to modernize processes and provide greater protection for those who interact with Bermuda's public mental health services. Mental health and wellness are essential to our community's well-being, and access to the resources for those needing this assistance will be provided.

During this Session, the Legislature will also be invited to consider these additional healthcare-related measures:

- (i) Enforcing a ban on industrially produced trans fats to promote healthier diets and reduce the health risks they present,
- (ii) Restrictions on flavoured vaping products to protect public health, especially among young people,
- (iii) Repeal of the sections of the Criminal Code 1907 that address pregnancy termination and the requirement for Committee approval
- (iv) A legislative review to ensure rights of accessibility and opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

PROMOTING A MORE RESPONSIVE AND PEOPLE-CENTERED GOVERNMENT

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, too many of our laws have not kept pace with modern approaches to the administration of justice. There is a need for law reform, and the Commission charged with advising the Government on these matters will be reinstated and restored to working order. During this Session, the Government will address the following matters of law reform:

- (i) Amendments to the Young Offenders Act 1950 to modernise the treatment of young people impacted by the criminal justice system, commencing with an increase to the age of criminal responsibility from 8 to 14.
- (ii) Developing a statutory regime for the compensation of those persons wrongfully imprisoned and convicted
- (iii) A comprehensive review of the system of Legal Aid to promote equitable access to justice for all

US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart observed: **“Justice is what fairness looks like.”** As the Government’s General Election Platform said, **“A justice system focused solely on punishment fails to address the root causes of crime or support long-term solutions.”** The Government believes in restorative justice and crime prevention, emphasising accountability, rehabilitation and personal growth. The Government will continue to implement the National Violence Reduction Strategy to break the cycle of violence and create safer environments for all residents.

To complement the proposed legal reforms and the crime prevention approaches, there is a need to determine the status of the security services and their mission in this modern Bermuda. Government House and the Government have agreed that the 2014 Security and Defence Review must be refreshed, and how to accomplish this critical task will be the subject of discussions on those areas reserved to the Governor and those delegated to the Government of Bermuda. This year the Royal Bermuda Regiment celebrates its 60th Anniversary, and the Government looks forward to appropriately marking the enduring contribution of this organisation to Bermuda society.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, our 1968 Constitution that was intended to be a bridge to independence within five years is approaching its own 60th anniversary. There is bipartisan agreement that reform of the 1968 Order is required. This, taken with the fresh call for voting reform, sets the stage for the commencement of a fulsome consultative process to discuss these matters, including reducing the number of seats in the House of Assembly, believer status, and absentee voting for residents and students overseas.

“One man/woman, one vote, each vote of equal value” remains the system under which Governments are elected in Bermuda, and it bears remembering that it was just in 2003 that this genuine universal adult suffrage was fully realised. Electoral and Constitutional reforms should mirror the times in which we live, and the strength of systems is in their ability to adjust to meet the demands of the times.

The policy work on the precise nature of that consultative process has begun, and a report will be introduced for the consideration of the Legislature as we wrestle with this critical requirement for the advancement of our constitutional system and relationship with His Majesty’s Government in London.

With the substantive issues in relation to the Commission of Inquiry into Historic Land Losses now resolved in the Courts, the Legislature will again be invited to take note of the Commission’s Report and to consider their findings and recommendations.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, the development, implementation and execution of Government policy and programmes is made possible through a dedicated and impartial Public Service. Retention of Public Officers in many technical areas has often proven difficult as private sector salaries cannot be matched by the public sector. However, in addition to the work done to address the salaries of public officers, the Government will launch a Public Service Scholarship Programme, providing university tuition support, in exchange for a 5-year commitment to public service or public healthcare. This will be accompanied by the modernisation of the Bermudian Public Service Graduate Scheme with competitive incentives to attract and develop skilled future public-sector leaders on a 5-year track.

