



**2025/26 SESSION
of the
BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**

13 MARCH 2026

(Sitting number 31 of the 2025-2026 Session)

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**Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., JP, MP
Speaker**

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10:02 AM**

Sitting Number 31 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.
Once the Sergeant has us sealed off there, the Clerk will lead us in prayers.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: Members, the House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 6 March and 9 March 2026]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes from the 6th and the 9th of March have been circulated.
Are any amendments required?
There are none.
The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

[Minutes of 6 March and 9 March 2026 confirmed.]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: I have an announcement regarding Member, MP Famous. He has indicated he will be absent again today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: There are two papers this morning.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: The first one is going to be introduced by the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

GOVERNMENT FEES AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2026

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation, and in accordance with section 36(3) of the Bermuda Constitution [Order 1968], I have the honour to attach and submit, for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly, the [Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2026](#), proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance, in exercise of the powers conferred by section 2 of the Government Fees Act 1965.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The second is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.
Minister.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023–2027

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: BUSINESS RETENTION INVESTMENT PROMOTION 2023–2027 UPDATE

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.
Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit, for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly, the Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027 Strategic Priority 2: Business Retention and Investment Promotion 2023–2027 Update.

The Speaker: Thank you. That's all the papers and communications for this morning.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: We have four Statements this morning.

The first is in the name of the Minister of National Security.
Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, colleagues and the listening public.

ROYAL BERMUDA REGIMENT DEPLOYMENT TO JAMAICA—HURRICANE MELISSA RECOVERY SUPPORT

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on Bermuda's continued commitment to [support the people of Jamaica](#) following the catastrophic devastation caused by Hurricane Melissa.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will recall that when Hurricane Melissa made landfall on 28 October 2025 as a Category 5 storm, it caused widespread destruction across Jamaica. More than 700,000 people were affected. Mr. Speaker, 27 communities were cut off, and more than 200,000 homes were destroyed or severely damaged. Critical infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and water systems, remain degraded as national authorities continue the long process of recovery and rebuilding.

Mr. Speaker, in the immediate aftermath of the storm, the Bermuda Government made a clear commitment to the Government and people of Jamaica that we would provide humanitarian assistance. I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that Bermuda has fulfilled that commitment.

Following reconnaissance conducted by the Royal Bermuda Regiment in November, and further engagement with the Jamaica Defence Force, Cabinet approved the deployment of up to 27 Royal Bermuda Regiment soldiers to Jamaica from 15 to 28 February 2026.

Mr. Speaker, the Regiment was embedded with the Engineer Regiment of the Jamaica Defence Force and also worked alongside the Guyana Defence Force, and contingents from the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands, as part of a coordinated recovery effort. Their primary task was to repair roofs damaged by Hurricane Melissa in the Parish of St. Elizabeth, one of the areas most severely impacted by the storm. This work provided immediate, tangible relief to affected families and helped create the conditions necessary for sustained recovery.

Mr. Speaker, this deployment was deliberately structured to ensure that Bermuda's contribution was practical, focused, and aligned with Jamaica's identified priorities. The Jamaica Defence Force is leading and coordinating all projects, ensuring that the skills

and manpower provided by Bermuda were directed where they were most needed.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to note that all soldiers deployed on this mission volunteered to do so. These men and women stepped forward willingly to serve in another country where there is a need for humanitarian aid. They operated in field conditions and met strict pre-deployment requirements, including medical clearance and fitness standards. The Regiment was accommodated at Forward Operating Base Luana in St. Elizabeth, with logistical and life support provided by the Jamaica Defence Force to ensure that Bermuda's presence did not place additional strain on local resources.

Mr. Speaker, whilst this was a physically demanding deployment for all involved, it provided the opportunity to undertake a focused overseas operational mission. All deployed personnel had the opportunity to apply their existing specialist skills and further develop them through practical experience. The deployment also reinforced the strong relationship that the Royal Bermuda Regiment maintains with the Jamaica Defence Force and, with the additional personnel joining from the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, the relationship with fellow British Overseas Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the total cost of the two-week deployment, approved by Cabinet, was up to \$241,385.00. This included transportation, equipment, supplies, and an operational allowance that reflected the demanding conditions under which our soldiers are serving.

Mr. Speaker, along with our National Disaster Coordinator, I visited our soldiers in Jamaica to see their progress first-hand and to witness the impact they were having in Jamaica. His Excellency, the Governor, also joined me on this visit. What I saw, Mr. Speaker, was a Bermuda contingent of eager, professional and organised soldiers who were making an immense impact on the lives of people in [the] St Elizabeth Parish.

Mr. Speaker, remarkably, our troops were erecting a new roof at a rate of every two days and were doing so with the utmost expertise and palpable enthusiasm. I could see true Bermudian craftsmanship on full display with astounding results. Added to the skill and speed with which our soldiers were working, it was clear to me that their morale was very high and that they were enjoying the opportunity to be of service to their fellow man. All of Bermuda ought to be proud of the efforts of our soldiers on this deployment, as I am.

Mr. Speaker, this mission represented more than a deployment. It was a demonstration of solidarity between small island countries that understand the realities of vulnerability to extreme weather events. By working with the Jamaica Defence Force and the contingents from Guyana, the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, Bermuda was making a huge statement on the international stage about cooperation and collaboration amongst regional partners in times of distress and need.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you to note that a contingent from Ghana and Rwanda was also in Jamaica to provide support in the recovery efforts. Their presence demonstrated a wide-ranging response to Jamaica's plight and brought an even greater international flavour to the recovery efforts.

Bermuda understands that disaster recovery does not end when the headlines fade. The transition from emergency response to long-term rebuilding is often the most difficult phase. By deploying skilled and disciplined personnel to Jamaica, Bermuda contributed where the need remains real and where our capabilities could make a measurable difference.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Simons, and his team for their preparations and planning to make this deployment a reality. I hasten to especially thank all members of the Royal Bermuda Regiment who volunteered for this deployment. Their willingness to serve beyond our shores reflects the professionalism, discipline, and spirit of service that this Honourable House has come to expect from the Regiment.

I assure this Honourable House that the efforts of the Royal Bermuda Regiment are definitely having a lasting impact on St. Elizabeth in particular, and Jamaica in general, and I am proud that our Government facilitated the deployment. Mr. Speaker, not only did our soldiers leave an indelible mark on Jamaica, the same could be said in reverse. Our soldiers left Jamaica with an enormous sense of pride and accomplishment in the knowledge that by the sweat of their brows and the labour of their limbs, they made a real difference in the lives of Jamaican citizens, and having earned their immeasurable respect. I have no doubt that our soldiers will recall their time in Jamaica for years to come and will do so with fondness and pride.

Mr. Speaker, the Greek philosopher Ennius in the 3rd century BC coined the phrase, *A sure friend is known when in difficulty*. Otherwise well known as, *A friend in need is a friend indeed*. So, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda and Jamaica are indeed friends, and in Jamaica's hour of need we have honoured that friendship. Bermuda made a promise to support the people of Jamaica following Melissa's onslaught and this deployment was the fulfilment of that promise.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Home Affairs.
Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

UNLOCKING IMPORTS: ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO DIVERSIFY IMPORTS

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to update this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda on the [continued progress being made](#) by the Ministry of Home Affairs to address affordability and the cost of living in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, let me first remind my Honourable House and colleagues that in November 2025, I tabled in this Honourable House The Affordable Bermuda Agenda, [Building a Strategy to Address] the Cost of Living report. This was indeed a reflection of the Government's commitment to address the cost of living and present to the people of Bermuda the specific actions that the Ministry of Home Affairs would take to reduce the cost of living for Bermudian households.

Mr. Speaker, as a backdrop, in March 2025, the Ministry undertook the collection of data from over 2,200 residents, who provided accounts of their experiences purchasing groceries. Many residents reported that the elevated cost of staple food items was significantly eroding their financial resources, leaving minimal disposable income and, in some cases, insufficient funds for household savings. The Ministry also engaged with stakeholders across the industry, notably wholesalers and retailers, who conveyed that attracting new international suppliers to a market of Bermuda's scale presented considerable challenges.

Their challenge, as presented to the Ministry was rooted in the fact that that US companies often regard Bermuda's import volumes as insufficient to warrant the attention in contrast to other larger jurisdictions or that they remain unaware of the business opportunities that the Bermudian market offers.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry heard and sought to address the supply chain dynamics and the implications of import-related costs that impact the price of goods before they reach the [consumer]. We also heard the recommendations emanating from the Cost-of-Living Summit [2025] and resolved to brainstorm and find [cost]-effective ways to diversify food sources and to help lower prices at the till.

Mr. Speaker, acting directly on the imports pillar of the Affordable Bermuda Agenda, the Ministry built a pathway for US suppliers to deepen their engagement in the Bermuda market through partnership with the US Consul General. At the Bermuda's Cost of Living Summit, the US Consul General Antoinette Hurtado took note of our challenges and met with the Ministry to offer support. The result was a pledged to provide greater support to Bermudian businesses with expanded market opportunities and introductions.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry explored and found a way to connect these US suppliers directly with Bermuda's greatest areas of needs through imports, beginning first with our essential good items. In December 2025, the US Consul General confirmed that her colleagues at the US Department of Commerce and the US Department of Agriculture [USDA] were in support and would host a virtual trade event featuring the

Bermuda market, giving American companies a direct platform to learn further about the opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, subsequently, on March 3, 2026, the US Department of Agriculture hosted a virtual trade event with more than 60 US businesses registered to participate. These businesses offered a mix of services ranging from supply chain warehousing and distribution services for food and beverage and the export of US agricultural products to international markets.

Mr. Speaker, the virtual trade event was moderated by Mr. Adam Shanks, Director of the International Trade Administration, US Department of Commerce and presentations given by Ms. Katherine Woody, a representative of the US Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service [FAS] and Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office [CBATO] in Miami.

Mr. Speaker, CBATO is the international agency arm of the US Department of Agriculture. Ms. Woody shared three main focus areas that support US businesses exporting food and agricultural products. These were:

1. Providing market intelligence that includes data and analysis of the opportunities for doing business in markets around the world.
2. Trade policy advocacy to expand and maintain market access for US food and agricultural products.
3. Trade promotion activities, including foreign market development and export assistance for US companies.

Mr. Speaker, during the session the US Consul General highlighted the strong economic relationship between the US and Bermuda and acknowledged the US as one of our largest trading partners and underscored the desire to maintain such ties.

Mr. Speaker, businesses were further informed about the market opportunities in Bermuda through presentations by the Bermuda Business Development Agency [BDA] and my colleague the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Mr. Speaker, BDA Managing Director Kendaree Burgess and Head of Business Development David Parker presented Bermuda's market profile, admitted as one of the highest per capita income markets globally, with currency at parity with the US dollar, a dependable landed-goods supply chain, and established trade links across the US, Canada and the UK. They also outlined the Bermuda's role as the structured point of connection and the agency's capacity to identify and advance commercially viable opportunities across sectors.

The session concluded with a presentation from the Minister of Economy and Labour offering US businesses a comprehensive overview of Bermuda's economic landscape and opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, during the forum I was pleased to share the objectives of the Ministry and the Affordable Bermuda Agenda and my desire to act on what the

wholesalers and retailers had told us, that they needed new international supply partners to diversify the import market and bring down costs for Bermudian households. We outlined the logistics case for Bermuda including direct container shipping from the US East Coast and transit times of two to five days from New York, New Jersey and Florida.

Also underscored during the presentation that we were supported by reputable port agents, cold chain infrastructure for perishables, less-than-container-load options, and a well-defined customs clearance process. Mr. Speaker, together, the Bermuda team shared that Bermuda is open for business.

Mr. Speaker, but the Ministry did not stop at the virtual forum. Yesterday, representatives from the USDA and FAS who assisted in facilitating the virtual forum came and visited the Island to engage directly with the local businesses and regulators of the import sector. They heard first-hand the challenges that the Ministry shared with them and further committed to future engagements to remove barriers for suppliers. As a result of the facilitated engagement, invitations to upcoming trade events, free of charge, was offered to Bermuda's market participants.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry accepts its role in project managing and facilitating new relationships in aid of our mandate to address costs. We affirm the road to systematically address cost in Bermuda and we also accept that it will not happen overnight, but we are resourceful, and we are holding an unwavering focus to deliver.

We are modernising our import processes, seeking to strengthen local competition, and removing the barriers that have kept new suppliers away. In short, Mr. Speaker, we took the concerns raised by the public and the private sector identified the challenges, and this Government built a bridge.

Mr. Speaker, the response from the United States businesses participating in the virtual trade event was notably positive and constructive. The Ministry believes that change is possible and affordability can be a reality. The Affordable Bermuda Agenda evidences a roadmap of how the Government ministries actualise through collaboration alongside stakeholder partners to deliver meaningful engagements. The forum and recent visit anchored the value of the work the Ministry is doing on behalf of the people of Bermuda. We are affirmed in our direction and no longer will accept the narrative that tell us that our size makes us powerless and unable to evolve. Brick by brick, Mr. Speaker, we are building the Bermuda that future generations will thank us for re-building.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.

Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023–2027

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: BUSINESS RETENTION INVESTMENT PROMOTION 2023–2027 UPDATE

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to continue reporting on Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027, following my previous report on Strategic Priority 1: Local and International Business Retention and Expansion. Today, I will speak on [Strategic Priority 2](#): Business Attraction and Investment Promotion.

Mr. Speaker, Strategic Priority 2 focuses on consistent, credible investment promotion and a smoother investor journey, supported by modern tools and fit-for purpose policy. Over the period, the BDA has improved how Bermuda is presented internationally by updating sector-specific marketing materials, developing pitch decks specific to priority industries, and progressing a redesigned website to make information easier to access. Public and private partners have also aligned messaging across investor engagements, supported by additional public relations capacity to extend reach and improve consistency.

To improve [conversion] and retention, the BDA is strengthening investor aftercare and building a directory of specialist service providers to enhance engagement in key jurisdictions. Taken together, these steps help ensure that contacts made in missions and conferences remain active, and that Bermuda remains top of mind with decision-makers.

Alongside stronger promotion, the BDA has focused on the practical factors that investors weigh [when] choosing where to locate. The work undertaken so far includes identifying and, importantly, effecting regulatory and policy improvements, including amendments to legislation related to benefit entities and trusts, driven by opportunities identified through industry working groups. The BDA has also bolstered stakeholder engagement and advanced changes that support innovation and the ease of doing business. This includes launching the Leadership Exchange, a new forum that intends to enhance engagement between the agency and the business leaders that it works with.

Indeed, a practical part of Strategic Priority 2 is using the credibility of firms already operating in Bermuda by engaging them as ambassadors in priority markets. This includes partnering with established networks and having industry representatives join the BDA on missions and conferences overseas.

Mr. Speaker, because modern investment promotion requires better use of technology to identify and pursue prospects, the BDA is rolling out [lead-]sourcing

technology and sector analysis. This is done in order to identify high-value prospects in target jurisdictions and make outreach more data-driven over time.

Once an investor chooses Bermuda, the experience they have next can determine whether they stay [and] reinvest, expand, and advocate for Bermuda, or whether they disengage. That is why Strategic Priority 2 also includes supporting a stronger investor experience by improving customer relationship management and structured follow-up. This is also one reason why over the period, the BDA held engagement sessions with those holding an Economic Investment and Residential Certificate [EIRC] as it sought to sustain relationships and encourage reinvestment.

Another important growth area is high net worth services and the private client ecosystem. Work continues on targeted promotion and relationship building with the professional intermediaries who drive this business, supported by public relations, thought leadership, and direct engagement with certificate holders, alongside communications on recent legislative improvements affecting beneficial ownership and trusts.

We are also targeting the professional channels through which this business is won and grown. Examples of this are law firms, private client advisers, accounting firms, and investment management firms. These serve to deepen relationships between on Island firms and their international counterparts in key markets, and to advance private wealth roundtables to expand Bermuda's presence and influence. This [purposeful], targeted promotion is designed to grow relationships where [decision]-makers are concentrated and where Bermuda's strengths are most relevant.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, Strategic Priority 2 is strengthening how Bermuda promotes investment by improving messaging, tools, relationships, and investor experience, while keeping policy and legislation aligned with opportunity and reputation.

This concludes my update on Strategic Priority 2 of the Economic Development Strategy [2023–2027].

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is from the Minister of the Cabinet Office.

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, listening audience.

BUILDING PERMIT AND SAFEBUILT UPDATE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House of the [proactive steps being taken](#) by the Department of Planning to address the current backlog of building permit applications, ensuring that construction in Bermuda meets the highest

safety standards and adheres to our building code is a vital function of the government.

Mr. Speaker, as detailed in the budget brief, the Building Permit team processed 640 building permits and 323 permit revisions last year. However, the department is currently receiving a significant volume of applications, exceeding 1,200 annually. This demand, coupled with increasingly inconsistent application submissions that often require multiple resubmissions, has contributed to delays that frustrate both industry professionals and individual applicants. While local consultants, contracted to aid the overburdened staff, have provided some temporary relief, the department must avoid potential conflicts of interest that arise when local firms review their competitors' work.

Mr. Speaker, to resolve this in an impartial and efficient manner, the department has engaged the services of SAFEbuilt, LLC, an experienced overseas professional services firm. Following [thorough] research, SAFEbuilt has been contracted for a short period at a cost not to exceed \$60,000, with an option to engage them on an ad hoc basis as needed. SAFEbuilt is uniquely qualified for this role because of their:

- **Technical Expertise:** Founded in 1992, they employ approximately 1,700 professionals across 40 states, including engineers and architects.
- **System Compatibility:** They are highly proficient in "EnerGov," the same file management system and Customer Self Service [CSS] portal used by the Department of Planning.
- **Impartiality:** As an overseas firm, they provide independent technical capacity without the risk of local competitive influence.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to reassure this Honourable House and the public regarding the parameters of this engagement:

- **Authority Remains Local:** The Department of Planning remains the sole statutory decision-making authority under the Building Act 1988. SAFEbuilt will provide technical reviews, but final approval or rejection of permits remains the responsibility of the building officials here in Bermuda.
- **Protecting Local Jobs:** This engagement is a supplemental measure to tackle a specific backlog; no current staff positions will be impacted.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative is a short-term, targeted solution designed to stimulate the construction activity essential to our economy. By leveraging advanced electronic workflows and additional technical resources, we aim to restore reasonable permit timelines and strengthen public confidence in the permitting process.

Mr. Speaker, SAFEbuilt began their work on February 17, and in those three weeks since, they have processed 41 applications. Their average processing time from the date assigned to the date of permit

issuance is 6.4 days overall, and that pace decreases steadily as they learn the specifics of the Bermuda context. In the past seven days, the pace has decreased to about five days per application, with some being processed in as little as two days.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to providing further updates as the work progresses and applaud the team at Planning for taking these bold and creative steps to make real progress on the challenges in the department. By investing in the professional services of SAFEbuilt, we are providing the department with the extra help needed to eliminate the current permit queue. This means shorter wait times for every resident and developer on the Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the State-ments for this morning.

We will move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

PREMIER'S QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: Members, as you know, the second Friday of any month that we are sitting, there are always Premier's questions ahead of the regular questions. And for the Premier's questions we have a 30-minute period. And we will begin now.

The first question is from the Opposition Leader.

Opposition Leader, you have the floor.

Hon. Ben Smith: Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good morning to colleagues and to the listening public.

QUESTION 1: CASINO GAMING

Hon. Ben Smith: Honourable Premier, your Government promised that casino gaming would diversify Bermuda's economy and support tourism. Yet after nearly a decade there is still not a single casino operating in Bermuda. You recently stated there is no appetite from the private sector to move the industry forward.

Will the Premier now admit that the Government's gaming policy has failed, yes or no?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the Honourable Opposition Leader clearly to his place. I see that he has now tried to improve the standard of questioning, and I'm pleased about that.

Let me answer the question.

The policy . . . he is, first of all, mischaracterising what I said. What I said is that the current casinos which are licensed, the volume of those are not enough for the private sector to provide banking services. That is the reality of the situation. That is what has been stated. The government cannot bank the proceeds of gaming. Banks must [bank] the proceeds of gaming. This has not been an issue that has been unknown. This has been an issue that has been since the inception of gaming in 2014, and the legislation passed [by] the former Government.

That much being said, we are at least in a positive place where banks are willing to bank the proceeds of gaming. The question is the volume which is required. And unfortunately, the only casino that is currently licensed for operation does not have the volume that the private sector is willing to support. So, when there is a future opportunity for more casinos to come online, then we are hopeful. But this is just a practical reality where we find ourselves.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: So, with the Premier's answer, considering that there have been multiple announcements that we would see major developments from hotels, can the Premier explain why those promises were repeatedly made if the industry was never actually viable?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what promises the Honourable Member is referring to. Let me state this again for the record. In 2014 the gaming legislation was passed [by] the former Government.

The gaming issues and banking issues have long preceded the fact of what we have done. So, if we want to talk about the introduction of a Casino Gaming Act without having the requisite things in place, I got it. But what we have tried to do is to make sure that we remain focused on trying to advance these particular matters as it is important.

Now, I will [say] for the Honourable Member, and I hope that he would listen, we had casinos and pledges from banks that they would bank the proceeds of gaming. That was the reason why we made those particular announcements at that point in time.

As has been stated in this House, the particular bank who did say that they were going to bank the proceeds of gaming went back and said they were no longer willing to do this due to the actions which took place underneath the former US administration where

there was increased scrutiny on matters related to correspondent banking relationships. That was their decision.

We now have a new administration in Washington, DC, who has removed some of the challenges that were posed towards correspondent banking based on reputational damage on both the domestic side and also on the international side. So that has removed the impediment for banks doing it and risking their correspondent banking relationships. But that has not gone on the other side insofar as whether or not it makes business sense for them to be able to balance because if they are going to implement such particular items, they have to form entire departments inside of their bank to manage the compliance risk, et cetera, because gaming is a high-risk matter. So, as I said, it is the volume.

We continue to work for this. We cannot speak for what the private sector can and cannot do. But what we are doing is making sure that we provide the requisite support for it to happen.

So, with our communications, with the offices that control the currency in the United States and others, we know that there is not a correspondent banking risk anymore. Now we just need to make sure that we have the local demand so that those particular matters can get up and running.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Second supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, with all of the legislation and the regulatory bodies that have been put in place and the millions that have been spent, can the Honourable Premier let us know who he thinks now should be held accountable for us not having an operating casino in Bermuda?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if the Government is held accountable, then the Government will open its own casino. But the private sector are the people who are doing this. This is the reality.

So, I'll try for the Honourable Member again. The one casino that has been licensed does not have sufficient demand for the private sector to provide banking services. I do not know how many more times I can say that for the Honourable Member to get [it]. It does not have sufficient demand for the private sector to provide services. Therefore, additional casinos which are required. It is for the private sector to decide how to advance those relationships.

Hamilton Princess, because the banking partner that did say that they were going to provide casino gaming, backed away from that. That is their choice

and their decision. The Fairmont Southampton has a designated site order. In the future they may get a casino licence and that may provide the sufficient volume for the private sector to bank the industry. This is a reality of the situation where we are currently. And I hope the Honourable Member would understand that.

The Speaker: Second question?

QUESTION 2: PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, fixing public education has been one of the central promises of your Government. Yet the most recent public school exam results show students performing below international averages. After nine years in Government, does the Premier accept that the education system is not improving fast enough, or at all?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the first thing that I would say is that I have students in the public education system. So, I can speak very clearly to what takes place there because I visit public schools every day. Now here is the reality when we come to this. It is very important that we look around these particular measures.

The Minister released these test results in December as a measure of transparency. They are complex and it is difficult to make comparisons from a Bermuda perspective to an international perspective. In Bermuda, for Cambridge Checkpoint sometimes we take the exams earlier than other cohorts do in other schools around the world. That's number one. In other schools that's number one.

Number two, in Bermuda we use the Cambridge Checkpoint as a diagnostic to understand where things are. Whereas in other school systems around the world, they are voluntary. People choose which, or school systems choose which students get them. So, I understand the desire to use that as a comparator, but it's important that these things are kept in context.

Number [three], the measures in regard of the additional funding of which we put in place in education, the additional programmes of which we put in place in education, the various targeted measures. If we look at the various things, for instance at Harrington Sound when they were challenged with mathematics, and they brought in a special math programme, we see math attainment.

If we look at the increase in reading attainment that has happened throughout our primary schools because we have had an increased focus on reading, I can state that there are, without question, positive things that are happening in education.

So, does anyone want to have the headlines that we'll see from these particular test scores? But it is important that those particular matters are kept in

context. There are good and positive things happening in the public education system.

Here's what I can say, Mr. Speaker. Do we have challenges? Absolutely. There is not a single school system across the world that deals in public education that [doesn't] have challenges. But I will remind the Honourable Member that our public education system is a comprehensive system. We take every single student. We take students who are high-flyers. We take students who [require] learning support. We take students who may have, you know, other types of challenges, you know, Down syndrome, et cetera. We have all. Autism. We have every single student in our system. And our job is to make sure we care and prepare for those persons who . . .

And if you look at the recent graduation results, if you look at the success of which we are having, the reality is there are positive things that are happening inside of our public education system. This Government will not use our students as props or political tools. We are going to continue to press forward on education reform strengthening education and making the investments that are required. And that is what we're doing. That is what we're seeing. And that is what we're delivering.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Supplementary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, the Government repeatedly said that education reform would deliver better outcomes for our students. Can the Premier explain why, after years of reform and over a billion dollars spent on education, student performances are still below international standards?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member cannot speak to years below international standards. I just answered that question, how the Government of Bermuda uses Cambridge Checkpoint examinations which are different [from] other systems around the world. I've stated that. I know the Honourable Member does not listen well, clearly—

The Speaker: Well, well, well—

Hon. E. David Burt: —but that is the statement.

Hon. Ben Smith: Point of order, point of order.

The Speaker: Ah! Ah! Ah! Sit down, sit down, sit down.

Premier, we are not going to start the morning with that one.

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That . . . just—

Hon. E. David Burt: I would hope the Honourable Member would listen to the answers that are given and, rather than reading his prepared questions, respond to what was stated. The point is, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The point is, Mr. Speaker, that our system uses Cambridge Checkpoint as a diagnostic exam, where other systems select who takes the test and use different formats. So, what the Honourable Member is trying to do is make that comparison, and it is not the correct comparison to make.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we are moving through continued matters related to education reform. We are taking the steps to make sure that we get it right. And we all know that reforming a national system is complex. But I have complete confidence in the Minister of Education, the work of which she's doing to continue to progress ahead, the significant investments of which we are continuing to make in education, the significant investments of which we are doing with our teachers to make sure that we provide them additional tools to reduce their burden, the works of which I have spoken about in this House during the Budget Debate. Speaking about the work of which we are doing in education is what is happening.

So, the Honourable Member should take heed and actually take advantage of the information that is shared because we do not use Cambridge Checkpoint in the exact same way as other jurisdictions do. I know it makes for convenient political headlines. But the reality is it is important that we focus on how these are used in this context rather than making an inaccurate comparison, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second supplementary or third question?

Hon. Ben Smith: Second supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, after almost a decade the results that have just come out, the majority of them are under the “C” level, the actual letter “C” level. Can the Honourable Premier let us know whether parents should have confidence that the reform, which at present is paused, is actually going to lead to the results that the Premier and his team have said parents should see?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I can unequivocally answer that question as yes. Because transformation is not an end point. It is a journey. It is the work of which we continue to do.

Yes, we have challenges in our system just like anyone does. But here is the reality, Mr. Speaker. It is not just the parents, it is not . . . sorry. It is not just the teachers. It is not just the Government. It is also the responsibility of parents and others to ensure that the work that is being sent home [with] their students is being done. That is the reason why through our additional initiatives, through Bermuda Forward, that the Minister of Education is working on to provide additional homework assistance to parents who may not be able to provide that reinforcement at home. These are things of which we are doing because it is important.

But I can state this. I have unequivocal confidence in the public education system. As someone who would not benefit from public education, I have unequivocal confidence in the public education system because I see it every day.

I see the homework that is brought home from my daughter. I see the additional enrichment activities that she gets to do. I see the work that is being done for my son. I see the success that we see throughout the school system. I see the work that is happening in co-curricular activities and others. There is significant work that is happening.

Do we have challenges? Absolutely. There is no public education system that is comprehensive that does not have challenges, but that does not state that the Government does not either make the investments which are necessary and required or continue to provide the support which is necessary and required.

But the important point is, Mr. Speaker, rather than trying to battle here with political points, I think it would be helpful for the Opposition to join in the mission of making sure that we speak to parents as well, that they have a responsibility to help to support teachers and others in dealing with matters inside of our school system as well. And it is good to see that more parents are coming on board, and I think it would be helpful that we all speak with one voice on that particular issue.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third question?

QUESTION 3: TOURISM NUMBERS BELOW PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, many of your competitors . . . many of our competitors across the Caribbean are reporting record tourism numbers, yet Bermuda's air arrivals remain below pre-pandemic levels. New hotel developments have been limited or extremely slow. After nine years in Government, does the Premier accept that Bermuda is falling behind its competitors in revitalising tourism?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept that, because here's the thing. Remember, we can talk about other jurisdictions being mass tourism destinations. That is not what Bermuda is. We all know that Bermuda is a niche tourism destination. To make comparisons between mass tourism destinations and niche tourism destinations is not correct.

Number two, Mr. Speaker, it is important . . . and I love when the Opposition brings this up. You know the reason why? Because . . . and I will remind us. This Opposition opposed the expansion of hotel concessions from 10 [years] to 15 years and criticised the expansion that was given to Fairmont Southampton when in their very own St. Regis deal, Mr. Speaker, they offered 20 years of concessions. Yet, when we come back to what we tried to do, Mr. Speaker, they, my opinion cynically, opposed the expansion. When we look at other jurisdictions inside the region who are offering 20-[year] and 25-year concessions, yet we do not get the support of the Opposition for the expansion of which we've given.

However, Mr. Speaker, that has not deterred us. And what have we seen? We have seen significant expansion in hotels in Bermuda. We recognise that the Fairmont Southampton is set to open this year, which is going to provide additional hotel airlift. But notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that our largest hotel is open, the work that has happened means that visitor spending is still higher without our largest hotel open than it was prior to the pandemic, Mr. Speaker. That is a true measure of investment. And when that hotel does open this year, then it will even be higher, Mr. Speaker.

So, we are confident in the future. And the work that the Government is preparing is to make sure that our workforce is ready, that we have adequate labour supply and we are able to meet our visitor demands and expectations, not only—*not only*, Mr. Speaker—at the hotel, but also throughout the country. And that is the reason why we have seen significant expansion in tourism investment orders for attractions and other things to make sure that when those new visitors come, the country is ready, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Government has repeatedly talked about the fact that they were going to introduce gaming and that the concessions that were being given were going to be drivers for new tourism growth. Can the Premier explain why all of those drivers have not led to an increase in tourism to pre-pandemic levels, which were already low numbers?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is again reading his prepared questions and not listening to the answer that I just gave. So, I'll try it again, because he just said *not prior to pre-pandemic levels*. Visitor spending has exceeded pre-pandemic levels even without—even without, Mr. Speaker, even without—the opening of our largest hotel, Mr. Speaker. And so, with the reopening of our largest hotel, those matters will increase.

Now, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. They can make as much noise as they want. But the facts are the facts. Visitor spending is higher than before the pandemic without—*without*, without—the opening of our largest hotel. And when our largest hotel reopens this year, which, of course, we recognise, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition came from this side on the work that was required to get it done, we will see those numbers improve even more.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Hon. Ben Smith: Second supplementary. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, with all other island destinations expanding hotels, increasing flights and attracting record visitor numbers, what specific action will this Government take that will actually increase tourism so that we can reach record numbers?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the fallacy that the Opposition is trying to put forward that this country, which is not a massive tourism and mass tourism economy, is going to reach the numbers of the 1980s,—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —is foolish.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members, Members.

Hon. E. David Burt: Let's just say this. It's foolish, Mr. Speaker. It is . . . it is a complete nonsense. Bermuda is different. I don't want to go through the history of tourism, but if the Honourable Member needs me to go through the history of tourism for him, I can.

The Speaker: Just answer the question . . . just answer the question.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, I get it, because the reality, Mr. Speaker, is that after World War II there were only two tourism destinations in the world, Hawaii and Bermuda, who had the infrastructure to attract. When other jurisdictions started moving into mass tourism, that is the reason why we have seen a shift inside of our

economy. But that does not deter us from doing the work to attract high-value tourists, Mr. Speaker.

And so, with the reopening of our largest hotel, with the work that is going to take place at Elbow Beach, with the investments that we see in other projects, that is what is going to continue to make sure that we have sufficient tourism demand in this country, Mr. Speaker.

But the proof is not whether or not we have record numbers. The proof is whether or not we have record spending. And that is what the Government is focused on, attracting high value tourists. Because it's far different having massive all-inclusive resorts at \$200 a night, than having niche resorts that you're charging \$1,200 a night, Mr. Speaker. They are two different things, and that is the difference of what Bermuda is trying to make sure we put forward.

That is the national tourism plan that had support from both sides, and that, Mr. Speaker, is what this Government is executing, despite the pause that was brought to us with a once-in-a-century pandemic.

The Speaker: All right.

The Opposition Leader has used his limit of questions.

The next MP who has questions this morning is MP Swan.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: CAPITAL INVESTMENT DISBURSEMENT 2026/27

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning.

Mr. Speaker, the 2026/27 budget included \$182 million in capital investment, described as the largest since 2008/09. Can the Honourable Premier outline where this money is going and how it will benefit Bermudians?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And here is what's important, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Members, Members. Members.

Hon. E. David Burt: I know they don't want to hear Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to speak it anyway.

The Speaker: Speak to the Chair . . . speak to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: Because, Mr. Speaker, \$182 million of capital investment is a statement of confidence in this country's future. And the key allocations, of course, because I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, you want to know the answer—

The Speaker: I'm listening . . . I'm listening.

Hon. E. David Burt: —and the public wants to know the answer, even if the Opposition does not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, \$26.9 million for the Bermuda Housing Corporation, a record investment on top of years of record investment.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Just curious, he's obviously reading the answer. So, did he write the question as well?

[Laughter]

The Speaker: The—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: I thought he wasn't allowed to read without your permission, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member has responses on his . . . knowledge of his—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Especially if you write the question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I assume he was speaking to the knowledge of his own heads, or the Ministry.

An Hon. Member: Well done.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Go on.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I want to make sure they're finished, Mr. Speaker, because it's their time that they're wasting, not my own.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker

The Speaker: Talk to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I've got it

Mr. Speaker, \$14 million of investment into the Ministry of Education to upgrade public school facilities and invest in new technology, in addition, at the Bermuda College.

The money to start the Swing Bridge project in the east, which I'm sure the Honourable Member is well aware of and is looking forward to.

Mr. Speaker, \$8.8 million for the expansion of the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility. Starting that major reformation project, which is a redevelopment project, which is something that's important.

Mr. Speaker, \$6.5 million for roads and dangerous walls. And we see the work that the Minister of Public Works continues to do there. (Happy birthday, Minister of Public Works and Environment, by the way.)

Mr. Speaker, \$3.5 million for new electric buses. Complete the transformation of our bus fleet to fully electric. And of course, Mr. Speaker, \$3 million for community improvement projects for MPs inside of this House, before projects of which they may get approved.

So, the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that we are continuing our increase in capital investment. And this is just another example of which this Government is doing to rebuild this country's infrastructure.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

And I declare my interest. I am one of four MPs directly impacted by this question. The Premier mentioned Swing Bridge. I believe it's \$9.4 million for the Swing Bridge. Can the Honourable Premier advise on the current status of this important project for the East End?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Public Works and Environment advised this Honourable House on March 6 that requests for proposals for replacement of Swing Bridge are expected to be released in the coming weeks. Preparatory roadworks are already being sequenced along detour routes in St. George's and St. David's areas to support construction, staging and traffic diversion once the project begins. And the \$9.4 million allocation to this budget continues the Government's commitment to delivering this critical piece of infrastructure for the people of the East End.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I declare my interest, again, being a member of Parliament for constituency 2. The Premier mentioned \$3 million for community improvement projects. I would like to thank him for that, Mr. Speaker.

But more specifically, I'm concerned about the need for a dock and the disrepair at Ferry Reach, a popular camping site out there, Mr. Speaker, and also a possible site for emergency evacuation should an unfortunate occurrence happen out at that now industrial and community-based area. With that type of funding, can the Honourable Premier advise how Members of this Honourable House can access this pool of funding for improvements in their communities, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for [his] question. And it is important to know that this allocation of the budget is a key step in ensuring that communities benefit, and who will know better than local MPs about what is needed for their particular areas? Unlike the Opposition, who, you know, branded this as a *slush fund*, I'm assuming that they will not be making applications then because they don't support it.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: In April, the Minister of Public Works and Environment—

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier is imputing improper motive by implying that the Members on this side are not aware of what is going on in their communities. We just have concerns about how the Government will administer these funds in a fair and impartial manner so all communities can be served, regardless of the political leanings.

The Speaker: I think what he said was not that you aren't aware. He said that you weren't going to avail of the fund because you're opposed to the fund. I think that's what he said.

But I think . . . I'd expect that you are aware of what's going on in your community there, like all good MPs.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Speaker: [INAUDIBLE]

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: I got it. They are clearly having a challenge listening, so they could probably talk less and listen more, and then they would actually hear, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. E. David Burt: So that in April, the Minister of Public Works and Environment will be circulating a form for MPs to complete. Clearly, the funding is not unlimited, so I'm not entirely certain about the Honourable Member's specific request for docks, et cetera. But we want to ensure that local project upgrades, such as upgrades to parks, benches, playgrounds, minor beautification projects, clearing of areas to make room for more community spaces, whether or not upgrades of fitness equipment, adding fitness equipment to various public parks, all the things that can happen.

This budget is a transformational budget, and we are going further than we have to ensure that the budget that is passed by this Honourable House will have a meaningful impact on everyday Bermudians from all of the various relief measures of which we have implemented. But also Mr. Speaker, in these small things that can improve the quality of life in our communities throughout the Island

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next Member who has questions this morning is MP Linda Smith.

MP L. Smith.

Ms. Linda Smith: Good morning, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: QUARRY AND ASPHALT PLANT

Ms. Linda Smith: And good morning to the Honourable Premier and the Honourable House.

I'm addressing this question to the Honourable Premier as I believe it's a matter that would be at the centre of Cabinet discussions and hopefully a priority given it affects a large capital project and important resources.

In November last year it was announced that the installation of the new asphalt plant would be delayed for three months to allow for an independent assessment on whether to sell the land that presently houses the quarry and move the quarry elsewhere. Three months have passed and we have not heard anything more.

Can we expect to hear that a decision has been made? And next step is, when can we expect that? And if the decision is made to sell the property, where will the quarry be moved?

Hon. E. David Burt: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the Honourable Member to rephrase her question because there has never ever been a discussion [about] the sale of government land. And so, I would hope the Honourable Member would rephrase her question because that is not correct, the question of which she's asked.

The Speaker: The Premier is asking you to just rephrase it.

Ms. Linda Smith: The question is, there was . . . it was announced that the quarry that the . . . that the receipt of the asphalt plant was being delayed so that there could be an independent assessment [about] moving the quarry.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, let me answer the question. The honourable . . . I think the Honourable Member posed the same question to the Minister during the particular debate. What I can inform the Member is that that particular study is ongoing. But there has never been a proposal and/or consideration to sell government land. It is important to note that there has never been such a consideration, et cetera. There were proposals that were put forward insofar as the expansion of a project, and a possible leasing of portions of that. The Minister will go ahead and review these particular matters and will update the House in due course.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Linda Smith: Yes, I do.

The asphalt plant is in Chattanooga, Tennessee right now. And my question is, How much are we incurring in extra costs for its safekeeping there instead of taking possession of the plant as scheduled?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the precise [information] to answer that question because that would be, of course, the specific nature insofar as expenses for something that is not done. I think [the Honourable Member] may have posed that particular question in the Budget Debate. But if the Honourable Member wishes to pose that question very specifically to Minister Public Works, I'm certain the Minister of Public Works will answer.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?
No? Okay.

The next Member who has questions for you, Premier, is MP DeCouto.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: MIDDLE EAST ADVISOR CONTRACT TERMS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Good morning.

We know that the Honourable Premier was in the Middle East and that the Middle East advisor accompanied him. What are the terms or arrangements with that advisor such as pay and period of current contract?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: You have—

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry.

The Speaker: You have six seconds, if you can be quick.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Members that expires the time for the Premier's Questions. So, thank you for your input on that. We will now move to the regular Question Period, which is 60 minutes. And the first . . . there's one . . .

Minister of Home Affairs. There's a question for you under the . . . on your Statement this morning
MP Fahy.

QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good morning again, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION 1: UNLOCKING IMPORTS: ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO DIVERSIFY IMPORTS

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, first of all to the Minister for her update. Any discussions that we can have with overseas potential partners are always helpful.

My first question is, Were there any commitments given to the Government or wholesale entities within Bermuda for selling goods to Bermuda at a decreased rate as a result of those meetings and virtual conferences? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question proposed by the Honourable Shadow Minister. Those matters are of a commercial nature, so it would not be

appropriate for the Government to be intimately involved in the cost and the arrangement that has been secured. But what I can say is that there has been an introduction amongst the private sector participants.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supplementary.

I'm not asking for specifics. I'm asking if the Minister can confirm whether any commitments have been given to the Government or wholesalers given that they were invited. I think if we are going to be talking about reducing the cost of living, I would hope that the Ministry would at least ask questions of those individuals invited to see if commitments were made—

An Hon. Member: Can't hear you.

Hon. Michael Fahy: —to see if these introductions are in fact successful. So perhaps the Minister would reconsider it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry. Thank you. Thank you, Member.

So, the question again is, Will the Minister at least consider gathering data from those individuals in terms . . . who attended those conferences as to whether commitments have been made. Again, not looking for specifics of commercial arrangements.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe the . . . the Honourable Member seems to suggest that the Government would be able to have a commitment amongst private sector participants. The Government's role and the Ministry's role, in particular, was to facilitate an introduction, noting the concerns that the wholesalers and retailers, the private sector, expressed to the Government. We are managing the legislative framework, the policy. That's the Government role. As to private sector matters, I feel like I've been invited to learn more about. But the reality is that they were pleased to be able to have unlocked conversations and access that they ordinarily would not have had and shared to the Government that they did not have access to. And so, through those introductions and through facilitating new relationships lower cost is the result.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, second question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second question.

**QUESTION 2: UNLOCKING IMPORTS:
ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO
DIVERSIFY IMPORTS**

Hon. Michael Fahy: Can the Minister share whether or not any specific additional shipping routes were proposed at any of these conferences as a result of the introductions through the various US Government departments that she made reference to in her Statement? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The subject and specific details are included in my Ministerial Statement were to goods. So those who sell goods, those who sell goods based in the US and those who sell goods in Bermuda. Nothing to do with shipping.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary or new question?

**QUESTION 3: UNLOCKING IMPORTS:
ADDRESSING INDUSTRY'S CALL TO
DIVERSIFY IMPORTS**

Hon. Michael Fahy: New question. Mr. Speaker, reference was made in the Minister's Statement as to specific barriers to trade with Bermuda. Can the Minister share if there have been any tangible results or suggestions on how those specific barriers to trade can be removed and what are they? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The content of the Ministerial Statement spoke to the concerns regarding the retailers and the wholesalers having access to relationships in the US. And so that was a barrier that was determined and shared with the Government. And the Statement sought to clarify a way that the Ministry has begun to unlock those barriers to introductions to US-based entities that they ordinarily . . . and have not . . . and shared with the Government that they did not have access to.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, that's all, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Okay. Members, that brings us to the end of the Question Period for this morning. We now move on.

**CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY
SPEECHES**

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to make a contribution?
MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Robert King: —and Members of this Honourable House and the listening public. I express condolences to the family of Shirley James, the wife of former Finance Minister, Dr. Clarence James—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: I'll associate the House.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: [Mrs. James] passed earlier this week. So, thoughts and prayers from the House to the family. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Does any other Member . . . Okay.
You look like you are holding hands on the same microphone.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: You want to share the three minutes? Minister, Minister of Works. You have your three minutes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Happy birthday.

The Speaker: Seeing that it is your birthday . . . seeing that he is the birthday boy, he gets to go.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you very much.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes, yes. It's the birthday, exactly.
Mr. Speaker, I will be very quick. I just wanted to send congratulations . . . commendation—

The Speaker: Not to yourself?

Hon. Jache Adams: Not to myself, no.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: Commendation to . . . I had the good fortune of attending the West Pembroke School—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: I am going to associate Minister Darrell and the Premier, and I think other colleagues did attend as well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes, the Premier's constituency, adjacent to mine.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: But [I] just wanted to say that I did have the good fortune to attend the event and wanted to send a good congratulations to all of the students, all of the teachers, and all of the parents, and anyone who had any involvement in what I would consider a first-class event. I was certainly entertained and I appreciated the entire show. Thank you, and I shall associate the entire House. Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Darrell, Minister Darrell, rather.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise this morning to congratulate a netball team. And I know in the last day of meeting we did have an extensive debate on sport. So, it is only appropriate that I congratulate the Tigers Netball Team and they are coached by long-time coach, Mr. Anthony Mouchette, who's a constituent of mine. And I read this morning with delight that they have won the league multiple times in a row. But also with sadness that they said that they will be breaking up after this season. And that has been a powerhouse. I have many former students and a few friends who actually played on that team. And I had the [good fortune] to be able to go down there a few times and watch those ladies in action.

So, I want to congratulate them on their league title. I think they are back-to-back champions and [won] multiple championships over the years. As well to a great coach, Mr. Anthony Mouchette. He says that he will be continuing in coaching but just not with that particular team.

Also, congratulations to one of the . . . I think she's the captain of the national team for netball, Ms. Debré Evans and her team, Storm, who finished second in the league. Anytime you go by Bernard Park, Mr. Speaker, on a Saturday, parking is difficult, but we allow it because, as we say, *sport matters*. And to see those young ladies from the peewee level all the way up to some very experienced netball players, it is good to see a couple of mates of mine. We had the fortune

of playing in the commercial summer league one time. And, you know, you thought it would be easy just running around and throwing a ball back and forth, but it takes a lot of athletic skill, a lot of ability. And, you know, kudos to what these ladies in the Bermuda Netball Association do.

And on another note, we know the national team has gotten back into international play, so we wish them well in their endeavours as they go forward. So, just a shout-out to female sport in this country and I'll call it the national female sport of netball.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member . . .

MP Swan, would you like your three minutes?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly would like to be associated with the condolences expressed to the family of Ms. Shirley James, who I consider a mentor and a dear friend throughout my life at Port Royal. She was the longest-serving chairman of the Bermuda Government Port Royal Golf Course. For 20 years she was the chairman of that golf course. And she also was the deputy chairman of the St. George's Golf Club from 1985 until sometime in the 1990s, where I served as its general manager and golf professional.

Ms. James was a very celebrated lady in her own right as a nurse, also as an artist, but she was a trailblazer as a chairman of the board. She also served as president, I believe of Mid Ocean Club as well. And during her tenure when I used to run golf tournaments for the Bermuda Department of Tourism, she opened up her home. I used to always have cocktails in a Bermuda home. And she said, *Kim, I love entertaining you. Our home is your home whenever you have events*.

So, I used to get my caterer to have the events down there in her property in Verdmont and many a visitor coming to this Island had been made to feel welcome on our shores because of her. She represented Bermuda in the Kitty Michael [Golf Invitational] tournament, which still goes on. I think she was one of the early participants in that event which also takes Bermudian women golfers overseas to participate.

In all the events that I organised on behalf of the Bermuda Government I always had a Bermuda component where Bermudians participated alongside with visitors. As I mentioned, she used to host them in her house. But she and the late Terry Brennan were persons I could always count on to interact with these visitors from overseas, be part of the hospitality. That was the part of building relationships that helped make Bermuda a very strong jurisdiction and help build and cement long-term relationships. Many events that we cultivated in the early 1980s still continue today.

As was the case up at Pompano this weekend. I shift gears to thank the Pompano not only for their 70 years of operation, but also for being a leader in sports tourism. The Ladies [Pro-Am] Golf [Classic] has taken

place, a final day today, as an event that carried on from what I started in the 1980s, along with Ms. James who used to play then and other ladies. So, I just wanted to tie in that great event that the Pompano has carried forward along with other events that they do up there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Minister, MP . . . the gentleman jumped behind you, MP.

MP Lister, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Couldn't get the name out there, Mr. Speaker?

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

I stand this morning . . . first, on a sad note I would like to send condolences to the family of a constituent of mine, Mr. Elias Rigo, of Second Avenue Warwick. When I first was elected, or canvassing to be elected in 2017 election, Mr. Speaker, I came upon Mr. Rigo in his house and, you know, we had a chat. And he asked, *Is Eugene Lister from Somerset your grandpa?* And I said, *Yes.* So, he immediately made a connection, and he was able to recall some moments of knowing my grandfather. So, you know, that family connection was there. But it is sad to hear that he has passed away. And again, I would just like to send condolences to his family.

Mr. Speaker, on a lighter note, I would like to . . . last evening I had to privilege along with the Minister of Housing (who's not in at the moment) and also the Minister of Education, we attended the Science Fair at the Bermuda Institute. And, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it was a well-attended Science Fair. Some great projects. But it took me back to my time as an [alumnus] of the Bermuda Institute and remembering when I did a science [project] back then and seeing how far they have come along. Because what the theme was this year was "Inventions Over the Years." So, what they did was if you were doing a science [on] the telephone, from the original invention of telephone to what we have nowadays, or the computer or bikes and things like that. So, it showed how inventions had transformed and had gotten better over the years.

So, I thought it was very interesting. But what really stood out to me, Mr. Speaker, is that one exhibit which I had to ask one of the teachers [about], they had a gas mask that was used in one of the world wars. And then they had an old diving helmet that [was] used and a bed pan back in the old days [that] they used to heat up to put on the beds. So, I was inquisitive and I asked the teacher, *[Are] these the students' . . . The students did not make these exhibits, [did they]?* She said, *No, persons in the community, when they found out what*

was happening, they actually donated some of these exhibits to be on display. So, I was surprised to see that. There was even Mobyette from 60, 70 years ago that people donated to be on display. So, I want to give kudos to the teachers and the students of the Science Fair.

And lastly, Mr. Speaker, I will declare my interests, I would like to recognise my wife, Mrs. Alicia Lister, who earlier this week she was recognised as a Condé Nast top travel specialist for the second year in a row.

An Hon. Member: Hey!

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: She won it last year and . . . I will associate the whole House, Mr. Speaker. She was selected by the magazine—

An Hon. Member: You are going to get some brownie points.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —as one of the world's most trusted experts for designing exceptional travel experiences. And at present, she is the only Bermudian to hold that title. So, I would like to get say congratulations to my wife on being acknowledged by Condé Nast as a top travel specialist.

[Timer chimes]

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister Rabain, would you you're your three minutes?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I would like for the House to say congratulations to Reverend Dr. Wendell Christopher who retired from St. Philip AME Church as my pastor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I associate the Premier. I associate the whole House with these comments, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Reverend Christopher left Bermuda shores in the 1960s and was known as, according to him as he told me, was known as the "Triple Threat" as he pastored in Maryland, Virginia and the

DC area. [He] known as a triple threat because he could preach, he could sing, and he could pray with conviction that could move a mountain.

And [at] 22, Mr. Speaker, Reverend Christopher did return to our shores and took up as the reverend at my church, that little church by the Sound, St. Philip AME Church down in Devil's Hole. He preached with conviction. Again, brought that double threat to our congregation. And I worked particularly close with him over these last few months as . . . we did his last Men's Day celebration at St. Philip. And so, we had some events put on and I was the chairman of those events. And so, I was honoured that he actually asked me to chair those. And so, we did have a good time and had a really, really excellent time working with him and the men of St. Philip. So, I just wanted to say congratulations to him and wish him well in his retirement and just thank him for showing up when he is needed. He is always known as compassionate. He is always known as someone who can, you know, really raise the spirit when things are not looking as good as you would like for them to look.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to congratulate him in his well-earned retirement as he takes off after some 60-odd years of pastoring in the AME faith, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member. . . MP Dill.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good morning to you and our listening audience.

I would like to take this opportunity this morning to stand and congratulate the Sandys Parish Council. And I associate MP Lister, [MP] Simmons and all of the House. They did an outstanding job last night as you can agree as you were present. They had what was called "Sandys Speaks," and it was a time of discussion, real talk, real storeys, real community. And I just want to congratulate them from beginning to end. They set the atmosphere. Invited the community in and they had two very powerful discussions on the cost of living and antisocial behaviour in the community.

I was especially impressed by the young men who were a part of the antisocial discussion. Their candidness as they shared their journey, a few of them who had been formerly incarcerated, and spoke about the things that it had taken to make them . . . to help them to make a change in their lives and the commitment that they have made to go out in the community and inspire others to make positive changes and make choices that will avail them of success.

So, I just want to thank once again the Sandys Parish Council for the work that they are doing and to the community, the Sandys community, for supporting them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Yes.

MP Simmons, you have your three minutes, sir.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning colleagues—

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: —and good morning Bermuda.

I rise today to congratulate the new student principal of Dalton E Tucker Primary, Ms. Capree Smith, for the second year in a row Dalton E. Tucker Primary in an effort to help educate the children about the electoral process, have had student principal elections. Last year the Honourable Member from constituency 32 and I had the opportunity to be there for most of the day and enjoy the proceedings. And it was an exciting thing to watch because you have young people taking a big risk to get up in front of their colleagues and put their name out there to be considered. To have to speak in front of your colleagues and have to be considered, and that is something that is very, very brave, very bold and very, very important for all of us to see in our young people. I commend all of the participants. There were four other candidates. Ms. Smith got 61 per cent of the vote, almost Jamahl Simmons numbers. But they can work on it.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: But I am very honoured and pleased to be able to see this process and I wish Ms. Capree Smith all the best and all those who vied against her to keep persevering. The first time is not always the best time, but better days are ahead. Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time? None?

Oh, Government Whip, are you rising to give a contribution?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Are you rising to give a contribution?

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you. Thank you. A lady's help.

Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues and the radio listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I rise with sadness to have to express condolences to three families. Two of them are from my constituency and another one is my friend, but I'll go through them individually. The first one is Mr. Philip Charles Smith, a constituent of mine of Khyber Heights in Warwick. He was commonly known as just "P." He was a very simple-minded sort of person. Not

so much simple-minded, but a simple living person, if I could use that. That term, that's what I meant.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: That's what I meant. And he was he was from the earth, if I could also use that term. So, I certainly want to express condolences to his wife, Gina, a very lovely young lady herself. And I know P will be missed. And I want to associate MP Bean on that one as well because I believe he was actually from Bailey's Bay. So, I'm sure that's where you where you know him.

Mr. Speaker, the second one is another constituent of mine, Mr. Sheldon Darrell, a very [well] known, popular person in the Warwick area. And I certainly want to express condolences to his sister who I certainly know looked after him in his later years. And he also will be missed as well.

The third family that I wish to express condolences for is not a member of my constituency, but a friend of mine, a very close friend of mine, Mr. Dennis Burrows, who passed recently. Dennis was what I would describe as a real friend and a master craftsman. He knew how to do things. He's made a couple of things for me in my house. So, I know the quality of work that he does. And I certainly want to express condolences to his wife, Cheryl, and the rest of the family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other.

Before we move on, I would just like to add my remarks to some that were expressed already. Government Whip, your last condolences to the Burrows family, I would like to be associated with that. I have known Mr. Burrows and his wife for many years. They do live in the West End these days. So, thank you for recognising them.

And I would also like to ask the House to send the rating and Government whip your last condolences to the Perinchief family on the loss of their mother, Ms. Gladys Perinchief, who is actually being funeralised right now as we sit here this morning. But she leaves her daughter, Delma, her daughters, Delma and Sherri-Lynn, who was a classmate of mine in primary school. So, I've known the family for a long, long time. And my condolences have already been expressed to them personally, but I would just like to acknowledge it here as I am not able to attend the funeral being I'm sitting here with you all this morning. Thank you.

We now move on the next item on the Order Paper this morning.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTION FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE ON MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: That now brings us to the reason we are here today and in the main is to deal with the resumption of the Committee of Supply for the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

For the listening audience, again, whenever we are doing the Budget Debate it is done in Committee rather than the House. And there are eight hours allotted for that and those eight hours are split between whichever ministries are being debated. Today we have the first five of those eight hours [with] the Ministry of National Security and the remaining three will be for the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

Once we are in Committee the Speaker is out of the Chambers for that period of time and the House will be in the hands of a Panel of Chairs, [being] led by the Deputy Speaker. And this morning the first person in the Chair this morning will be the Deputy Speaker.

We now call on the Premier to move us into Committee.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House to now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2026/27.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 11:29 am

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Chairman: Good morning, Members.

We are now in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. Currently, we will be considering the heads that fall under the Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 67, 12, 45 and 88.

I call on their respective Minister to begin.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, I'm here Madam Chairman.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, Good morning.

I move the following heads, Head 83; Ministry of National Security, Headquarters, Head 6, which is Defence; Head 7, which is the Police; Head 12, which is Customs; Head 45 is Fire Services; and [Head] 88 is National Drug Control.

The Chairman: Members, it has been moved that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 be considered.

Are there any objections to that?

There are none.

Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: As we get started, Madam Chairman, can you inform the public how long this debate will be?

The Chairman: I certainly can, Minister.

This debate has been scheduled for five hours. So, I'm expecting a very robust debate, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, thank you much.

HEAD 83—MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: It gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 83, the Ministry of National Security found on pages B-264 to B-267 of the Budget Book.

Mandate

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the mandate of the Ministry of National Security is, *Working together to keep you safe.*

An Hon. Member: We get it. Say it again.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Working together to keep you safe.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, a total of \$5,315,000 has been allocated for this head which represents an increase of \$349,173 from the previous year and constitutes 4 per cent of the original budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. The increase reflects the funding required for various resources, projects and initiatives the department will be implementing such as the legal fees for the Police Complaints Authority, Cybersecurity Training, Software Management System, and further work on ITU [International Intercommunication Union] Operation Centre and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Tabletop Exercises.

The department will also be filling three posts to provide critical resources in cybersecurity and Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation [DRRM]. Further details are provided in the business unit cost analysis.

Madam Chairman, on page B-265 of the General Summary you will note that there are four business units within the Ministry Headquarters. You will note that the Parole Board and the Treatment of Offenders Board are listed but this is for comparative reasons only as they both were transferred to the Ministry of Justice in 2024.

The estimate for business unit 93000 for Administration is \$3,090,000, an increase of \$293,000, or 10 per cent. This comprises an increase of \$155,534 towards salary increases, salary for the political aid, and the salary differential for staff transferring in from another post. Madam Chairman, \$80,000 is allocated towards the legal fees for the Police Complaints Authority and \$57,456 to cover training tabletop exercises.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 93004 for the Police Complaints Authority is \$32,000, an increase of \$1,000, or 3 per cent to cover website maintenance costs.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Straight?

The Chairman: Yes. Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The estimate for business unit 93007 for the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team is \$756,000, Madam Chairman, \$334,000, or 79 per cent increase over the 2025/26 financial year. The increase is to fund the following:

- \$106,114 to cover one mitigation specialist post;

- \$12,152 to cover salary and salary grade increases;
- \$19,859 for conferences and tabletop exercises; and
- \$195,875 for software to enhance disaster tracking and an alert software.

Madam Chairman, business unit 93008 relates to the Gang Violence Reduction Programme with an estimate for the financial year 2026/27 of \$1,437,000. This represents a \$279,000, or 16 per cent decrease over the financial year 2025/26. The decrease is a result of the net effect of an increase of \$140,153 towards staffing. Dedicated funding towards grants of \$150,000, a decrease of \$30,000 towards safe house and relocation fees, and a decrease of \$539,153 from marketing education bursaries, redemption and summer placement programmes.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates of the Ministry of National Security is found on page B-266. I will highlight the material object code increases and decreases.

Salaries increased by \$3,000. This is attributable to the net effect of the salary increases and the decrease in funding for the relief administrator post.

Training increased by \$55,000 to accommodate increased cybersecurity training for tabletop exercises and anti-money laundering.

Travel expenses are decreased by \$3,000 as the Ministry aims to take strategic advantage of online events.

There is an uplift of \$20,000 for communications to increase the Ministry's anti-violence awareness messaging.

A decrease of \$267,000 for professional services is the net effect of an increase of \$67,368 towards cybersecurity assessments.

A decrease of \$25,000 in respect of part-time teachers for the Uniformed Services Programme who will no longer be required due to a restructure of the programme development.

And a decrease of \$173,332 in the Gang Violence Reduction Team reflecting a reprioritisation of resources to support the continued development and maturation of the National Violence Reduction Strategy.

Finally, Madam Chairman, other expenses increased by \$550,000. This is largely due to the increased funding as follows:

- \$230,000 for cybersecurity subscriptions and the ITU Operation Centre;
- \$200,000 for disaster tracking software and emergency alert system licence fees; and
- \$120,000 towards critical anti-money laundering training and additional resources required for the preparation for the Mutual Evaluation.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, as shown on page C-14, the Ministry received \$1,265,000 for capital acquisitions. Madam Chairman, \$15,000 will be used to purchase satellite phones for emergency situations. The Public Safety Radio Network project requires upgrades and repairs and a budget of \$177,782 has been allocated.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry continues to advance the Island-wide CCTV network as part of its public safety strategy. The initial project comprising of 130 camera sites was completed in May 2025, with work now progressing on network expansion of 31 camera sites. In the 2026/27 fiscal year, funding will support the completion of outstanding contractual items and the integration of supporting infrastructure to ensure the system operates as a fully integrated public safety asset.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry has commenced preparatory works for the implementation of the automated speed and licence plate recognition (or LPR, as it's commonly known), [a] camera enforcement system to strengthen road safety, including civil engineering works, the supply of poles, and installation of roadside infrastructure to support the speeding and LPR camera deployments. In the 2026/27 fiscal year, the Ministry will continue advancing the technical legislative and operational requirements necessary for the system's full deployment. Funding of \$1,072,218 has been allocated to CCTV and the automated speed and licence plate recognition camera enforcement system projects.

Madam Chairman, as shown on page B-266, the department's decrease in one full-time equivalent reflects the decreased need of a relief post due to a vacant administrative post being filled.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I'm pleased to report the outcomes of the department's forecasted performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26. These are found on page B-267.

Business Unit 93000, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, this business unit is responsible for providing support to the departments in the form of policy development, project management, financial oversight, and cybersecurity governance. The Cybersecurity Team manages the development and implementation of critical safety policies. The Ministry will conduct recruitment for three posts to strengthen national defence efforts. The National Cybersecurity Unit is scheduled to complete several key strategic milestones during the current fiscal year. The critical national information infrastructure designation and the critical national information

infrastructure regulations are expected to be finalised and presented shortly.

The National Cybersecurity Unit website will reach full completion to enhance public accessibility and digital communication. The National Cybersecurity Unit will implement the first version of the threat intelligence platform to provide proactive defence against emerging risk.

The Ministry finalised the updated information systems risk management programme policy, which is now progressing through the established review and approval process including consideration by the Cabinet Cybersecurity Committee and approval by the head of the public service. The Ministry conducted monthly meetings both in a formal and informal setting with its heads of departments and DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] Manager. The formal meetings were held to provide heads of departments with pertinent information that included updates from the public service executive, updates on the status of Cabinet memoranda, DEOD updates primarily around recruitment and the status of the exercises, financial updates relating to budget year-end and procurement.

In addition, the department has provided updates on the major activities in their respective departments. The informal meetings were designed to encourage an exchange of ideas and brainstorming in a relaxed setting on any topic.

Business Unit 93007, Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team [DRRM] is responsible for the oversight of stakeholder disaster recovery plans and the coordination of our agencies before, during and after national emergencies.

To strengthen these efforts, the team is fully funded for the national disaster coordinator and the national events coordinator positions. Additionally, the department is filling a new mitigation specialist post to provide critical resources for national resilience.

Madam Chairman, the Disaster Risk and Reduction Mitigation Team is scheduled to complete several key milestones to enhance Bermuda's operational readiness and legislative framework. National Risk Register, Phase 2 of the National Risk Register is set to be completed in Q2 of the 2026/27 financial year, delivering a validated national risk profile to inform government-wide planning and budget prioritisation.

Legislative Modernisation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Ministry continues to advance legislative modernisation in collaboration with policy analysts and legislative drafters to clarify disaster declaration authority and align statutory frameworks with existing executive powers.

Public Safety Radio Network

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Software modernisation has been successfully completed improving system stability and operational resilience. The Ministry will now advance hardware replacement and redundancy enhancements to ensure full communications continuity especially during high-impact events.

Community Preparedness and Response

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, weather monitoring activities continue throughout the Atlantic hurricane season with the team maintaining active situational awareness and providing timely updates to leadership. The team also contributed to the updating and development of key operational documents including the EMO procedural guides. Shelter readiness assessments were completed in collaboration with key agencies further reinforcing Bermuda's emergency posture.

Madam Chairman, to strengthen operational readiness across government and community partners, the DRRM Team conducted extensive hurricane season preparedness activities. This included engagement with government agencies to verify hurricane response inventories, inspections of hardware store supply chains to confirm capacity under disaster scenarios, and consultations with telecommunications infrastructure managers to identify vulnerabilities and strengthen response plans. The team also worked directly with stakeholders responsible for road clearing and tree cutting operations ensuring these critical recovery resources were coordinated and prepared.

Madam Chairman, I need not remind my colleagues that Bermuda faced off against three unusually late storms in October 2025 as the active hurricane season had come to a close. Hurricane Humberto and Hurricane Emelda, both Category 2 storms, affected the Island at the start of the month within 12 hours of each other. Hurricane Melissa book-ended October when it hit Bermuda as a shadow of the storm that decimated the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica.

During all of these storms and the ones that did not reach hurricane strength, the DRRM Team played a vital role in organising and coordinating the various agencies in preparing for their arrival, and in the case of Humberto and Emelda, the restoration thereafter. The DRRM Team once again performed their role with expertise, discipline and thorough preparation and planning, all of which helped to mitigate the impact of the storms. These weather events reminded us of the value of having a well-trained, well-organised and knowledgeable DRRM Team. Their continued efforts bode well for our country in times of disaster, rather natural or man-made.

Madam Chairman, stakeholder engagement remained a cornerstone of our DRRM Team operations. The team participated actively in numerous

forums, including port security meetings focused on maritime and infrastructure vulnerabilities, supply chain meetings to ensure critical goods continuity during disasters, and public health preparedness meetings aimed at strengthening the health sector's resilience to emergencies.

Madam Chairman, the DRRM Team remains at the front line of national safety through active engagement and rapid response.

Inter-Agency Coordination

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The DRRM Unit will continue structured tabletop exercises alongside the facilitation of MAGIC (that stands for Multi-Agency Gold Incident Command) training to enhance readiness at both operational and executive levels. The tabletop exercises will test mass evacuation procedures for a cruise ship incident, a ferry reach evacuation scenario, a strategic level cyber incident, and an aircraft crash response. Each exercise will assess inter-agency coordination, decision-making, and emergency plan effectiveness producing formal after-action reports and improvement plans to enhance national resilience and ensure Bermuda's disaster response framework remains tested and robust.

Infrastructure Recovery

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The team coordinates stakeholders in the rapid repair and restoration of the public safety radio network following incidents such as hurricanes.

Hurricanes Resilience

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Ongoing activities include engagement with government agencies to verify response inventories, analysis of hardware store supply chains, and shelter readiness assessments.

Madam Chairman, in summary the Disaster Risk Reduction Mitigation Team demonstrated a commitment to national resilience, operational excellence, legislative modernisation, stakeholder collaboration, and international best practise alignment. Through disaster preparedness activities, legislative support, stakeholder engagement, operational support, infrastructure maintenance, and strategic research the team significantly advanced Bermuda's disaster risk reduction objectives and strengthened its national emergency management framework.

Business Unit 93008, Violence Reduction Team

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Violence Reduction Team continues to serve as a central pillar of Bermuda's violence prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation efforts under the National Violence Reduction Strategy. The team remains focused on

disrupting cycles of violence, strengthening protective factors for young people, and creating structured pathways towards stability, education and employment. Through early intervention programmes school engagement initiatives, workforce development opportunities, and crisis response services, the Violence Reduction Team continues to deliver measurable outcomes that contribute to community safety and long-term social stability.

Madam Chairman, early intervention remains a critical component of the team's work. The "I am" programme continues to support the emotional development and behavioural regulation of young boys by strengthening emotional awareness, improving decision-making, and reducing peer conflict within school environments. During fiscal year 2025/26, the programme engaged 122 boys across eight primary schools and one middle school. Madam Chairman, 98 structured sessions were delivered between May 2025 and February 2026. Additional supports included 25 crisis support sessions, 22 mediation sessions, and 165 individualised support sessions. Feedback from educators and parents indicate improvements in communication, attitude, and school engagement among participants.

The G.R.E.A.T. programme, which stands for Gang, Resistance, Education and Training, continues to engage primary and middle school boys through structured value-based education designed to strengthen resilience, reinforce positive identity development, and build resistance to gang influence. The programme remains an important component of Bermuda's early prevention strategy by reinforcing conflict resolution skills, supporting healthy decision-making, and helping young people navigate negative peer pressure.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry also expanded its community engagement initiatives through the Hype League programmes. These initiatives provide safe, structured environments for young people during higher risk evening hours while promoting teamwork, physical activity and positive social interaction. The Hype League summer programme operated through open play at CedarBridge Academy from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm over an eight-week period during the summer holiday.

The programme connected with over 200 youth with average participation ranging from 30 to 50 young people per session. Activities included indoor football, basketball, and outdoor cricket. School-based Hype League engagement programmes were also introduced to strengthen structured activity during the school day. Implemented in three schools and delivered three days per week, these sessions averaged 20 to 25 students per session and focused on organised sports and supervised engagement during lunch periods. Schools reported improved lunchtime engagement, reduced behavioural disruptions and increased participation in positive activities.

Madam Chairman, Workforce Development remains an important pathway for prevention and rehabilitation. The Work Placement and Mentoring Programme supported 15 youth participants with 13 completing eight-week work placements. A total of 120 job coaching sessions were delivered, and 90 per cent of participating business partners reported positive satisfaction with the programme. Outcomes included six youths receiving extended paid employment, four securing jobs following programme completion and 100 per cent of parents reporting positive personal growth among participants.

The Redemption Programme also continued to provide intensive mentorship and structured life development for young men seeking to redirect their lives. Madam Chairman, 20 trainees completed the 25-week programme supported by 125 one-on-one sessions and 56 career and personal development sessions. Programme outcomes included eight participants securing employment, one participant entering university, and eight crisis interventions successfully managed. These efforts contributed to improve life skills, behavioural stabilisation, and upgraded employability.

Madam Chairman, street level outreach and case management services supported 82 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. Tailored interventions address housing instability, employment barriers, legal challenges, and mental health needs. Services included relocation assistance, prison visits court advocacy, and inter-agency collaboration. Community supervision support was also provided to 15 clients engaged in court-ordered community service placements between May 2025 and February 2026. These interventions contributed to improve client stabilisation, reduce retaliation risk, and strengthen reintegration pathways.

Madam Chairman, the Coordinated Crisis Response Team continues to provide immediate support following violent incidents, delivering stabilisation services for affected individuals and families. During the reporting period, the team was activated following 36 violent incidents and delivered 125 support sessions, including 48 family safety planning interventions. These efforts contribute to reducing retaliation risk, stabilised affected families, and building trust within communities.

The National Violence Reduction Strategy continues to operate through its established governance framework, including the National Violence Reduction Steering Committee, the Inter-Agency Gang Enforcement Team, and Inter-Agency Community Response Mechanism. This structure supports coordinated prevention enforcement and rehabilitation efforts across government agencies and community partners. Educational and vocational pathways remain a priority under the empowering Future Initiative. GED grants continue to be issued with partnership with C.A.R.E. Learning Centre, alongside expanded collaboration with the adult education school. Madam Chairman, 10 Violence Reduction Team's clients have been supported through

educational funding with eight currently enrolled and four expected to complete their GED during this academic year.

Additional initiatives such as the Computer Care Programme and Workforce Development partnerships have further expanded academic engagement and employment readiness opportunities for high-risk youth.

Opportunities for High-Risk Youth

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the “Stop the Violence” campaign continues to serve as a national public awareness initiative, designed to challenge harmful norms, promote emotional well-being, and encourage healthier decision-making among young men and boys. The campaign incorporates storytelling, youth engagement, and community dialogue to address the social and emotional drivers of violence. Key campaign initiatives included “Truth Be Told: Youth Rise Against Violence,” “Voices of Young Men: Stories of Loss and Hope,” and “Mental Awareness for Black Men and Boys.”

Madam Chairman, campaign analytics demonstrate strong public visibility and engagement across multiple digital platforms. Instagram recorded over 211,900 views and approximately 7,800 interactions. Facebook generated nearly 78,800 views, while YouTube content reached over 47,600 views with an audience retention rate of 87.8 per cent. These results reflect growing public engagement with violence prevention messaging and continued normalisation of conversations around community safety and personal responsibility.

Madam Chairman, grants provided under the National Violence Reduction Strategy continue to support community-based organisations delivering services for at-risk youth, including trauma-informed care, education and therapeutic programmes, and targeted support for violence reduction team clients. These partnerships strengthen community capacity while reinforcing Bermuda's collective response to violence prevention.

Our Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, during the fiscal year 2026/27, the Violence Reduction Team will continue to build upon its prevention, intervention and rehabilitation efforts under the National Violence Reduction Strategy, while introducing several new and expanded initiatives designed to strengthen early intervention, youth engagement, and long-term opportunity pathways.

Madam Chairman, as we look at the year ahead, the Violence Reduction Team will remain a central pillar in the ongoing delivery of the National Violence Reduction Strategy. As both architects of the strategy and active agents of its delivery, the Violence

Reduction Team continues to be a driving force behind Bermuda's efforts to reduce violence and build a safer, more inclusive society. The Violence Reduction Team's work is not theoretical. It is practical, personal and profoundly impactful. Through education, mentorship, crisis response and real-life opportunities, the Violence Reduction Team is changing lives, restoring communities and guiding young people toward hope and purpose.

Our next steps reflect a commitment to deepening this impact and expanding the reach of our programmes in alignment with the eight strategic goals of the National Violence Reduction Strategy.

Madam Chairman, the Violence Reduction Team will:

- a) Continue leading and implementing core violence prevention initiatives in direct alignment with the National Violence Reduction Strategy, serving as key stakeholders across all three strategic tiers of the strategy.

Madam Chairman, the Steering Committee, Inter-agency Gang Enforcement and Inter-agency Community Response [will]:

- b) Support community-based prevention and early intervention through grants to sports clubs to provide after-school homework assistance, life skills development and violence prevention workshops for our young people.

Funding youth-centred organisations that offer trauma-informed wraparound support to vulnerable children and families. Expanded counselling services and therapeutic programmes to address mental health needs and support emotional healing for people affected by violence or violent incidents.

Madam Chairman, a key priority will be the continued expansion of structured youth engagement through the Hype League platform, building on the success of the summer and school-based initiatives, the programme will be extended to additional school environments and community spaces, providing increased access to safe recreation activities during high-risk periods.

These programmes will continue to emphasise teamwork, mentorship and positive behavioural development while strengthening relationships between youth participants and outreach workers. The Ministry will also expand its education and workforce development pathways under the Empowering Futures initiative. This includes strengthened collaboration with the adult education school and additional support for GED completion among violence reduction team clients.

In fiscal year 2026/27, the programme will further develop partnerships with Workforce Development agencies and training providers to increase access to certification programmes, technical training opportunities and structured employment pathways for young adults seeking to transition into stable employment.

In addition, Madam Chairman, the Ministry will advance new initiatives designed to support post-secondary educational opportunities. Work is underway to develop sponsorship pathways through Bermuda College that will allow eligible Violence Reduction Team participants to pursue associate degrees, professional certifications, and vocational training aligned with Bermuda's workforce needs.

The Ministry also intends to expand targeted public engagement initiatives under the "Stop the Violence" campaign. Building on the campaign's strong public response, future programming will place greater emphasis on youth-led dialogue, storytelling initiatives, and mental health awareness programmes focused on young men and boys. These efforts will continue to challenge harmful social norms while encouraging open conversations around trauma, emotional well-being and responsible decision-making.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Minister, before you continue, can I just take a second to recognise former Member Michael Scott, who is in the Gallery.

Member, welcome.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Welcome, Mr. Scott.

Through these initiatives, the Violence Reduction Team will continue to strengthen Bermuda's violence prevention framework by expanding opportunity pathways, deepening community engagement and reinforcing early intervention strategies that support safer communities and more positive futures for Bermuda's young people.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 83, Ministry Headquarters.

I shall now present my budget brief for Head 6, Defence.

The Chairman: Thank you. The Minister will continue in Committee of Supply for Revenue and Expenditure. While he's pulling up his presentation for Head 6, I believe it is, I just wanted the listening public to recognise that we are in the Budget Debate for the Ministry of National Security.

So, I welcome the Minister when he is ready to continue with his next head.

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

HEAD 6—DEFENCE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, [Head 6, Defence,] is found on pages B-268 through B-272 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 6, the Department of Defence found on pages B-268 through B-272 of our Budget Book.

Mission/Mandate

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Our mandate or mission, Madam Chairman, *The Royal Bermuda Regiment will generate and sustain a disciplined force to operate in Bermuda waters and on land to ensure Bermuda's safety and security, protect Bermuda's interests and strengthen Bermuda society.*

Under the authority of the Defence Act 1965, the Royal Bermuda Regiment's mandate is to be a military force maintaining the necessary levels of personnel, training and equipment to enable it to protect Bermuda's interests. It conducts its training and operations whilst also acting as a centre of excellence for all Bermudians and residents to be able to personally and professionally develop while serving their country.

Department Objectives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the department objectives which can be found on pages B-268 and B-269 are as follows.

- The effect: The Regiment provides an agile and flexible disciplined force to deliver the following effects, protect Bermuda's people and resources, support Bermuda's recovery after disaster, deter illegal activity wherever mobilised, strengthen supported government agencies and the Bermuda community, reassure the Bermuda public of the government's ability to respond in a time of need and engage with the Bermuda public to drive recruitment.

- Our Coast Guard: In accordance with the Defence (Coast Guard [Unit]) Amendment Act of 2018, the Regiment shall maintain a standing maritime force to protect and secure Bermuda's territorial waters by way of the provision of search and rescue, a 24-hour search and rescue capability in accordance with international obligations in partnership with other government agencies.

- Support: Operations in conjunction with and in support of government agencies with maritime responsibilities to include Bermuda Maritime Operations Centre, Marine and Ports, Environmental Protection, reference oil spill response and fisheries, Bermuda Police Service, Customs, and Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service.

- Diving: Maintaining underwater search and rescue recovery diving capability.

- Humanitarian Aid/Disaster Relief: The Regiment will provide an organised response to alleviate the results of a man-made or natural catastrophe, the consequences of which put lives and or livelihoods at risk and exceeds the responsible agency's ability to cope using its own resources.

- Force Protection: The Regiment shall maintain a reserve disciplined force to respond with or without arms during times of emergency to minimise the vulnerability of personnel, facilities, equipment, material, operations and activities from threats and hazards in order to preserve freedom of action and operational effectiveness. Roles shall include defence of high-value assets, protecting facilities or locations that are essential to Bermuda's operations, public order, management of and effective response to public disorder or rioting.

- Provost: The use of military police for the security of military estates and personnel.

- Explosive ordnance disposal: Disposal of unexploded ordnance, conventional munitions and limited capability for improvised explosive devices jointly with Bermuda Police Service.

- Fire: In support to the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service to assist in firefighting.

- Enhancing Bermudian Society: The Regiment has played a central role developing Bermuda society and shaping Bermudian identity through military service and shall continue to do so through

- a) The provision of youth engagement and development through the delivery of military and adventurous training by way of the Junior Leaders programme including a school-based Cadet programme and Junior Band and facilitation of Outward Bound Bermuda.

- b) The provision of a common military experience for volunteers joined from across Bermuda's community providing the opportunity to enhance life and vocational skills and an appreciation of discipline, leadership, followership and the need to support civil authorities thereby becoming better citizens.

- Ceremonial: The Regiment will provide a professional standard military band and corps of drums and accompanying marching troops to conduct national ceremonial and civic events.

International Assistance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Regiment will engage in training and support with regional partners with a focus on British Overseas Territories to build joint capacity. The Regiment shall be prepared to support overseas operations on a voluntary basis if deployed, sustained and funded by third parties and where the Regiment operates as a component in a larger operational framework.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I now invite your attention to page B-270 of our Budget Book. A total of \$11,249,000 has been allocated for this head which represents an increase of \$1,439,000, or 15 per cent from the previous year and constitutes 8 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

Madam Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be \$11,249,000 for 2026/27 and represents an increase of \$1,439,000, or approximately 15 per cent higher than the budget of 2025/26. This change is due primarily to an increase in full-time staff salaries in line with government-wide salary uplifts, part-time wages, transport, travel and operational expenses with additional expenditure focused on the Coast Guard St. David's substation. This increase will allow the Royal Bermuda Regiment to return to its original full-time equivalent and allow the Royal Bermuda Regiment to support training and operations in accordance with the commanding officer's directives and throwing speech initiatives.

Business Unit 16000, Defence Department, \$509,901

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Finance cost centre covers the Defence Department which holds three civilian full-time staff and one Regiment full-time staff and serves as the accounting function for the Royal Bermuda Regiment. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$509,901 which represents an increase of \$152,000, or 42 per cent when compared to the last fiscal year.

This is due to the salary uplift and the incorporation of a new post of full-time Outward-Bound instructors in a civilian role.

Business unit 16005, Recruitment, \$167,760

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Recruitment cost centre covers the advertising, promotion and related recruiting expenses. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$168,000 which is an increase of \$74,000, or 79 per cent from the 2025/26 financial year

Contributions to this increase include the introduction of an HR Management Programme to streamline line recruitment, costs affiliated with the government Career Fair and recruitment costs increasing to account for inflation.

Business Unit 16010, Regimental Headquarters
\$6,032,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Regimental Headquarters cost centre covers all other Regiment's full-time equivalents for Defence and Head 6, liabilities such as employee-related expenses and liability insurance for the marine fleet, vehicle fleet and public liability. The 2026/27 budget estimate is

\$6,032,000 which is an increase of \$937,000, or 18 per cent over the 2025/26 financial year. This increase is to account for an uplift in full-time equivalent salaries, rising insurance costs and increases to medical costs for our full-time equivalent staff.

We have also anticipated the cost for additional housing allowance changes for all full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 16020, Quartermaster \$1,750,048.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Quartermaster cost centre covers all the operational and logistical services for the Royal Bermuda Regiment in relation to facilities for land and maritime capabilities. This capability is organised under the Logistics Company. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$1,750,000 which is an increase of \$233,000, or 15 per cent over the 2025/26 financial year. This is due in large part to the increases in part-time pay and the increases to the cost of purchasing goods and materials including electricity, gasoline and rental costs.

Business Unit 16030, Ceremonial \$489,044

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Ceremonial cost centre covers the ceremonial and the humanitarian and disaster relief training expenses. These are now organised under Headquarters Company after the ORBAT changes of February 2025. Headquarters Company now includes the Regiment's training and engagement functions but excludes costs captured by cost centres 16060 and 16080.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$489,000 which is an increase of \$137,000, or 39 per cent increase over the 2025/26 financial year. This is due to an increase in the part-time soldiers' wages and increase in soldier numbers with the new ORBAT. We have also moved bounty pay from the cost centre 16080 business unit as Training wing is now under Headquarters Company.

Business Unit 16040, Internal Security, \$245,276

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Internal Security is \$245,276. Madam Chairman, the Internal Security cost centre covers the training expenses related to internal security and military aid to civil authority.

These functions are organised and delivered by a company. The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$245,000 which is an increase of \$10,000, or 4 per cent increase over the 2025/26 financial year. This increase is exclusively due to the wage increase.

Business Unit 16060, Bermuda Cadet Corps
Junior Leaders \$42,869

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Cadet Corps cost centre covers the training and youth engagement of the Junior Leaders Programme.

As part of the curriculum, staff of the Royal Bermuda Regiment facilitate adventure training, drill, camp craft, and similar military activities to young Bermudians below the age of military enlistment. The main aim is to enhance the leadership and decision-making skills of school-age cadets in order to make them better citizens. The programme runs weekly throughout the school year and incorporates meetings, weekend camps, and an annual exercise.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$43,000 which is the same allocation as the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Business unit—

The Chairman: Minister, just so that you know, we're about five minutes before lunch and you can probably finish those next three business units within five minutes, you think, or no?

[No audible response]

The Chairman: You can do the next business unit, of course. You can take us up to 12:30.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Let me do the next business unit.

The Chairman: Yes, please.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And I can finish there.

Business Unit 16075, Overseas Camp \$841,098

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, this year the Overseas Camp will take place in the United Kingdom in May 2026. Since the formation of the unit, the two-week Overseas Camp has been the culmination of the annual training cycle and remains a mandated requirement by the Governor.

The exercise provides tangible evidence that the Royal Bermuda Regiment is fit for role and able to operate at the scale and intensity required to complete their missions and tasks. The complexity and range of activities conducted on land and at sea are not possible to achieve within the confines of Bermuda. Therefore, it is essential that the camp is conducted abroad.

It is also a primary component in the retention of Royal Bermuda Regiment personnel as it is engaging and an exciting and impactful opportunity for Bermudians to travel abroad.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$841,000, a decrease of \$63,000, or 7 per cent when compared to the 2025/26 financial year. This decrease is due to a slightly shorter Overseas Camp, which results in less pay and other expenses.

That's it, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: You want to finish there?

Okay, so we have approximately three minutes before lunch. Did you . . . you didn't want to try the next one? Okay. Go ahead.

Business Unit 16080, Training and Validation,
\$465,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Training and Validation cost centre covers the expenses related to the training of recruits and promotion courses. To ensure our military personnel are current, qualified, and competent, it is essential that the selection and training system provides development and assessment opportunities at all levels for all specialisms.

The Training and Validation budget ensures these courses and qualifications are delivered in a most appropriate and cost-effective way possible, only seeking external instruction when it is not possible through local resources. All routine training exercises subscribe to the UK Armed Forces recognised assurance system, the defence system approach to training to ensure safety and consistency.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$465,000, which is a decrease of \$90,000, or 16 percent, from the 2025/26 fiscal year. This is a result of there being no JNCO [Junior Non-Commissioned Officer] Cadre leadership course being run this fiscal year.

The Chairman: And I do believe that this would be a good time to move us to lunch.

So, Minister, if you can, could you move us to lunch?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the House adjourn until 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: Thank you.

It has been moved that the House adjourn until 2:00 pm.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

So moved.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:27 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:01 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE
FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

HEAD 6—DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

[Continuation of debate thereon]

The Chairman: Members, we are in the resumption of Committee of Supply for the Estimates and Revenue of the year 2026—sorry, yes, for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

We are currently debating the Ministry of National Security, and I call on the respective Minister to resume.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good afternoon to you.

Can you give us a time as to how much time I got left?

The Chairman: Certainly, we have approximately four hours remaining.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Business Unit 16085, Marine Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, Madam Chairman, moving right along, we are still in Head 6, which is Defence, so I am on business unit 16085, Marine Operations, \$706,483.

Madam Chairman, the Marine Operations cost centre covers the costs associated with the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard's operating expenses and part-time wages. The unit has 16 full-time staff, consisting of 14 soldiers and two officers. They are supported by part-time staff who train and operate on weekends and public holidays in order to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters 24 hours a day throughout the year. The Regiment's Coast Guard Unit is organised under C Company.

The 2026/27 budget estimate is \$706,000, which is an increase of \$49,000, or 7 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. This is due to increases to part-time wages, the cost of goods, including anticipated electricity and gasoline costs of running St. David's Coast Guard substation.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates of the department is found on page B-271. I will highlight the material object code increases and decreases.

Salaries have increased by \$353,000, or 7 per cent for the 2025/26 financial year. This is largely in part due to salary uplifts of 4.3 per cent awarded by government.

Professional services have increased by \$828,000, to account for the anticipated funding of additional expenses for the Coast Guard Unit as it

expands its operations when the new Coast Guard station opens, and the move of a post supporting Outward Bound Bermuda to the Regiment. This cost centre also supports professional services associated with recruitment.

Energy has increased by \$52,000, or 12 per cent. This is due to the increased costs of gasoline and electricity, and the projected costs for the expansion of the Coast Guard St. David's facility.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Regiment is due to purchase a pair of advanced vessels for the Coast Guard. These vessels are designed to provide a standardised, high-performance capability to support 24/7 operations, interoperability with partner agencies, and resilience across a wide range of missions, including national security and environmental response.

On page C-15 of the Budget Book, you will see the capital funds allocated for these new vessels. The total allocation for the two vessels is \$2,200,000. Additionally, on page C-7, it shows that \$900,000 has been allocated for the first phase of construction of a boatshed at the Coast Guard Unit headquarters at Watford Island.

This will provide shelter for boat maintenance and the secure storage of equipment currently stored in shipping containers.

Active Strength

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Regiment currently employs 43 full-time staff and 4 civilians. This brings the total of full-time equivalents for 2025/26 to 47, which is reflected on budget page B-271.

In addition to the full-time staff, the Royal Bermuda Regiment part-time strength is 231. This brings our total strength to 275.

Performance Measures by Business Units

16000, 16005, 16010, 16020,
16030, 16040, 16075, 16080

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, in May of last year, the Royal Bermuda Regiment successfully completed its annual camp with 121 soldiers deploying to Jamaica with soldiers from the Falkland Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Cayman Islands joining, affording the opportunity to hone soldiering skills and practice command and leadership.

Separately, four soldiers deployed to Trinidad and Tobago to deliver public order training as part of the US Southern Command-sponsored exercise Tradewinds. In June 2025, soldiers participated in the Junior [Non-Commissioned Officers] (NCO) Cadre tactics camp in North Carolina. Joined by eight students from Turks and Caicos Islands, with 19 promoted in January 2026. The Regiment completed two recruit

camps in July and February with intakes of 12 and 22. These intakes have been supplemented by re-enlistment of soldiers throughout the year. At the end of September and October, the Regiment embodied in support of the recoveries from Hurricanes Imelda and Melissa.

In mid-October, the Royal Bermuda Regiment mobilised again for a Trooping of the Colours during a visit of its Colonel-in-Chief, the Duchess of Gloucester. In February 2026, the Regiment deployed 26 personnel to Jamaica to aid reconstruction efforts as Jamaica recovers from Hurricane Melissa. The Bermuda-led contingent, joined by eight soldiers from the Cayman Islands Regiment and five from the Turks and Caicos Islands Regiment, were able to replace 14 roofs over a two-week period, working alongside the Jamaica Defence Force Engineer Regiment and the Ghana Armed Forces.

16085—Marine Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I am pleased to report that the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard has completed another successful year of operations, due in large part to the small but dedicated staff that watch over our waters 24 hours a day. The unit represents a continued commitment by the government to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters for recreational users and those who are part of our Blue Economy.

During the 12 months of January 2025 to December 2025, the Coast Guard conducted 1,127 patrols, observed 14,560 vessels, conducted 98 search and rescue missions, and enforced environmental protection laws such as fishing and lobster licence checks. These remain significant achievements from a relatively small resource. The Reserve or part-time component of the Coast Guard Unit mobilised during weekends and holidays from Bermuda Day in May to mid-September, providing a significant uplift during the boating season after completing their October to May training cycle.

Madam Chairman, the Royal Bermuda Regiment conducts many of these tasks in partnership with or in support of other government departments, specifically the Emergency Measures Organisation (EMO), Maritime Operations Centre, Department of Environmental Protection, HM Customs in Bermuda, Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team, Bermuda Police Service, Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, and the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Major Achievements for 2025/26

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, in addition to its public roles, including the continued development of the Coast Guard, the Royal Bermuda Regiment has

- Fulfilled its mandate through Hurricanes Imelda and Melissa in September and October 2025.
- Celebrated 60 years of service starting on the 1st of September 2025, punctuated by hosting a Trooping of the Colours in October, under the patronage of Colonel-in-Chief, the Duchess of Gloucester. This coincided with the first All Ranks Ball in a decade, allowing all members of the unit and her families to celebrate the occasion.
- Assisted in the training of fellow Overseas Territories Regiment, the Turks and Caicos Islands Regiment.
- In July 2025 and February 2026, the Royal Bermuda Regiment trained over 40 Turks and Caicos Regiment recruits who joined our recruit camps and 12 Junior NCOs who joined the Junior NCO Cadre Camp.
- Actively pursued the government's commitment to Blue Shield.
- Deployed to Jamaica in February 2026 to support Jamaica's reconstruction efforts after Hurricane Melissa.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the coming financial year will see the Regiment Coast Guard Unit's continued growth.

It will see the full integration of its unmanned systems into operations both in the air and underwater in the execution of its search and rescue duties. The two-year procurement of a new fleet of vessels will commence, which will expand its unit's operational capabilities significantly and allow for the retirement of its current fleet which is operating years beyond its designed life. The St. David's Coast Guard Station will open and be integrated into operations, allowing for a sustained presence in the East End.

Finally, work will progress to increase the staffing level of the Coast Guard to allow for the sustainable staffing of two stations, allow for training and the coverage of vacation and sick leave without compromising operational effectiveness. Ceremonially, we continue to prepare for multiple parades throughout the year. The Royal Bermuda Regiment Band has a rich history of representing the Island overseas and is working towards doing so again in 2027. And also introducing the joys of music to the youth as the band continues to enhance school-age musicians. To that end, Youth Band Camp and Junior Leader Summer Camp is also planned again this year and both camps will run concurrently. Work continues to introduce the Junior Leader Programme into Bermuda schools.

The Regiment will conduct recruit camps in July 2026 and February 2027. The annual camp in May 2026 will be held in the UK with a focus on public order and leadership. As we look forward to the coming year,

the Regiment remains poised to mobilise, be it during the 2026 hurricane season or in support of the operations of other agencies as the need arises.

Madam Chairman, this past year has showcased our Regiment as a force of professionalism, reliability and adaptability, both ashore and afloat, within Bermuda and alongside Caribbean allies. They have notably enhanced the Coast Guard Unit's operational capabilities while offering substantial personal and professional growth opportunities for our soldiers. The year has reaffirmed the Royal Bermuda Regiment's stature as a steadfast, honourable and skilled entity, efficiently delivering critical services to Bermuda in regular periods and emergencies as it did after Hurricanes Imelda and Melissa on both land and sea. Our Island's Regiment stands as a key pillar within our community and a source of collective pride for all of us.

Madam Chairman, in closing, I wish to commend Lieutenant Colonel Duncan Simons and his outstanding team for their continued dedication and service to Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 6, which is Defence.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

We are continuing in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, currently debating the Ministry of National Security and its attendant heads.

When the Minister is ready, he will take us into his next Head for debate.

HEAD 7—BERMUDA POLICE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Found on pages B-273 through B-276 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

It gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 7, the Bermuda Police Service, which can be found on pages B-273 through B-277 of the Budget Book.

The mission of the Bermuda Police Service is *Making Bermuda safer*. To make Bermuda safer, the Bermuda Police Service strives to

- maintain the confidence of the community;
- treat all persons fairly with dignity and respect;
- protect vulnerable victims;
- reduce crime, particularly focusing on serious crimes and gang-related criminality;
- reduce antisocial behaviour; and
- enhance road safety.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service (BPS) carries out its objectives by aligning its organisational structure to maintain its community safety agenda and the prevention of criminal risk, locally and internationally, through a funded establishment of 473 employees as shown on page B-276. This funding supports 400 police officers and 73 civilian staff.

The BPS remains committed to expanding the officer establishment to 420 officers, reflecting our confidence in ongoing recruitment efforts and our commitment to enhancing operational capacity.

Madam Chairman, the BPS is developing a strategic and operational plan for 2027 through to 2031. This forward-looking strategic framework, which will involve comprehensive internal and external consultation with officers, staff, community members, and partner agencies, will set our direction across the next five years. The plan will reflect our response to evolving security needs and emerging challenges facing our Island.

Key initiatives will progress across multiple strategic pillars.

- The BPS gang-targeting team continues to work with the Ministry of National Security's Gang Violence Reduction Team (GVRT) to reduce the threat in this area and seeks to divert persons from gang-related criminality. However, significant risk to the community remains from gun and gang-related violence and the BPS continues to strive to deter such acts through effective use of intelligence and specialist policing.
- The BPS continues to work in support of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC as it is known) to prevent financial crime, money laundering, and terrorist financing with a strategic focus to maintain its excellent Caribbean Financial Action Task Force grading.
- The Bermuda Police Service further continues its work to prevent and respond to cybercrime and security matters and help maintain Bermuda's reputation as a premier international financial jurisdiction.
- The BPS is working to implement a framework for greater multi-agency collaboration on the problem of domestic abuse. We seek to enhance communication and improve training with a view to elevating service and reducing victimisation.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I would now invite your attention to the current account estimates for Head 7 which can be found on page B-274.

Total current expenditure for the 2026/27 financial year is estimated to be \$74,395,000.

The Chairman: Minister, that's located on page B-275.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, Ma'am.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

And represents an increase of \$4,626,000, or 7 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. This increase reflects salary adjustments from recent union negotiations and necessary investments in operational support and infrastructure maintenance.

Proposed salaries of \$57,991,000, which can be found on page B-275, represents an increase of \$3,131,000, or 6 per cent, year over year.

Programme 0701, Commissioner's Office

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Commissioner's Office is the operational core of the Bermuda Police Service. The BPS is focused on the protection of the Island's property and its people. To ensure such protection, we require boots on the ground, that is, sufficient officers who form a capable and committed police service. Officer salaries represent the primary expense in programme 0701. Total funding for programme 0701, as shown on page B-274, is \$56,301,000.

The Chairman: And Minister, you were correct, it is on page [B-]274.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Commissioner's Office represents 76 per cent of the BPS total budget and covers proposed costs for 400 officers and five civilian staff. I refer you to first line of page B-276 for that number.

Back to page B-274. Funding for this programme increased by \$1,709,000, or 3 per cent. The budget also includes funding of \$5,000,000 for police overtime costs and other benefits for officers as mandated by the Police (Conditions of Service) Orders 2024. This provision is essential to support round-the-clock policing operations throughout the year, including coverage during public holidays and special events, ensuring consistent service delivery to our community.

Programme 0702, Corporate Services Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Corporate Services Division includes the following departments:

- 17010 Human Resources
- 17020 Finance and Administration
- 17025 Information and Management Services
- 17190 Training and Development Department
- 17300 Vehicle Stores
- 17310 Uniformed Stores

Funding for programme 0702 for the 2026/27 financial year is \$10,629,000, an increase of \$3,933,000, or 59 per cent year over year.

Madam Chairman, the department under the Corporate Services Division that requires the most funding is Information and Management Services, with total funding of \$4,753,000, which represents 45 per cent of the budget for the programme. This line item has been increased by \$2,061,000 for the fiscal year 2026/27, or 77 per cent.

Madam Chairman, as the world becomes more reliant on technology, so does modern policing. The cost of technology continues to increase as organisations transition from vendor-owned software applications to subscription-based licensing models. Additionally, computer hardware is typically obsolete within five years and requires replacement to maintain operational security and performance. Significant investment in computer hardware maintenance, support, and software licensing reflects the reality that digital infrastructure is now essential to effective policing. This allocation ensures that the BPS maintains the technological capability necessary to support criminal investigations, intelligence operations, and community service delivery.

Madam Chairman, the BPS cannot accomplish its mission for making Bermuda safer without competent officers safeguarding people and property on the Island. To build and maintain a professional police establishment, we must continuously recruit to address attrition and support growth in officer numbers. This requires investment in human resources management, recruit training, and compliance with the Police (Conditions of Service) Order (COSO).

Funding under cost centre 17010, Human Resources, has been allocated at \$3,525,000 for 2026/27, an increase of \$2,271,000, or 181 per cent year over year. This substantial increase addresses two critical needs.

First, the COSO, that's the Police (Conditions of Service) Order, mandates comprehensive medical benefits for all police officers. Medical costs have escalated significantly in recent years and the budget in prior years did not adequately reflect these growing expenses. The 2026/27 allocation corrects this long-standing shortfall and ensures that BPS meets its statutory obligations to officers under COSO.

Second, this funding supports our overseas recruitment strategy. Building a sustainable police establishment requires attracting experienced officers from the international market. Investment in overseas recruiting initiatives enables the Bermuda Police Service to secure skilled professionals with the capabilities needed to address complex policing challenges and strengthen our operational capacity.

Madam Chairman, the 2026/27 budget for finance and administration has been set at \$1,409,000 as shown on page B-274, which is a decrease of \$113,000, or 7 per cent. This represents a modest adjustment year over year. The finance and administration cost centre provides funding for the maintenance of the numerous properties of the Bermuda Police

Service, including the police barracks located in Prospect, Somerset Police Station, Southside Police Station, and various offices at our Prospect site.

Staff under this budget manage BPS payroll, vendor and other payments, stores and facilities operations. The budget also includes provision for securing overseas witnesses for critical criminal prosecutions supporting the administration of justice.

Programme 0703, Operational Policing Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the operational policing division includes 17040 Community Policing Unit.

Programme 0703 was restructured in the 2024/25 financial year to consolidate operations under the Community Policing Unit, a cohesive operational structure. Funding for this unit is set at \$1,964,000 as shown on page B-274, which is a decrease of \$252,000, or 11 per cent. This decrease is due to a staffing reduction of four persons. The unit is staffed by civilians who provide critical support to the Bermuda Police Service officers in their policing duties. Station duty officers, whilst civilian personnel, provide essential operational support that enables efficient police response.

The budget also funds rent and associated costs for the Southside Police Station and covers cleaning services and operational costs for running the department's facilities.

Programme 0704, Operational Support Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, Operational Support Division provides funding for the following departments:

- 17090—Court Liaison Unit;
- 17120—Tactical Operations;
- 17130—Garage and Workshop;
- 17160—Forensic Support.

The total budget for this programme is \$3,503,000, representing overall stability year over year. The most significant funding difference in the Operational Support Division is the increase of \$501,000, or 61 per cent, for Forensic Support.

Madam Chairman, a significant development in the 2026/27 budget reflects Cabinet approval during the prior year for seven new posts within the Forensic Support Unit. These positions include one forensic support unit supervisor, five forensic support unit officers, and one junior forensic support unit officer. For several years, this critical department operated with insufficient staffing levels and relied heavily on overseas consultants to meet operational demands, creating both cost pressures and service vulnerabilities.

The creation of these permanent positions represents a strategic investment in the Bermuda Police Service's investigative capacity and organisational sustainability. By developing a fully staffed forensic civilian

capability, the Bermuda Police Service is moving to reduce dependence on external consultants by creating a clear and attractive career pathway for Bermudians who aspire to professional forensic science roles. This approach builds institutional knowledge, strengthens continuity of investigations, and ensures forensic services can be locally sourced and expertise remains within the service.

Beyond these direct benefits, civilianising these specialised forensic positions generates a significant operational advantage. It frees up police officer posts that would otherwise be absorbed by forensic duties, allowing these officers to be deployed to frontline policing services. This strategic reallocation directly strengthens community safety and emergency response capacity. Officers currently performing or supporting forensic work will be able to focus entirely on community engagement, crime prevention, investigation of priority offences, and response to public calls for service. In an environment where staffing levels remain constrained, this represents a disciplined approach to maximising the impact of every officer position.

Madam Chairman, this investment strengthens the Bermuda Police Service's capacity to deliver sophisticated crime scene analysis and evidence processing. This supports crime investigations while at the same time optimising our establishment for frontline operations where the community most directly experiences police service. The result is a win for operational efficiency, community safety, and fiscal responsibility.

Cost centre 17130, Garage and Workshop, includes wages and salaries for garage mechanics and the fleet manager, as well as funding for inventory, spare parts, fuel, and insurance for the BPS fleet. The budget for Garage and Workshop represents 40 per cent of the total budget under the Operational Support Division.

Operational vehicles are essential to policing operations and operate continuously throughout each day and night. As a 24/7 service, Bermuda Police Service vehicles endure significant wear and tear and require consistent maintenance and periodic replacement for safety and reliability.

To ensure vehicles are kept at a proper service standard, maintenance and parts replacement form a regular and constant occurrence for the fleet. The allocation of \$1,392,000 to this cost centre ensures that the BPS sustains a modern, well-maintained fleet capable of meeting the demands of contemporary policing and supporting the BPS commitment to road safety initiatives.

Programme 0708, Serious Crime Divisions

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Serious Crime Divisions includes the following departments:

- 17140—Serious Crime Unit;

- 17150—Drugs and Financial Crime Department;
- 17170—Intelligence Division.

The budget for programme 0708 is \$1,916,000, a decrease of \$544,000, or 22 per cent year over year. This adjustment reflects a strategic reallocation of resources. Specifically, the creation of permanent full-time positions in the Forensic Support Unit, as noted under programme 0704, has reduced the need for overseas forensic consultants. The BPS has strategically redeployed consultant budget lines from the Serious Crime Divisions, resulting in savings of approximately \$400,000 from the Serious Crime Unit consultant account, \$50,000 from forensic account reallocations, and \$150,000 from forensic laboratory services. These adjustments reflect improved operational efficiency through the hiring of permanent skilled Bermudian staff while maintaining investigative effectiveness.

Madam Chairman, within the Serious Crime Divisions lies the Serious Crime Unit with a budget of \$649,000, representing 34 per cent of the total Serious Crime budget. The Serious Crime Unit investigates the most serious criminal offences, including murder, attempted murder and offences involving firearms and ammunition.

Where overseas consultants continue to be engaged, they provide skilled and experienced investigative support, assisting with complex cases and bringing specialised expertise, not currently available locally. These professionals enhance the Bermuda Police Service's capacity to conduct rigorous investigations while maintaining international standards of evidence collection and analysis, ultimately supporting successful prosecutions and justice outcomes for serious crime victims.

Programme 0710, Bermuda Reserve Police

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, programme 0710, Bermuda Reserve Police is allocated \$82,000. The Bermuda Reserve Police provide supplemental policing capacity, and the budget primarily funds bounty payments and associated costs.

Reserve officers contribute meaningfully to public safety by supplementing the regular establishment during periods of high demand and special events. Continued support for this programme reflects our commitment to utilising all available resources to enhance community safety.

The budget was decreased from \$281,555 to \$82,000 to reflect the actual costs for 2025/26. There was a reduced deployment of the Bermuda Reserve Police for 2025/26 due to a decrease in high demand and special events that required the Bermuda Reserve Police.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Revenue shown on page B-275 for the Bermuda Police Service consists of income from

- 8457, general licences;
- 8521, firearms licences;
- 8523, licences for the use of explosives;
- 8525, security guard fees;
- 8617, publications;
- 8801, facilities; and
- 8889, sundry receipts.

The BPS is responsible for the provision of fire-arm and explosive licences on Island. In addition, the BPS reviews and approves licences to the various security guard services. The BPS also provides barrack housing facilities at a nominal cost at its prospect location. With our active recruiting efforts in recent years, the availability of such housing is critical as a benefit and incentive for new officers. The BPS provides additional services including fingerprinting, police reports, and traffic reports for the public. Because the BPS is not considered, nor should it be, a revenue generator, income earned from these sources remains nominal. The BPS estimates total revenue of \$693,000 for 2026/27, a negligible decrease of \$5,000.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The subjective analysis of current account estimates of [Head] 7 is found on page B-275. The following highlights material changes year over year.

Madam Chairman, with a projected budget of \$74,395,000, salaries and wages represent 78 per cent of the BPS budget. The budget for salaries is \$57,991,000, an increase of \$3,131,000, or 6 per cent. The budget for wages is \$685,000, an increase of 6 per cent. The funding supports 473 full-time equivalents comprised of 400 officers and 73 civilian staff, as shown on page B-276. These salary and wage increases reflect recent union negotiations and reflect the commitment of the government to fill vacant officer posts and is a tangible sign of the value it places on police officers and staff.

I would like to read that again for the listening public: *These salary and wage increases reflect recent union negotiations and reflect the commitment of the government to fill vacant officer posts and is a tangible sign of the value it places on police officers and staff.*

Madam Chairman, repair and maintenance is budgeted at \$4,746,000, an increase of \$2,356,000. This significant increase addresses deferred maintenance needs across BPS facilities throughout the Island. The BPS operates ageing buildings that require escalating repair and maintenance investment. Additionally, this budget allocation now comprehensively includes software licence renewals and IT equipment maintenance, which were previously under-budgeted in separate cost centres. The allocation reflects realistic funding requirements for maintaining operational

facilities and digital infrastructure essential to contemporary policing.

Madam Chairman, materials and supplies are budgeted at \$1,386,000, adjusted from the prior year allocation of \$2,057,000. This decrease is to account for the anticipated reduced cost of maintenance and parts of vehicles owing to the purchase of new vehicles.

Professional services are budgeted at \$1,433,000, a decrease of \$1,302,000. These adjustments reflect a rebalancing of operational spending priorities, as well as the acquisition of additional staff to perform these services.

Capital Expenditure— Capital Development Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, as shown on page C-7, the Bermuda Government is funding important capital projects for the Bermuda Police Service in the 2026/27 financial year. The renovations to the old headquarters building in Prospect commenced in the prior year and will continue in 2026/27. It is the strategic objective of the Bermuda Police Service to relocate senior command and the Serious Crime Unit back to their operational base in Prospect.

By consolidating these functions at Prospect, the BPS can eliminate rental and associated costs at its Front Street location, allow the Court's expanded use of the Hamilton Police Station, and bring staff back to a unified headquarters. This capital project represents an important long-term investment in facilities and operational efficiency.

Madam Chairman, as shown on page C-7, in the 2026/27 financial year, Government has allocated an additional \$1 million for capital development. These funds will enhance other buildings within the Bermuda Police Service Prospect location. Specifically, funding will address the removal of asbestos roofing from the building currently housing HR personnel, a necessary health and safety measure. Additional funds will support completion of renovations to two buildings within the Prospect complex that will enable future reductions in rental expenditure and allow consolidation of more staff at the Prospect location, further enhancing operational efficiency and reducing ongoing operational costs.

Capital Acquisition Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has been provided with \$1,910,000 for capital acquisitions, as shown on page C-15. Madam Chairman, \$710,000 has been provided to purchase new vehicles. As a 24/7 operation, the Bermuda Police Service vehicles endure severe wear and tear, and some must be replaced each year for safety and operational reliability.

Additionally, as the BPS seeks to expand the officer establishment to 420 officers, there is a

corresponding need to expand the vehicle fleet to support increased field operations. The acquisition of new operational vehicles in the 2026/27 financial year will support both fleet renewal and operational expansion.

Madam Chairman, the BPS has also been allocated \$200,000 for computer hardware and body-worn camera equipment. Body-worn cameras represent an important tool for accountability and evidence gathering, and continued investment in this technology supports both officer safety and transparency.

Madam Chairman, \$1,000,000 will be used to procure a records management system replacement. This investment is critical for long-term digital policing capabilities and will enhance the BPS's ability to manage criminal records, investigations, and operational intelligence in a modern, secure, and efficient digital environment.

Staffing

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has budgeted for 473 officers and staff for the 2026/27 financial year, as shown on page B-276. This represents a significant increase of 41 funded posts compared to the 2025/26 revised budget, reflecting government's commitment to increasing police service capacity.

Madam Chairman, this represents a significant increase of 41 funded posts compared to the 2025/26 revised budget, reflecting government's commitment to increasing police service capacity. The 2026/27 budgeted establishment comprises 400 police officers and 73 civilian staff members. While the budget provides for 400 officers, the Bermuda Police Service remains committed to expanding the officer establishment to 420 through active and sustained recruitment initiatives.

This measured approach balances prudent fiscal management with our strategic objective of building a fully staffed, operationally capable police service. The eventual expansion to 420 officers will significantly enhance our capacity to deliver frontline policing services, support community safety initiatives, and meet the operational demands facing Bermuda.

Service Initiatives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service is advancing its Strategic and Operational Plan for 2027–2031, a comprehensive five-year roadmap that will reflect our commitment to involving security needs and emerging challenges.

This plan will be developed through extensive internal and external consultation with officers, staff, community members, and partner agencies and guides our work across five key priority areas:

1. Reducing serious crime
2. Protecting vulnerable persons
3. Raising confidence in the police
4. Reducing harm on our roads

5. Developing digital policing

Implementation of this plan will be guided by our unwavering commitment to community satisfaction and confidence. We remain focused on ensuring that public input and community partnerships shape our strategic direction and operational approach. By combining professional expertise with community voice, we maintain focus on priorities that build on our achievements while adapting to evolving security threats and community expectations.

Performance Measures

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I am pleased to report on some of the department's performance measures for the 2025/26 financial year.

Public satisfaction with the Bermuda Police Service represents the cornerstone of our performance framework. This measure, independently assessed each quarter through comprehensive surveys, transcends all other measures for a fundamental reason: policing exists only through the consent and support of our community. When citizens express satisfaction with our service, it signals their trust in our approach, their confidence in our abilities, and their willingness to partner with us in *Making Bermuda Safer*.

A police service can achieve technical objectives yet fail in its primary mission if the public feels unheard, unfairly treated, or unsafe. These independent quarterly measurements capture the people element of policing that no procedural measure can quantify. Simply put, if the community is not satisfied with their service, the Bermuda Police Service is failing, no matter what the other numbers suggest. Our performance framework is built on independent quarterly surveys that measure public perception across five key dimensions of policing service.

Madam Chairman, overall satisfaction with the Bermuda Police Service remains steady with an average response of 6.2 on a zero to 10 scale, consistent with the prior year. This stability in satisfaction scores reflects the BPS's sustained commitment to service delivery despite operational pressures. Importantly, 49 per cent of the population reported satisfaction levels of 7 or higher, indicating that nearly half of Bermudians hold positive views of our police service.

The public's perception of fair treatment by the BPS remains very strong this year, with an average score of 6.7 and 60 per cent of respondents rating the service 7 or higher for treating all citizens fairly. This reflects our commitment to dignity, respect, and equitable policing.

Public perception of the Bermuda Police Service's response to serious crime shows modest improvement, with an average rating rising from 5.7 to 5.8, with 44 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction with how the service investigates crimes of note. This measure, while lower than other dimensions, reflects the serious and complex nature of major crime

investigations and the community's understandable expectation for swift resolution. We recognise this is an area where continued focus on communication, transparency, and investigative outcomes will build greater public confidence.

Madam Chairman, road safety perception declined slightly from 6.2 to 6.0, with 44 per cent of the population feeling safe on Bermuda's roads. This measure reflects broader road safety challenges including impaired driving and speeding issues requiring continued enforcement and community partnership. The BPS will intensify focus on road safety initiatives in the coming year with speed cameras expected to come online and have a notable impact on driver behaviour.

Public perception of the Bermuda Police Service's response to antisocial behaviour improved marginally from 6.0 to 6.1, with 45 per cent expressing satisfaction. This measure reflects growing community concern about vagrancy and quality of life issues in urban areas, particularly in the City of Hamilton. These concerns require sustained multi-agency partnership as well as the presence of capable guardians working alongside the police and intelligence-led enforcement.

Across all measures, the Bermuda Police Service recognises both achievements and opportunities. The breadth of independent measurements that capture fairness, crime response, road safety, and antisocial behaviour alongside overall satisfaction provides us with a comprehensive understanding of where we are meeting public expectations and where we must improve. These quarterly surveys reflect the voice of the community, and we are committed to using this feedback to guide operational priorities and service delivery.

Madam Chairman, please note that there is an error on page B-277 and that it shows zero as the measures when it should read 6.0.

The Chairman: And, Minister, you would know, or hopefully you know, that the office for the Chambers did provide all Members with an errata for performance measures from your Ministry and gave us the corrected version, so just so that you know, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I do have that in front of me, so thank you.

Policing Issues for 2026/27

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Like many police services globally, the Bermuda Police Service faces ongoing operational demands that require careful management. The service continues to make progress in increasing officer numbers through active recruitment. While staffing challenges exist, we are confident that our strategic approach to recruitment and the government's commitment to supporting growth will continue to strengthen our establishment. Funding is in place, and we will

vigorously endeavour to meet our recruitment targets for 2026/27.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service continues to benefit from strong government support and recruitment efforts, including expanded opportunities for resident non-Bermudians. This approach enhances diversity and brings new talent into the service. There is a firm commitment by government to ensure that the Bermuda Police Service is sufficiently staffed to meet the Island's security needs.

Madam Chairman, despite staffing investments, we face several significant public safety challenges that require targeted action this fiscal year. The scourge of gang and gun violence continues to affect our community. We are witnessing concerning dynamics, including involvement of younger persons in gang-related activity, sometimes extending destructive patterns across generations. This intergenerational cycle of violence demands renewed intervention strategies focused on at-risk youth, supporting diversion from gang involvement and violence. Knife crime remains a concern, and the Bermuda Police Service will continue to prioritise enforcement action and intelligent-led operations to address this threat.

Domestic abuse remains a concern, requiring sensitive handling and coordinated response. We will continue our partnership work with other agencies to ensure community members feel confident to report these sensitive matters. Our objective is to build greater community confidence in the police while providing specialised response and support to our victims.

Madam Chairman, the summer months will bring increased demand as residents and visitors congregate on beaches, on the water, and within entertainment venues. These periods present public safety challenges, including increased gang tensions, antisocial behaviour, and impaired driving. The Bermuda Police Service will maintain an intelligence-led approach to target the most violent offenders and those causing the greatest harm to our community.

Vagrancy and associated crime continue to present challenges to the look and feel of Bermuda, particularly in the City of Hamilton. Business owners report lost revenue and concerns about safety. While the roots of this complex social problem extend beyond policing, the BPS remains committed to addressing reported crimes while working with partners to develop longer-term solutions.

Each of these challenges requires not just enforcement action, but genuine community partnership and trust, the foundation upon which effective policing is built. We recognise there is always room for improvement. We will continue to ensure our responses are visible, effective, and build public trust across all communities as we work to address ongoing operational needs.

2025/26 Accomplishments

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I am pleased to report on the Bermuda Police Service's significant enforcement and operational achievements throughout calendar year 2025. These accomplishments reflect the dedication and professional commitment of our officers and staff to *Making Bermuda Safer* across all communities.

The Bermuda Police Service conducted sustained, intelligence-led enforcement operations that produced measurable results across serious crime, drug interdiction, and community safety. Between September and December 2025, Operation Sentinel, a service-wide initiative to reduce gang-related violent crime, delivered substantial outcomes: 173 arrests across high-harm categories including investigations that resulted in the recovery of four firearms and ammunition, 26 charges of possession with intent to supply, and 23 bladed article offences. The operation recovered 50 stolen motorcycles and removed them from criminal use and issued over 600 moving traffic violations directly disrupting offender mobility and preventing violent crime.

Madam Chairman, drug enforcement remained a priority. The Bermuda Police Service executed sustained, intelligence-led interdiction operations resulting in the seizure of 246 kilogrammes of illegal drugs valued at more than \$29,500,000. This included cannabis, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, MDMA, THC concentrates, and carfentanil. The service enhanced boarder security efforts across courier services, air travel, maritime routes, and cruise ship arrivals, resulting in 110 drug seizure events. Targeted investigations into drug trafficking networks resulted in 29 arrests, with 11 individuals formally charged and 5 convictions for serious drug importation offences.

Serious crime investigations advanced substantially: 21 persons were arrested for serious offences, including murder and attempted murder. Investigators recovered eight firearms and 48 rounds of ammunition, disrupting the ability of offenders to commit violent acts. This sustained and coordinated investigative approach reflects our commitment to tackling serious violence and progressing complex cases through the criminal justice system.

The Bermuda Police Service also prioritised protection of vulnerable persons. The Vulnerable Persons Unit commenced investigation on 108 cases involving children and seniors, identifying suspects in 83 cases. The unit received and managed over 200 Department of Child and Family Services referrals and over 100 Ageing and Disability Services referrals. The Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer received and managed over 300 domestic abuse referrals.

Most notably, officers conducted a 33-day search operation that successfully located a missing 15-year-old alive and well, exemplifying our commitment to safeguarding the vulnerable.

Madam Chairman, asset recovery and financial crime enforcement strengthen community safety.

The Bermuda Police Service seized criminal property valued at \$1,047,900 under the Proceeds of Crime Act, including jewellery, marine vessels, and assets linked to organised crime, with cash seized totalling \$230,435. The Criminal Investigation Unit recovered stolen property valued at \$92,000 and approximately \$20,000 to \$25,000 linked to ATM fraud investigations, directly returning value to crime victims.

The Chairman: Minister, we are going to change Chairs at this moment, and I just want you to know that there are approximately 2 hours and 55 minutes remaining in this debate. So, you're moving along quite nicely. Thank you, Minister.

And hopefully you can get a little glass of water while you're . . .

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members. Good afternoon, members of the listening public.

As the Honourable Minister for National Security, Michael Weeks, is grabbing a quick glass of water to [quench] the thirst, let me just remind listeners that this is a five-hour debate on the budget for the Ministry of National Security. And it is due to conclude at . . . it started at—three hours left. Three hours left. Excellent. Thank you very much.

Okay, until . . . three—perfect.

So, Minister, if you are ready to get back up, and if so, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, sir. Mr. Chairman, if I had a higher podium, it would be so much . . . for us tall guys.

The Chairman: You could double up. You could get the other one and double up.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I will take that under consideration.

Mr. Chairman, community engagement remains central to policing strategy. Throughout 2025, the Bermuda Police Service maintained strong partnerships with community organisations supporting at-risk and vulnerable individuals, including the Youth Leadership Academy, Beyond Rugby, and the Mirrors Programme. Officers participated in senior's events and engaged with underrepresented groups. The service conducted three community-wide town halls addressing community violence, providing residents direct updates and insights into this critical issue.

The Bermuda Police Service also conducted a weapon amnesty that provided the public an opportunity to surrender prohibited items and resulted in the recovery of firearms. These achievements, from firearms and drug seizures to serious crime arrests,

vulnerable person protection, and community partnership, demonstrate the Bermuda Police Service's unwavering commitment to enforcement, disruption of criminality, and community safety. Our officers remain focused on preventing harm, holding offenders accountable, and ensuring that violent and predatory behaviour is met with decisive action.

Mr. Chairman, despite these challenges, we should remain optimistic about the future of policing in Bermuda. Our women and men work with dedication and integrity every day to serve this community. The trust placed in them is something we value and strive to strengthen with every interaction. We know that public confidence is not just a metric, it is the foundation that enables everything they do.

As they move forward with the plans and initiatives outlined today, they do so with a firm commitment to transparency, accountability, and genuine partnership with the people of Bermuda. When the community and police stand together, we create not just a safer Bermuda, but a stronger one.

So, Mr. Chairman, I extend my commendation to Commissioner Darrin Simons and his entire team for their sterling efforts in ensuring a safe Bermuda for all of us.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 7, Bermuda Police Service.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

I suspect that means you are taking us on to Head 12, does it?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I shall now turn my next brief to Head 12.

The Chairman: Excellent, and for those following along in the Budget Book, that was page B-278, Head 12, Customs.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HEAD 12—CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the current account estimate for the Customs Department, Head 12, which can be found on pages B-278 through B-281 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department's mission is *Protecting Bermuda's border and promoting economic development*.

The objectives of the department are to

- assess and collect customs duty and fees on imported goods;
- enforce customs laws and administer other statutes controlling the international movement of goods and people;

- prevent the smuggling of drugs and other illegal commodities, enforcing international conventions for environmental protection and money laundering, and agency work for Immigration, Health, Transport Control, and Environment; and
- provide information and assistance to the public regarding customs laws and regulations.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department's vision is to be a modern, effective, and efficient Customs administration offering professional service to all stakeholders, using international best practices, maximising revenue collection, and protecting the borders of Bermuda.

To make this vision a reality, strategic goals have been set for customs:

Strategic Goal 1: Staffing, Stability, and Training

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in order for the Customs Department to carry out its mission, the department will continue to provide an environment that supports the highest level of integrity. Enhancing the department's integrity as a respected law enforcement arm of the government is vital to performing our enforcement functions and will continue to be improved by ongoing training and officer development.

Strategic Goal 2: Legislation and Operational

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, to advance customs' mandate of facilitating legitimate trade, assessing and collecting the government's revenue and interdicting drugs and other contraband, the department will continue to review existing legislation and propose enhancements that will progress customs' capability to fulfil its mandate in a rapidly changing environment.

Strategic Goal 3: Policy, Procedures, and Future

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department's policies and procedures are a vital portion of its foundation, and the ongoing programme of updating these policies and procedures enables continuous improvement and further enhances the department's already positive work culture and continues its responsiveness to an ever-evolving environment.

Revision of the memorandums of understanding with the department's law enforcement counterparts will build upon the shared understanding of the department's comparable duties, aims, and objectives.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now draw your attention to the current account estimates for Head 12, which can be found on page B-278. A total of \$20,864,000 has been allocated for Head 12 for the

financial year 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$1,371,000, or 7 per cent, on the original budget for the financial year 2025/26. The most significant driver of this increase is the 4.3 per cent pay rise given to staff.

Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department operates one programme listed as 1201, General, with eight business units.

I will now address the business units as set out on page B-278.

Business Unit 22000, Yacht Reporting Centre

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The operations of the Yacht Reporting Centre (YRC) constitute an important part of the vessel clearance section and consequently, the budget for YRC is provided for under business unit 22090, Vessel Clearance. The 2024/25 actual expenses of \$7,000 are an allocation of the Customs Department portion of the government-wide vehicle insurance cost.

Business Unit 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Airport Arrivals—Travellers has an estimate of \$5,559,000. This represents a decrease of \$73,000, or 1 per cent. This decrease pertains entirely to staff costs. Although the amount provided for base salaries has increased by \$279,000, the amount provided for other staff costs, such as overtime and other contractually agreed allowances, has decreased by \$352,000.

A contributing factor in this reduction is the Customs Department's increased use of external vendors to fulfil the immigration and cashiering functions at the airport. The external vendors are a number of retired customs officers and police officers who are utilised to free up customs officers to focus on their core responsibilities. The vendors represent an efficiency because their pay is lower than a customs officer's pay since their role is much more limited. This is especially useful to the department as they currently have unfilled vacancies, and the vendors provide coverage of essential duties while the department actively works to recruit for the substantive roles. You will note on page B-279 that the full-time equivalent is planned to increase from 61 by two to 63.

Business Unit 22050, Investigations/Audit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Investigations/Audit has an estimate of \$1,157,000. This represents an increase of \$77,000, or 7 per cent. This increase pertains entirely to staff costs. On page B-279, the full-time equivalent will be maintained at 13.

Business Unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Hamilton Commercial Ops has an estimate of \$1,512,000. This represents an increase of \$203,000, or 16 per cent. This anticipated increase is largely due to the demands posed by NAMLC compliance as we prepare for the mutual evaluation starting later this year. An enormous amount of work is being done and needs to be done to prepare for the evaluation and this increase is needed to cover the extra costs generated by work associated with NAMLC.

You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 15 full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 22080, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Administration has an estimate of \$5,992,000. This represents an increase of \$810,000, or 16 per cent. The Administration business unit is deemed the headquarters of the department, and a majority of the operational budget is allocated to this unit. For brevity and to avoid repetition, I will elaborate upon all the notable budget changes during my presentation of page B-279; however, I will briefly comment on the movement in staff costs in this section which have increased by \$168,000, or 7 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 22 full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 22090, Vessel Clearance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Vessel Clearance has an estimate of \$2,068,000. This represents an increase of \$117,000, or 6 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 22 full-time equivalents.

Business Unit 22100, Interdiction

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Interdiction has an estimate of \$3,300,000. This represents an increase of \$200,000, or 6 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to increase its staffing level by three to become 35 full-time equivalents. The increase of the actual full-time equivalents is planned to be used to bolster the effectiveness and operational capacity of the Intelligence Unit.

Business Unit 22110, Seaport Enforcement Team

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Seaport Enforcement Team has an estimate of \$1,276,000. This represents an increase of \$37,000, or 3 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section is planned to maintain a staffing level of 14 full-time equivalents.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-279, the table headed Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates shows how the allocated funds are intended to be spent. Just over 82 per cent of the budget, \$17,212,000, has been allocated to pay for salaries. The allocation for the salary expense line has increased by \$748,000, or 5 per cent.

If we momentarily turn our attention to the table headed Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents), we observe an increase in the number of estimated Customs staff from the 2025/26 original of 181 to the 2026/27 estimate of 184.

The additional positions are planned to be used at the airport and the interdiction section. The total approved establishment of the Customs Department is 228 positions.

Mr. Chairman, of the remaining expense lines, the most significant changes are as follows.

- Other personnel costs are estimated to be \$188,000, a decrease of \$12,000, or 6 per cent. The other personnel costs in question are, primarily, allowances provided for Customs Officers being on call and called out. As you will be aware, the Customs Department has to be prepared to respond around the clock to provide its border control service. From time to time, unscheduled flights and vessels arrive into Bermuda and, therefore, the Customs Department pays an on-call allowance to retain a skeleton crew to respond to emergency out-of-hours calls. The reduction of \$12,000 pertains to a reduction in the allowances provided to canine officers as one canine has retired.

- Training costs are estimated to be \$21,000, an increase of \$11,000, or 110 per cent.

- Travel costs are estimated to be \$43,000, a decrease of \$1,000, or 2 per cent. The planned travel comprises of Bermuda Customs participating in the World Customs Organization and Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council conferences, as well as attending overseas ACAMS training. The planned increase is primarily due to an additional expected trip for ACAMS training. ACAMS is the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists, and this training is beneficial to Customs in several ways. For example, expertise in money laundering techniques, trends, and detection methods allows the Customs Department to provide up-to-date training to officers on the ground with respect to conducting investigations. This expertise is also useful in developing intelligence on the financial side of smuggling, which makes the identification of suspicious activities easier. Further, it aids in the development of policies that satisfy the requirements of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. This in turn benefits the economy of Bermuda as it increases the likelihood of receiving a favourable rating as part of the National Money Laundering Risk Assessment, which will be conducted within the next year.

- Communication costs are estimated to be \$116,000, a decrease of \$17,000, or 13 per cent. These costs represent telephone and internet costs and are reflective of the preceding financial year's actual expenses. The reduction in costs follows a project where the department reviewed its current needs for paid telephone lines and found that cuts could be made in this cost centre.

- Professional services are estimated to be \$832,000, an increase of \$474,000, or 132 per cent. The main drive of this expense type is the expanded use of retired Customs Officers to perform immigration primary functions and to cover two cashier posts until those posts are substantively filled. These support officers have the training and years of experience but are employed at a reduced cost and on a part-time basis. As a result, this allows the department to work more efficiently as it frees full-time customs officers from performing some immigration functions and allows them to focus on the core aspects of the Customs Officer role. Additionally, the department is increasingly being called upon to respond to recommendations from the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee and, therefore, has provided an additional \$167,000 on legislation and policy consultants to assist with this workload. Additionally, the department has provided a further \$150,000 to engage contractors to further develop export control functions for Bermuda.

- Rentals are estimated to be \$684,000, an increase of \$77,000. This expense line covers rent for buildings in the amount of \$597,000 and equipment for \$10,000. The Customs Department occupies two buildings for which it pays rent:

- Customs House at 131 Front Street, which houses its headquarters, administration, commercial operations, investigations, and audit sections. The facility service charge for Customs House has increased by \$13,000 to \$508,000.
- Building 110 at Southside, which is a replacement for the training and administration space that Customs formerly occupied within the old airport buildings. The rent for this facility has not increased. The remaining \$64,000 of the increase in rent pertains to a provision to rent facilities to host the Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council Conference in May 2026.

- Repair and maintenance are estimated to be \$1,272,000, an increase of \$38,000, or 3 per cent. This heading includes software costs and the increases due to a rise in the software maintenance fee. The software in question pertains to a maintenance contract associated with CAPS, the Customs Automated Processing System. In December 2025, an existing five-year software maintenance contract with IBM expired and the fees were increased in the new maintenance contract.

- Energy is estimated to be \$162,000, an increase of \$19,000 or 13 per cent. The increase is

reflective of actual costs during the preceding financial year.

- Clothing, uniforms, and laundry are estimated at \$68,000, an increase of \$1,000, or 1 per cent.

- Materials and supplies are estimated at \$268,000, an increase of \$33,000, or 14 per cent. This category of expense is broad and diverse and includes office supplies, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, food and supplies for canines, computer supplies, consumables for detection equipment, and other miscellaneous items. The estimate is reflective of the actual expenditure in the preceding financial period.

Performance Measures

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, turning to pages B-280 and B-281, I would like to offer some comments on the performance measures for the Customs Department.

Firstly, on page B-280, you will note that no performance measures have been provided and no budget allocation has been allocated to business units 22020, Airport Commercial, and 22040, Airport Shift "B." These business units were floated into 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops, and 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers, respectively, some years ago.

For the 2024/25 year, business unit 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers, collected forced duty in the amount of \$13,831. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that forced duty in the amount of \$25,000 will be collected. The target for 2026/27 is \$35,000.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2024/25 year, business unit 22030, Airport Arrivals—Travellers seized illicit items on 66 occasions. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that this unit shall seize illicit items on 25 occasions. The target for 2026/27 is 25.

For the 2024/25 year, business unit 22050, Investigations/Audit, completed 95 cases and collected additional duty of \$9,361. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that this unit shall complete 50 cases and expects to collect additional duty of \$16,300. The target for 2026/27 is 100 cases dealt with and additional duty collected of \$20,000.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2024/25 year, business unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops met its prescribed quality service levels [QSL] with respect to the time frame of releasing imported goods 72 per cent of the time on 533,481 processed declarations. It is forecasted that during 2025/26, that this unit will achieve 70 per cent on 588,036 process declarations. The targets for 2026/27 are 70 per cent achievement of QSL time frames and 570,000 processed declarations.

Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-281, for the 2024/25 year, Business Unit 22090, Vessel Clearance, prepared invoices to collect revenue from arriving vessels in the amount of \$1,531,157. The forecast for 2025/26 and the target for 2026/27 is \$1.3 million.

For the 2024/25 year, Business Unit 22100, Interdiction seized 411 illicit items and achieved a 92 per

cent of positive results from search and detentions undertaken. It is forecast that during 2025/26, 350 items will be seized and the target for 2026/27 is therefore also 350 seizures.

For the 2024/25 year, Business Unit 22110, Seaport Enforcement Team reviewed 80 per cent of import cargo manifests and scanned 93 per cent of imported containers. It is forecast that during 2025/26, those percentages will be 98 per cent and 94 per cent respectively. The target of 98 per cent for both categories has been set for 2026/27.

Capital Expenditure. Mr. Chairman—excuse me.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. While you are just taking a quick gulp of water, we are currently in the five-hour debate concerning the Ministry of National Security. We are currently on head, or just wrapping up Head 12, Customs, which I believe is the fourth of your six heads, Minister.

And for those following along, the Honourable Minister Michael Weeks has us at [page] B-281 and this is a five-hour debate concluding at 6:03 in the afternoon.

Minister, if you are ready, with that replenished throat . . . go ahead.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, Mr. Chairman, I am now at Capital Expenditure.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Customs Department has two planned capital projects. Firstly, as shown on page C-8, a capital development project for Business Unit 75372 has been allocated \$600,000 to replace the Hamilton Dock Scanner Hall Building. The existing building has been in place since 2012 and has fallen into disrepair and is in urgent need of replacement for the safety of those working in and around the building and for the preservation of the equipment contained therein. Work on replacing the building has already started and the project is expected to be completed by May 2026.

Initiatives for 2026/27

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in harmony with the Customs Department's strategic goals, the following initiatives are planned.

With respect to Strategic Goal 1—Staffing, Stability, and Training (as mentioned earlier):

- The Customs Department intends to complete promotions and a recruitment exercise during 2026/27. This will bolster the activities across the department, but with particular focus being placed on enhancing marine and airport operations.

- The department will continue to utilise the excellent training modules developed by the World Customs Organization, which are provided as part of Bermuda's membership.
- Additionally, Customs will engage with the UK Home Office for strategic planning and training opportunities.
- Customs will work on updating staff job descriptions to ensure that they are in harmony with current operational realities.
- With the export control scoping study well underway, it is the intention of the department to commence staff training to undertake this new role, which plays an important role in the combating of international terrorism and organised crime.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to Strategic Goal 2—Legislation and Operational:

- The Customs Department has begun consulting with an international expert in the field of export control and expects to have substantial proposed amendments to the Revenue Act [1898] during 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to Strategic Goal 3—Policy, Procedures, and Future:

- During 2026/27, it is our intention to continue to work to provide support to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee in its important work of preventing money laundering and terrorist financing. Customs plays a very critical role in this area as the enforcement body responsible for the cross-border movement of cash and goods.
- As mentioned earlier, it is also our intention to develop an export control process which will further mitigate the risk to our reputation and society arising from money laundering.
- The department continues to work with software developers to create an API which will allow the submission of Customs Traveller Declarations using a smartphone application and expects to have this available to be published in the early part of the 2026/27 financial year.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the Collector of Customs, Ms. Lucinda Pearman, and her entire team for their continued, dedicated, and professional service to Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the current and capital estimates for Head 12.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

And we will now move on, I believe, to Head 45 regarding the Fire Services, which again for those listening, we are in Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. This is a five-hour debate on the budget for the Ministry of National Security. The debate is due to go until 6:30 pm and Minister Michael Weeks is now taking us onto his

fifth head of six, and this is Head 45—[Bermuda] Fire [and Rescue] Service which is found at [page] B-282.

Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 45—BERMUDA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 45, Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, found on pages B-282 through B-284 of the Budget Book.

Mission Statement

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The mission of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service is, *To provide fire protection to life and property through the delivery of fire prevention, airport fire rescue, and emergency medical services to the community.* We will deliver this through the dedicated and professional service of our uniformed and civilian staff in collaboration with our community partners.

Department Objectives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department objectives, which can be found on page B-282, are to

- continue procurement of modern, fit-for-purpose emergency response vehicles;
- implement a modernised, comprehensive training programme for all operational personnel including advancing the development of a firefighter training facility;
- continue skills for justice officer qualifications and incident command with our key UK training partner;
- advance our work towards UK National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) National Operational Guidance Compliance by collaborating with a leading UK training provider; and
- modernise our estate and buildings to make them fit-for-purpose.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$19,176,153 has been allocated for this head which represents an increase of \$1,260,000, or 7 per cent, from the previous year and constitutes 14 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. The majority of this increase is due to the costs associated with recent negotiated salary and benefits awards.

General Summary

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the general summary of business units for the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service is found on page B-282.

I will highlight the material, object code increases and decreases per Business Unit .

Business Unit 55030, Fire Prevention: \$60,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Fire Prevention Division plays a critical role in ensuring public safety through comprehensive fire risk management. Staffed by a dedicated team of five full-time professionals, the Fire Prevention Division conducts risk assessments of commercial buildings and issues fire certificates in accordance with the Fire Safety Act 2014.

Additional functional tasks include the investigation and determination of causes of fire and where appropriate prevention officers issue safety guidance. Additionally, the prevention team reviews and examines architectural and engineering planning submissions for new construction and remodelling projects, ensuring compliance with the relevant building and life safety codes.

During the 2025/26 fiscal year, several building projects continue either via major renovations or via new builds. For example, the Bermudiana condominiums, the Fairmont Hamilton, Fairmont Southampton, Grotto Bay Beach Resort, the HSBC building on Church Street, 91 Front Street, Luxor House and 33 Church Street, to name a few. The Fire Prevention Division has been consulted about potential residential buildings and other change of use projects in the City of Hamilton.

Mr. Chairman, these projects and many others help stimulate economic growth in our community and provide jobs for Bermudians. In addition, they provide regular inspections of licensed properties to ensure maintenance of fire protection standards. To help streamline the review process, the Fire Prevention Division recently launched an online permit platform with interoperability with the Department of Planning's energy platform.

With a growing population of seniors in our community, the Fire Prevention Division focused their efforts and attention on this demographic this fiscal year. Partnering with Age Concern and Bermuda Housing Trust, the division distributed and installed smoke alarms for residents at Elizabeth Hills and Haydon Park. They will continue this initiative at Purvis Park in March.

The Fire Prevention Division once again facilitated the annual Fire Safety Awareness Week in October of 2025, receiving children from across the Island for a station tour of Hamilton Fire Station and interacting with firefighters through fun activities. At the end of the visit, each child received gift bags with fire safety promotional material. Additionally, the division collaborated with Mr. Bruce Barritt for his Welch's Wednesday giveaway and distributed to the motoring public fire safety promotional material with emphasis on lithium-ion batteries, which was this year's theme. To further heighten Fire Safety Awareness Week, the department

mobilised their fleet of apparatus through the City of Hamilton as a new feature for the campaign.

Mr. Chairman, funding for this Business Unit for the 2026/27 financial year is \$60,000. This represents an increase of \$31,150, or 107 per cent, over the 2025/26 financial year. This increase can be attributed to the need to purchase fire safety education publications, brochures and promotional equipment to support community fire safety education.

[Pause]

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister is just taking another sip of water. Honourable Minister, are you ready to press on?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Ready to press on, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay, we are still at Head 45—

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: And I think you were now over on to [page] B-283.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, just about getting there.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: During the 2025/26 financial year, the Fire Prevention Division achievements included: 178 fire certificates issued; 200 plan reviews completed; 19 senior care homes inspected; 18 hotel initial inspections and subsequent follow-up inspections were completed; 26 child day care inspections were completed; and 355 risk assessments were conducted.

Business Unit 55060, Central Emergency
Fire Service: \$7,423,275

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Central Emergency Fire Service business unit covers the provision of fire and emergency services from Hamilton, Eastern and Western Fire Stations. These stations respond to fires, road traffic collisions, emergency medical incidents and hazardous material incidents when required. This business unit has a budget estimate of \$7,423,275, which is an increase of \$927,275, or 14 per cent, over the financial year 2025/26. This increase can be attributed to funding for 16 new firefighters and an increase in salary benefits associated with the collective bargaining agreement between the Fire Service Association and the Bermuda Government.

Business Unit 55080, Other Services Central:
\$753,110

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Other Services Central contains the Vehicle Repair Services and Engineering personnel. This business unit has a budget estimate of \$753,110, which represents a decrease of \$85,890, or 10 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. The decrease reflects the anticipated reduction of maintenance costs, which is attributed to the delivery of four major foam vehicles that provide fire protection at the L. F. Wade International Airport. This business unit also supports the procurement of essential vehicle parts to maintain the remaining fleet of emergency vehicles.

Business Unit 55090, St. George's Emergency Fire
Service: \$115,163

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the St. George's Emergency Fire Service business unit supports the provision of fire and emergency services to the eastern end of the Island from the Clearwater Fire Station. This station responds to fires, road traffic collisions, and hazardous material incidents when required. We are pleased to report that this business unit also supports the allocation of a dedicated ambulance to provide emergency medical response to the community at the east end of the Island. The funding for this business unit is \$115,163 for the 2026/27 financial year and represents an increase of 10 per cent, or \$10,750 from the 2025/26 financial year.

Business Unit 55100, Emergency Medical
Services: \$50,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Emergency Medical Services business unit is responsible for facilitating emergency medical technician certification, in addition to the procurement of personal protection equipment and supplies associated with the department's emergency medical response throughout the Island. The funding for this business unit is \$50,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$20,000, or 29 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year.

Business Unit 55120, West End Emergency
Service: \$72,100

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the West End Emergency [Fire] Service provides provision of emergency services from the Port Royal Fire Station. This station responds to fires, road traffic collisions, hazardous material, and provides support to the Hamilton and Clearwater stations for emergencies when required. The funding for this business unit is \$72,100 for the 2026/27 financial year and represents an increase of \$11,100 from the original 2025/26 budget allocation.

Business Unit 55150, Training: \$727,000

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Training section is tasked with developing a comprehensive educational schedule to ensure that all training and certification programmes meet both local and international standards. This includes recruitment and foundation training and certification. The Training section leads the recruitment process, facilitates local and overseas recruit foundation courses for new firefighters designated for airport and structural operations.

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Training and Certification. This section designs and implements training programmes for EMTs, ensuring firefighters are equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to provide high-quality medical care during emergencies.

Firefighting Competency Maintenance. This section organises local and overseas training for firefighters, focusing on techniques and strategies to effectively respond to aircraft, structural fires, hazardous material, and medical emergencies in alignment with local and international standards. This ensures that firefighters are equipped to manage various emergency scenarios safely and professionally.

Leadership Training Courses. This section facilitates leadership and professional development and international certification of personnel in supervisory and management roles. Leadership training concentrates on developing skills to ensure that leaders can proficiently direct their teams during emergency incidents.

This unit has a budget estimate of \$727,000, which represents a decrease of \$109,550, or 13 per cent, from the 2025/26 financial year. The decrease is due to achieving most of our required training certification in 2025/26, which means the need for revalidation of firefighters is lessened for 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, training achievements during the 2025/26 financial year include:

- nine firefighters obtained their aircraft rescue firefighter certification in the United Kingdom;
- forty-eight airport firefighters revalidated their certifications in Toronto, Canada;
- firefighters completed several Skills for Justice award in Incident Command courses;
- twelve completed the Level 3 Initial [Incident] Command award, and four completed the Level 4 Intermediate [Incident] Command award; six completed the Level 6 Advanced [Incident] Command award, and four completed the Level 7 Strategic [Incident] Command award. The courses were conducted in Bermuda and the United Kingdom;
- one firefighter obtained the aircraft crew commander certification in the United Kingdom;
- one firefighter obtained the aircraft watch commander certification in the United Kingdom;
- nine firefighters completed the foundation aircraft rescue firefighter certification in the United Kingdom;

- two completed various emergency driving courses;
- fifteen firefighters completed the emergency medical technician certification course in Bermuda;
- six firefighters obtained the national registered emergency medical technician certification;
- seventy firefighters maintained their registration as emergency medical technicians with the Allied Health Council;
- forty firefighters completed CPR recertification;
- eight recruit firefighters received the Skills for Justice award Level 3 certification in operational firefighting;
- two firefighters completed the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Module 3 Water Rescue Technician course in Wales;
- two firefighters completed the trained aid assessor qualification course;
- two firefighters obtained breathing apparatus instructor qualifications at Red One Limited, in the UK;
- two firefighters obtained their breathing apparatus repair technician certification; and
- two mechanics completed vehicle factory training at Spartan and Rosenbauer.

Business Unit 55170, General Administration:
\$4,220,095

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the General Administration cost centre is responsible for the funding and support services of the Administration section of the department. The budget estimate for this unit is \$4,220,095, which is a decrease of \$10,905, or less than 1 per cent from the financial year 2025/26.

Business Unit 55190, Emergency Dispatch:
\$1,000,008

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Emergency Dispatch Corps Centre is responsible for answering both fire and medical 911 calls from the community and dispatch the appropriate fire and medical resources. The budget estimate for this business unit is \$1,000,008. This represents an increase of \$56,008, or 6 per cent.

Business Unit 55200, Airport Fire [Rescue]:
\$4,755,402

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this business unit provides aircraft, emergency rescue, and firefighting services at the L. F. Wade International Airport, as prescribed by the Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements (OTAR) Part 140. Aerodromes are categorised between a range of 1 to 10. A Category 10 aerodrome can accommodate the world's largest passenger aircraft. By comparison, the L. F. Wade International

Airport is registered as a Category 9 aerodrome. This category must be maintained to facilitate the direct flights between Heathrow International Airport and Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, an aerodrome's registered category predicates the level of fire protection that must be provided for rescue and firefighting, including the manpower, training, and certifications equipment, the number of vehicles, extinguishing medium, and response guidelines. Firefighters assigned at the airport fire station are required to expertly navigate an 80,000-pound vehicle to any point on the runway within two minutes of an accident.

Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for this unit is \$4,755,402, an increase of \$450,402, or 10 per cent. This is largely attributed to an increase in the salary and benefits negotiated between the government and the Fire Service Association.

Revenue Overview: Fire Protection and Airport Operation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the revenue estimates for the service can be found on page B-283. The revenue for the 2026/27 financial year is estimated at \$170,000, which is identical to the fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, you will note the variances in the three line items from year to year. However, the net change from year to year is zero. Please note that for 2026/27, we have reallocated the revenue codes to better reflect actual operations and revenue collection.

Mr. Chairman, all commercial buildings and large residential properties undergo fire and life safety risk assessment and apply for a fire certificate. Fire certificates are valid for one to five years based on the risk level. Relicensing occurs over the lifespan of a building.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The subjective analysis of current account estimates of the department, Head 45, is found on page B-283. I will highlight the material object curve increases and decreases.

Salaries

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, funding allocation for salaries for the financial year 2026/27 is \$16,151,142. This is an increase of \$1,612,141, or 11 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This increase is attributed to an increase in salaries and benefits resulting from recently concluded collective bargaining agreements and a filling of 19 funded vacant full-time equivalents.

Other Personnel Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, funding allocation for other personnel costs is associated with the collective bargaining agreement between the Fire Service Association and the Bermuda Government. The collective bargaining agreement includes benefits related to emergency off duty pay, telephone allowances, specialist skills pay, standby pay, and shift premiums. Funding allocation is \$60,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$16,000, or 21 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This decrease is attributed to the consolidation of funding into another business unit to improve accounting efficiency.

Communications

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for communications is \$341,440 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents an increase of \$13,000, or 4 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. The increase is due to a rise in fees charged by telecommunication vendors.

Professional Services

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocated for professional services is \$111,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$39,000, or 26 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. The decrease represents more prudent management of resources for the year.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for repair and maintenance is \$536,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents a decrease of \$131,000, or 20 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This business unit supports the maintenance of air conditioning, cleaning services, and building infrastructure. This change reflects measures taken to maximise allocated funding.

Insurance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for insurance is \$354,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This is the same as for fiscal year 2025/26.

Energy

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for energy is \$494,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. This represents an increase of \$106,000 from the financial year 2025/26. This increase reflects the rising cost of fuel and energy costs.

Materials and Supplies

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, funding allocation for materials and office supplies for the department's three locations is \$302,000, a decrease of \$31,000, or 9 per cent, from the financial year 2025/26. This decrease reflects measures taken to maximise funding allocated for the 2026/27 financial year.

Capital Expenditure
Capital Acquisition Funding, Page C-15

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$1,489,678 has been allocated for capital acquisitions for the 2026/27 financial year. Capital acquisitions can be found on page C-15 of the Budget Book.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. And while you're just getting a glass of water, let me recognise in the Gallery, Senator Simmons, I think, is in the Gallery.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: And you were just taking us to grants and allocations at [page] C-7, I think.
Is that what you said? [Page] C-7, Minister?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. [Page] C-15.

The Chairman: Oh, I'm sorry, [page] C-15.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Capital expenditure.

The Chairman: Yes, I have it.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: A total of \$1,489,678 has been allocated for capital acquisitions for the 2026/27 financial year. Capital acquisitions can be found on page C-15 of the Budget Book.

A total of \$1,403,917 has been allocated for the procurement of two domestic emergency response vehicles to provide fire protection and emergency response to the community. A further \$84,761 has been allocated for the procurement of operational rescue equipment firefighters use to enter hot and hazardous environments and equipment used to extricate persons trapped as a result of road traffic collisions.

Manpower

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the employee numbers of full-time equivalents can be found on page

B-283. The total number of full-time employees is 164 for the financial year 2026/27. This is unchanged from the financial year 2025/26.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26 were achieved. These can be found on page B-284.

Business Unit 55060, Central Emergency
Fire Service

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Central Emergency Fire Service delivers comprehensive fire and emergency services from its base in Hamilton to all regions of the Island. The unit provides an all-hazard response, including fires, road traffic collisions, medical emergencies, and hazardous material incidents. During the 2025/26 financial year, the department responded to approximately 4,200 fire incidents calls for service. I am pleased to report that we successfully achieved an average response time of eight minutes for the arrival of the first emergency vehicle at incident scenes. Excellent.

Business Unit 55090, St. George's Emergency
Fire Services: \$104,413

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the St. George's Emergency Fire Service business unit provides fire and emergency services to the eastern end of the Island from the Clearwater Fire Station. We are pleased to report that the community at the east end of the Island are serviced by a dedicated ambulance that responds from the Clearwater Fire Station. The dual response of a fire vehicle and an ambulance have ensured that response times are within the target time of eight minutes during the 20[2]5/26 financial year.

Business Unit 55120, West End
Emergency [Fire] Service

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Central Emergency Fire Service provides fire and emergency services primarily to the west end of the Island from the Port Royal Station, mandated to provide emergency response to all hazard response. Activities are coordinated by the department's emergency dispatch. We are delighted to report that the target average of an eight-minute response time for the first vehicle arrival to incidents was achieved for the financial year 2025/26.

Business Unit 55190, Emergency Dispatch

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, emergency dispatch is a critical first point of contact for the community in times of crisis. Receiving and managing all

911 calls relating to fire and medical emergencies. Upon receipt of a call, highly specialised trained dispatchers rapidly evaluate the nature and severity of the incident and immediately mobilise the appropriate fire and emergency medical resources.

This coordinated response framework ensures that personnel and equipment are deployed without delay, enabling timely intervention and improving outcomes for those in need. The effectiveness, speed and precision of the dispatch function are fundamental to the service's operational readiness and the safeguarding of public safety. During the 2025/26 financial year, the emergency dispatch answered approximately 11,457 calls for service, which included 6,896 medical incidents and 4,561 fire incidents.

Business Unit 55200, Airport Fire Rescue

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this business unit is tasked with delivering aircraft emergency rescue and firefighting services at L. F. Wade International Airport. These services are mandated under the Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements (OTAR) Part 140, ensuring alignment with international aviation safety standards. Fifty-one of the most notable emergencies the Airport Fire Rescue responded to during the 2025/26 financial year includes 12 aircraft related emergencies, 33 medical emergencies, five hot fuel requests (these are instances when all aircraft receives fuel while the passengers remain on board), and one special services. All responses were within the stated performance measures for the 2025/26 financial year.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: During the 2026/27 financial year, fire officers will complete various local and international certified courses. These include expanding the maintenance of competency scheme to ensure all firefighters are fit for role. We also intend to expand the Skills for Justice award Level 3 and 4 Operational and Technical Incident Command Certification and Revalidation for all managing fire officers.

Fire officers will attend highly specialised tactical training programmes that will develop designated lead officers within the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service. These officers will be equipped with specialist competencies including qualifications such as hazardous materials, technical advisor and road traffic collision instructor certification, thereby strengthening the service's internal expertise and operational capability. A firefighter recruit foundation course for vacant funded posts will commence in quarter one of the 2026/27 financial year.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 45, [Bermuda] Fire [and Rescue] Service.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

For the benefit of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year ended [*sic*] 2026/27, or the year coming, I should say, rather. And we are hearing a five-hour debate on the Ministry of National Security budget.

And we have just been hearing from the Honourable Minister Weeks, who has just finished Head 45 and is now moving on to the sixth and final head, namely Head 88, National Drug Control. This is a five-hour debate, and it is due to conclude at 6.03 pm.

Honourable Minister, when you are ready, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I move on, I would also like to thank Chief Fire Officer Mr. Dana Lovell and his team for their unwavering commitment and service to the community. They continue to remain on the front line providing exemplary service protecting Bermuda.

I shall now move on to Head 88, Bermuda National Drug Control.

HEAD 88—BERMUDA NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 88, the Department for National Drug Control, found on pages B-285 through B-288 of the Budget Book.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Department of National Drug Control is, *To reduce the harmful effects of substance misuse and abuse on the community.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-265 of the Budget Book, a total of \$5,989,374 has been allocated for this head, which represents 4 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be \$5,989,000 for 2026/27 and represents an increase of \$954,059, or approximately 19 per cent higher than the budget of 2025/26.

This increase is due primarily to increases in salary uplifts, funding for the adolescent substance abuse treatment programme, increased grant allocations and an increase in the general cost of living for operating costs.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates of the

Department of National Drug Control is found on page B-286. I will highlight the material object-related increases and decreases as per business unit.

Business Unit 98000, Administration, page B-285:

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$1,317,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$1,396,000

Increase of \$79,000, or 6 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Administration allocation of \$1,396,000 is a \$79,000, or 6 per cent, increase from the 2025/26 allocation. The increase is due mainly to an increase in grant allocations by \$200,000, offset by funding from the SHIFT (PRIDE) grant of \$169,000, being moved to 98020 Prevention, line 3 on page [B-]285, along with various increases in operating costs totalling \$79,000, including the negotiated salary uplifts.

The administration budget covers employee salaries for two staff and other operational expenses, facilities, utilities, maintenance costs, supplies, and training, and the following grants of \$150,000 for Salvation Army Harbour Light and Community Life Skills Programme; \$150,000 for Dignity House (which is new); \$330,000 for Focus Counselling Services; and \$150,000 for Pathways Bermuda. These are listed on page C-21, Grants and Contributions.

The Chairman: Yes.

Business Unit 98010, Community Development

Page B-285

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$233,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$217,000

Decrease of \$16,000, or 7 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the allocation to Community Development, business unit 98010, is \$217,000, which is a \$16,000, or 7 per cent, decrease from the 2025/26 allocation. The decrease is related to a decrease in funds for advertising and promotions. Funding is allocated to facilitate activities that are primarily targeted towards public education, community development, information dissemination, and to support a grant of \$60,000 to the Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (CADA) to support alcohol awareness and to provide TIPS training. (Please see page C-21, Grants and Contributions.)

Business Unit 98020, Prevention, page B-285:

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$247,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$373,000

Increase of \$126,000, or 51 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, an allocation of \$373,000 is provided to support the Prevention Unit efforts in business unit 98020. This is a \$126,000, or 51 per cent, increase in the allocation from 2025/26 due to the negotiated salary uplift for one staff and the

move of SHIFT programming funds under the DNDC due to the charity closing.

The funding will ensure that the programming previously provided by SHIFT continues. Funding was previously budgeted under 98000. Funds in this business unit are utilised to improve coverage of drug prevention measures within the community, to improve opportunities for school-based prevention interventions, and to increase access for young people to targeted prevention programmes. Funding is also utilised to support training of prevention professionals and community members to support drug prevention efforts.

Business Unit 98030, Treatment, page B-285

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$419,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$890,000

Increase of \$471,000, or 112 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit, business unit 98030, is allocated \$890,000 in fiscal year 2026/27. This is an increase of \$471,000, or 112 per cent. The increase is related to funding allocated to implement the Throne Speech Initiative, adolescent substance abuse treatment programme, in fiscal year 2026/27 in the amount of \$450,000, along with salary uplifts for two staff.

Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit funding allocation is used to facilitate the implementation of key activities geared towards achieving the goals of the National Treatment Strategy, including Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), accreditation fees and resources, addiction-specific training, Recovery Month (which is in September), activities; and the AccuCare, web-based client management system licences and training. Funds are also allocated to support the grant for the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB] at the cost of \$80,000 (see page C-21, Grants and Contributions) as well as the implementation of an adolescent substance abuse treatment programme, as previously mentioned.

Business Unit 98050, Research and Policy

Development Unit, page B-285

2025/26 Original Estimate: \$326,000

2026/27 Estimate: \$314,000

Decrease of \$12,000, or 4 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Research and Policy Development Unit, business unit 98050, has an allocation of \$314,000, which is a \$12,000, or 4 per cent decrease from the previous fiscal year. The decrease is due to no scheduled national surveys in fiscal year 2026/27 and the completion of the evaluation phase related to the National Drug Control Master Plan. However, the needs assessments will be conducted during fiscal year 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, funding in this cost code is used to facilitate information gathering and analysis through local research and surveys, monitoring and evaluation

of the National Drug Control Master Plan objectives, maintenance of the BerDIN network, as well as the research and development of any relevant legislation and policy development initiatives prioritised within the department and/or Ministry. Funding also supports salaries for the senior research officer and research officer, including their salary uplifts.

Business Unit 98060, Nelson Bascome
Treatment Facility, page B-285
2025/26 Original Estimate: \$1,138,000
2026/27 Estimate: \$2,732,000
Increase of \$1,594,000, or 140 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the DNDC has now combined the cost to operate both the Men's Treatment Programme and the Women's Treatment Programme under one cost code (98060) and has renamed this cost code Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility. You will note that the funding reflects the combined operational costs of the two programmes plus the Women's Transitional Housing Programme.

The Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility, business unit 98060, is allocated \$2,732,000, an increase of \$1,594,000, or 140 per cent, from the previous fiscal year due to the inclusion of cost code 98070. The overall combined increase of \$139,000 is related to salary uplifts for 16 clinical and three support staff, administrative assistant, residential cook, and maintenance person servicing both the Women's and Men's programmes and overall cost of living operating costs for food, electricity, et cetera, for both programmes under the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility.

Mr. Chairman, the allocation for the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility will provide the operational and staffing funding required to provide services to meet the treatment rehabilitative needs and goals of adult males and females needing residential treatment at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility as well as the Women's Transitional Supportive Residence.

Rent is paid by the DNDC to the Department of Public Works in the amount of \$60,000 per annum for the housing unit that facilitates the operation of the Transitional Supportive Housing Programme. Staff from the Residential Women's Programme supervises this unit. The Women's Treatment Programme and Supportive Housing Unit remains the only residential treatment and transitional supportive housing programme for women in Bermuda.

Business Unit 98080, National Drug Control
Master Plan, page B-285
2025/26 Original Estimate: \$0
2026/27 Estimate: \$67,000
Increase of \$67,000, or 100 per cent

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, business unit 98080 is in place to provide for the effective implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan. Cross-Ministry initiatives with the Police, Customs and Corrections, evaluation of the master plan and to encourage cooperation and involvement of other government departments and civil society in the implementation of the master plan initiatives.

This business unit has been allocated \$67,000 in fiscal year 2026/27. The Department of National Drug Control is required by the [National Drug Control] Act 2013 to oversee the implementation of the action plans and to monitor and evaluate the performance of the plan. Funding will be utilised to complete the needs assessments for the renewal of the National Drug Control Master Plan, to support media campaigns to highlight the outcomes of the previous national plan and its evaluation, and to support required equipment and or training for the implementation of priority initiatives highlighted in the plan.

Capital Expenditure, Page C-15

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2025/26, the DNDC was provided with \$10,000 to upgrade the computer software used by the Research Unit to manage and analyse data gathered via national surveys and the Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN). This was purchased and installed. In fiscal year 2026/27, the DNDC has been provided with \$2,000 to purchase replacement furniture for the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility.

Manpower

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department employs 27 staff. The department headquarters is presently staffed by a director, five technical officers, and one full-time administrative staff.

Direct staffing support to the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility is provided by one treatment coordinator that oversees both the Male and Female Residential Treatment Programmes, along with 16 clinical staff (clinical coordinators, addiction counsellors, junior addiction counsellors, and treatment support workers) and three support staff (administrative assistant, cook, and maintenance) currently assigned to the Women's Treatment Centre and Men's Treatment Programme.

There are currently nine vacancies within the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility (two clinical coordinators, three addiction counsellors, three treatment support workers, and one junior addiction counsellor) due to be filled in early 2026/27 fiscal year. One vacancy in Head Office (treatment coordinator) is also due to be filled in early 2026/27 as they are all being actively recruited.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26 were achieved in the majority of funded cost codes. Some initiatives were unable to be completed due to staff vacancies.

The performance measures for the Department for National Drug Control are listed on pages B-287 and B-288.

The Chairman: Yes.

Business Unit 98000, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Administration provides the organisational framework in support of the mission and mandate of the Department of National Drug Control. Its resources are aimed primarily at recruitment expenditures, and grants and contributions to the treatment and prevention partners that provide services for and on behalf of the department. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of financial transactions were completed in E1 within Financial Instructions for the year 2025/26 and 100 per cent of performance appraisals were completed for the 2025/26 period.

Mr. Chairman, as a result of supplemental funding in 2024/25, six grants were disbursed in 2025/26. The Department for National Drug Control is established in part as a service delivery unit but cannot provide all of the needed services required within the community and depends heavily on acquiring services in the treatment and prevention areas through grant allocations to realise its mandate. CADA, Salvation Army, Harbour Light and Community Life Skills [Training] Programme, Focus Counselling Services, Pathways Bermuda, the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB], all received grants and provided required services as per their grant agreements during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, SHIFT (formerly known as PRIDE) was closed and its funding was reallocated to the Prevention Unit at 98020 to ensure that the programming previously provided by SHIFT will continue under the Department of National Drug Control.

The Salvation Army received \$100,000 for the Harbour Light and Life Skills programmes in fiscal year 2025/26. This funding level challenged their ability to hire needed staff and their ability to provide their programmes effectively. Harbour Light and the Life Skills [programmes] will receive a grant in the amount of \$150,000 in fiscal year 2026/27, a 50 per cent increase to continue to provide residential drug treatment and community life skills programming for 10 males and hire needed staff.

Mr. Chairman, Focus Counselling [Services] provides transitional supportive housing for up to 28 recovering males. These adult males have participated in primary drug treatment at other treatment facilities

(prison, hospital, inpatient or outpatient services) and require assistance in reintegrating back into the community. The goal is to return participants back to the community as productive citizens, thus improving the number of individuals maintaining a drug-free lifestyle. Focus Counselling Services received \$330,000 in fiscal year 2025/26. Focus Counselling Services will receive the same level grant of \$330,000 in fiscal year 2026/27.

Pathways Bermuda provides outpatient substance abuse treatment and aftercare services within the community, servicing approximately 81 individuals. Pathways received \$150,000 in fiscal year 2025/26, and will receive a grant of the same level, \$150,000 in fiscal year 2026/27 to continue to enhance their services. They have hired a clinical supervisor as specified for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, CADA works in collaboration with the Department for National Drug Control to provide community education on alcohol misuse, as well as to provide the server training programme (TIPS) which is mandated within the Liquor Licence Act 1974, as amended in 2011. A grant of \$60,000 was provided to CADA in fiscal year 2025/26, which mainly supports the implementation of the TIPS programme.

CADA will receive the same level of funding of \$60,000 in fiscal year 2026/27, to support these activities. Grant funding of \$80,000 was provided to the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB] in fiscal year 2025/26. The Bermuda Addiction Certification Board provides international certification testing for both prevention and treatment professionals locally. Funding also supports addiction-specific training to enhance workforce development in this speciality area on the Island [and] supports recertification of professionals and helps to maintain membership in the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC). Certification is required for registration of addiction counsellors to practice under the Allied Health Professions Act 1973.

There are currently 49 certified and registered addiction counsellors, an increase of three from the previous year. Fourteen of the addiction counsellors are also certified clinical supervisors, an increase of two from the previous year. There are three prevention specialists, which is a total of 52 certified addiction professionals working in Bermuda. There are also three associate alcohol and drug counsellors holding that designation under the board. BACB will receive the same level grant of \$80,000 for fiscal year 2026/27 to continue their work.

The highlighted agencies have provided an integral part of the drug prevention and drug treatment continuum of services for Bermuda for many decades in collaboration with the Department for National Drug Control.

Dignity House will be receiving a grant of \$150,000 for the first time in fiscal year 2026/27. Dignity House is a residential mental health rehabilitation facility with a focus on reaching and restoring lives, adding

value and dignity to clients with complex mental health needs, including drug and alcohol use and mental health issues combined.

The programme uses the recovery model and detailed interventions to meet client psychosocial needs. The need for a programme of this nature has been prioritised in the National Drug Control Master Plan since its inception in 2010. Dignity House was accredited by CARF in 2025 and fills a long-time gap in service within our community. (See page C-21 Grants and Contributions.)

Business Unit 98010, Community Development

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the goal of this unit is to educate the public about the harms of alcohol and drug use, to ensure the provision of clear and sustained messages to our young people that *no use of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, or other drugs is acceptable*, and to involve families, schools, and community organisations in alcohol and drug prevention efforts.

Other initiatives for the Community Development Unit are to assist in highlighting drunk/drug driving and road safety initiatives through public education and to continue awareness campaigns directed at underage drinking, adolescent drug use (alcohol and cannabis) and emerging drugs such as fentanyl and synthetic drugs, edibles, and vaping.

Throughout the 2025/26 fiscal year, the DNDC prevention team collaborated with the Department of Education to bring awareness and education on the harms of vaping, drugs, alcohol, and synthetic drugs to both middle and high schools in the public and private sectors. This was done through lunchtime information sessions and multimedia campaigns focusing on vaping and cannabis with ads occurring on radio, television, and on the internet targeting the adolescent population.

A training event for Bermuda School Guidance Professionals on emerging drug trends was also held at BUEI featuring international presenter, Officer Jermaine Galloway, also known as “Tall Cop.” Approximately 50 professionals participated. Grassroots activities included work with the Court Street Market Community group, participation in health booths at both senior schools and the City of Hamilton.

Business Unit 98020, Prevention

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Prevention Unit is responsible for providing drug prevention programmes for schools and the wider community with the goal of stopping use before it starts.

The Prevention Unit facilitates the implementation and integration of the AI’s Pals programme at the preschool level at all public schools and one private school. AI’s Pals is an early childhood curriculum and teacher programme that promotes resiliency at the early childhood stage with explicit instruction to develop

social competence, autonomy, and problem solving. The DNDC supports the AI’s Pals programme within schools by funding initial teacher training, refresher courses, and by providing resources supplies for all educators implementing the programme at a cost of approximately \$15,000 per year. Approximately 296 students have participated in the programme from the preschool level in the public schools, similar to last year, and 48 in the private schools, a total of 344 students. Currently, there are 42 teachers trained and providing the AI’s Pals programme.

Mr. Chairman, the Prevention Unit also provides the Teen Peace programme that supports three public schools for P7 and M1 school-age children as an after-school programme. Currently, there are 50 students participating in the Teen Peace programmes, similar to the previous fiscal year. The programme allows students to be interactive with positive pro-social adults and affords them the opportunity to further develop, operationalise, and practice social-emotional learning skills at a vital stage when children are transitioning developmentally, cognitively, and emotionally.

The DNDC hires and trains facilitators for this programme as well as provides all supplies and resources. Teachers facilitating have received a Botvin LifeSkills Training, which is a research-validated substance abuse prevention programme proven to reduce the risk of alcohol, tobacco, drug use, and violence. The programme targets the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky antisocial behaviours. There are six trained facilitators implementing the Teen Peace after-school programmes.

Mr. Chairman, the Adventure Education programme that utilises an experiential approach to learning is used as part of the annual summer camp for emerging M1 students. The Adventure Education programme engages young people physically, emotionally, and mentally while encouraging them to explore appropriate risk-taking behaviours and play that predicts outcomes through adventure, fun, and learning.

Adventure educators use a specific framework to facilitate learning which includes the “Adventure Wave” which surges between three basic [phases]: Brief, Activity, and Debrief, helping to develop anti-bullying, anti-drug communication, compassion, critical thinking, health, leadership, respect, responsibility, self-esteem, and team-building, tolerance, and trust, to name a few. Four facilitators have been trained to provide the programme during the summer. Thirty students participated in the summer camp during fiscal year 2025/26, which ran for a two-week period.

Mr. Chairman, the Parenting 101 programme for at-risk parents is led by a certified Parenting facilitator and the Department of National Drug Control Prevention officer. The programme provides a step-by-step guide to building positive parenting skills and family relationships to prevent problem behaviours. Parents learn how to prevent problem behaviours from

starting, how to communicate, and how to help their child to solve problems and make good choices as they grow. Stress management and positive discipline are also included. Effective strategies that have been proven to work are learned and can be used immediately by the parent. All the tips and tools are based on research.

The Prevention officer and a senior educator are the only facilitators of this programme at an approximate cost of \$5,000 annually. Unfortunately, the programme did not take place in 2025/26 but is scheduled to occur [in] early 2026/27.

Mr. Chairman, all the drug prevention programmes are evaluated throughout the year by observation by the Department of National Drug Control staff, (drug prevention officer and the community development coordinator) to ensure fidelity and appropriate implementation by the facilitators.

Business Unit 98030, Treatment

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit is responsible for overseeing substance abuse treatment Island-wide by ensuring quality care through accreditation of programmes, workforce development and training, and public awareness of available services. The unit is also responsible for maintaining a continuum of care and advocating for gaps in services.

In fiscal year 2025/26, the focus was on maintaining the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (or CARF accreditation) for the Men's Treatment Programme, the Women's Treatment Centre and Turning Point [Substance Abuse Programme], operated by BHB [Bermuda Hospitals Board], as required by the National Drug Control Act 2013.

All these programmes have maintained a Gold Star CARF accreditation status throughout fiscal year 2025/26. CARF accreditation is spearheaded and funded by the Department for National Drug Control Island-wide at an approximate cost of \$20,000 per programme. Compliance surveys are completed every three years. Quality improvement reports are submitted annually.

CARF accreditation is scheduled for the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Facility and supportive residency unit in March 2026, along with the Turning Point Substance Abuse treatment programmes operated by the BHB.

Mr. Chairman, efforts have continued to consolidate the use of the AccuCare web-based client management system and all drug treatment programmes across the Island to assist in standardised best-practice care. Five treatment facilities out of the six on Island utilise the system at a cost of approximately \$21,000 annually. Required treatment-specific training, such as CPR, first aid, and safety care prevention techniques, also took place during 2025/26.

Recovery Month, which is September, was celebrated this year, led by the treatment officer. Several

programmes were highlighted through open houses attended by Cabinet Ministers, the Premier, along with the general public. Fun events for recovering persons, such as bowling, family picnics, and barbecues were also held and enjoyed by many.

The Chairman: The Minister is just taking a quick brief break in his presentation.

For the benefit of the Honourable Members and the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

This is the Budget Debate on the Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45, and 88. The Minister is currently on his final Head, 88. And there is approximately one hour left in this five-hour debate.

I believe that we will be changing the Chairs in a minute if anyone knows where MP Simmons is. He can . . . okay, great, fabulous. Yes, no rush, no rush.

So please continue, Minister. You have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, Mr. Chairman, the primary activities of the Research Unit are geared towards the collection and dissemination of reliable data through the Bermuda Drug Information Network (commonly known as BerDin) identifying emerging trends and patterns of drug use, evaluation of the current drug control efforts, and providing coordination, implementation, and evaluation of the National Drug Control Master Plan and Action Plan. The unit is also responsible for developing alcohol- and drug-related policies as required.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year 2025/26, the 15th Annual Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN) meeting was held with all network members at BLUEI [Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute] on 28 November 2025. This annual event continues to greatly increase collaboration, understanding, and information sharing among all agencies involved in demand and supply-reduction activities. The 2024 Annual Report of the Bermuda Drug Information Network (or BerDIN), was released to the public in November 2024 following the meeting. The report can be found on the government website.

Mr. Chairman, the treatment demand indicators, consumer satisfaction surveys, stakeholder feedback surveys, employee climate survey, and quality records reviews were completed within the Department for National Drug Control. The Women's Treatment Programme, Men's Treatment Programme, and The Right Living House [RHL] operated under the Department of Corrections during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

The study examining the correlation between drug and alcohol consumption and traffic accidents, as well as fatalities, began at KEMH [King Edward VII Memorial Hospital] in May 2023. This initiative is a joint effort with the Department of National Drug Control Research Unit and the Emergency Department at the King

Edward VII Memorial Hospital and continued through the 2025/26 fiscal year.

The 2025 Substance Use and Pregnant Women Survey was completed during the three weeks from the 8th of September to the 30th of September 2025. The report will be made available on the government website.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, if that is convenient, a moment to pause. We will now be in the capable charge of MP Scott Simmons in the Chair.

Thank you, Honourable Minister Weeks. About an hour to go in the last Head.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

The Chairman: Honourable Minister, now that I have been sufficiently outed, I would ask you to just go ahead and continue, Minister, while I sort matters here.

I recognise the Honourable Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Good afternoon, sir.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, 75 per cent of BerDin members submitted their information on time. However, numerous agencies faced difficulties in submitting their datasets last year. The postponement of data entry adversely affects the annual report by creating gaps in previously supplied information, leading to an inaccurate representation of Bermuda's drug situation. Steps are being taken to address this issue moving forward.

Head 88, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Page B-285.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, page B-285, Mr. Minister. Go right ahead.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Mr. Chairman. I feel good.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister. Okay. I am all together now. That has been sufficiently sorted.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Would you like some water?

The Chairman: No, I had lunch.

And so, Mr. Minister, I take it you are at Head 88, National Drug Control. Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman, the Men's Treatment Programme and the Women's Treatment Programme are

now merged under 98060 as the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility. Moving forward, the performance measures for 98070 will be merged under 98060.

The Men's Treatment Programme is a residential substance abuse treatment programme for men 18 years and above in Bermuda. It provides long-term comprehensive primary treatment for addiction disorders. The programme's primary treatment is delivered over a 12-month period using a phased approach. During the last phase, a transition plan was developed, which includes participating in volunteer services, job shadowing, and referral to a transitional supportive residency programme and/or aftercare services. The Men's Treatment Programme had 12 admissions and five discharges to the community during the 2025/26 fiscal year, with two completing the 12-month programme.

Mr. Chairman, life skills training remains a key component of the programme, especially in the transition phase. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of clients received life skills training, and six received aftercare services.

Family counselling is also a key part of treatment with six family members receiving support in 2024/25.

The Men's Treatment Programme has been accredited by CARF since 2015 and has received a three-year CARF Gold Star award.

The Chairman: Excellent.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Women's Treatment Programme provides long-term comprehensive treatment for addiction and related disorders. The programme is delivered over a 12- to 15-month period using a phased approach. The phased approach to treatment delivery enables the client to reach short-term goals and celebrate accomplishments, thus motivating them to continue in the treatment. Community involvement and re-entry are gradual and involve partnering with local businesses and organisations to facilitate volunteerism among our clients. The programme had seven admissions during the 2025/26 fiscal year, an increase of six from the previous year.

Life skills training remains a key component of the programme, especially in the transition phase. All clients receive life skills training.

There are three women receiving aftercare services, and there were three who received respite care. Although numbers have improved, efforts will continue towards improving the admission rate by including a campaign to assist in increasing participation in the women's programmes through focus groups, public awareness, and by partnering with community programmes that women access.

Mr. Chairman, the supportive residency facility and programme provide a safe environment for the re-integration of women back into the community who

have completed a programme of substance abuse treatment at the Women's Treatment Centre, or who are accepted by the Women's Treatment Centre. All transitional clients are females who have been drug-free for at least one year.

The programme is managed by the Women's Treatment Centre and is located within the general community. There are three clients occupying the transitional home, all of whom are working in the community and actively engaged in life skills training to facilitate their move back into the community as productive citizens.

The Women's Treatment Centre programme and supportive residences have been accredited by CARF since 2009, and have maintained a three-year [CARF] Gold Star award since then. Both programmes will be surveyed by CARF in late March 2026.

Business Unit 98080, Master Plan

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, business unit 98080 is in place to provide for the effective implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan; cross-ministry initiatives with the police, customs, and corrections; evaluation of the Master Plan, and to encourage cooperation and involvement of other government departments and civil society in its implementation. This business unit was not allocated any funding in fiscal year 2025/26, but will receive funding in 2026/27.

The Department of National Drug Control is required by the NDC [National Drug Control] Act 2013 to oversee the implementation of the action plan, and to monitor and evaluate the performance of the plan. The required evaluation of the 2019–2024 Master Plan was completed in fiscal year 2025/26. The needs assessments and the drafting of the new plan will occur in fiscal year 2026/27.

The Steering Committee will oversee the implementation of the Master Plan's actions were approved by the Cabinet and needs to be convened in fiscal year 2026/27 to ensure priority actions are addressed.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, we shall

- continue critical recruitment efforts with the goal of filling all vacancies by the end of the first quarter of fiscal year 2026/27;
- continue providing and monitoring grants to drug treatment and prevention partners within the community to enhance national demand for reduction efforts;
- establish the Steering Committee to oversee the National Drug Control Master Plan actions;
- commence the needs assessment processes to create the next five-year plan as required by

the NDC Act 2013. and draft a new National Drug Control Master Plan;

- release the Pregnancy Alcohol and Drug Survey that took place in September 2025;
- release the National Household Survey on Alcohol and Drugs that took place in October and November 2025;
- continue to provide residential substance abuse treatment for both adult males and females at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility;
- implement the Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment Programme as per the November 2024 Throne Speech;
- continue to expand and enhance drug prevention efforts within schools through collaboration with the Department of Education training teachers and providing drug prevention materials and support;
- continue to educate the public and bring awareness about the harms of drug and alcohol misuse and abuse;
- hold a community engagement event to enhance community-based efforts addressing substance abuse and other antisocial issues within the community;
- support the development