Public Officers must also have the tools by which to deliver on these mandates and in the first instance there is much to be done make delivery more seamless, removing processes that distract from the execution of core objectives. The Government will continue the digitisation of government services, providing greater access to online services, including increasing options for online payments to improve convenience and efficiency for the public, and as part of the digital transformation of government services, the Government will increase the amount of government information that is open and accessible online to reduce the unenviable burden of PATI requests on public officers. This applies to government boards, quangos, and government financial information. A simplified Project Management and Procurement Code of Practice will create a faster process for awarding government contracts to accelerate key initiatives, including the upgrading of Bermuda's public infrastructure.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, in addition to the measures set out above, during this Session, the Legislature will be invited to consider the following matters:

- (i) Clean Air Regulations
- (ii) Electronic Communications (Cybercrime) Amendment Bill
- (iii) Insurance Amendment Bill
- (iv) Banks & Deposit Companies (Over-the-Limit Fees) Regulations
- (v) Banks & Deposit Companies (Access to Banking) Amendment Bill

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, 100 years ago five black men – A.B. Place, Henry Hughes, Joaquin Martin, David Augustus and James Rabain, pooled their resources and with 750 pounds gave birth the Bermuda Recorder. Mr. Place was the driving force and he once said: **“I’ve known the time I’ve gone to that office and knelt down and prayed to God to give me strength and wisdom to carry on the publication of the Recorder for just one more day, just so we might be able to rectify some of the conditions which prevailed at the time with regard to my people, the black people of Bermuda.”**

In reflecting upon this year's centenary of the Recorder's founding, all Bermudians can draw inspiration from this story of triumph out of adversity, the pooling of resources for a common purpose and the true spirit of entrepreneurship that laid the foundation for the alternative, representative, media voice in Bermuda. We are all heirs to such perseverance and the Government is determined to create the conditions that support, reward and celebrate those who would join in the task of building a fairer Bermuda.

Traditionally, at this point, the Governor is permitted to add some words of his own:

The Governor

Madame President, and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, I am grateful for the convention which by tradition allows the Governor to add a few words of his or her own at the end of the Throne Speech.

It is a privilege to be part of this tradition so recently after my swearing in.

The importance of fairness, good governance and accountability are at the heart of the Constitution. I therefore welcome the Government's commitment to serve every Bermudian with fairness and accountability.

The importance of these principles, and the maintenance of, and respect for, the separation of powers of institutions under the Constitution cannot be underestimated.

Bermuda is not immune to global issues. As we convene, the world feels increasingly uncertain and unstable. In such times there is a need not just to maintain these principles of good governance, but to protect and strengthen them.

The stability that Bermuda offers to its people and visitors, including with its world class regulatory mechanisms and independent judiciary, are essential to Bermuda's health and future prosperity. As Governor I will contribute to championing these principles in the execution of my duties, and in partnership with the Government.

As the challenges being faced in Bermuda have evolved over time, so must the law. I therefore look forward to supporting the Government's commitment to reinstitute and restore the Law Reform Commission. A well-resourced and effective Commission, which engages with members of the public, civil society and institutions, can play a key role in modernising criminal and civil law for the benefit of Bermuda.

I also welcome the commitment to refresh the 2014 Security and Defence Review. It is, as the Government acknowledge, a critical task. This work will help ensure the uniformed services have the strategic direction to continue to meet the needs of Bermuda both now and in the years to come.

My time exploring the island has brought into sharp relief the importance and extent of Bermuda's unique natural environment. With climate change and global losses of biodiversity, the danger to the environment is clear and present. I note the Government's plan to protect the environment and encourage all those involved to work together and act before it is too late. We all have a duty to do what we can to protect the environment for those generations that follow us.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly, I declare this Session open and may God guide you in your deliberations.

His Excellency Andrew Murdoch
Governor and Commander-in-Chief
14th March 2025

*To commemorate the 100th Anniversary
of the Bermuda Recorder - 18th July 1925*



The Founders

A.B. Place, Henry Hughes, Joaquin Martin,
David Augustus and James Rabain



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA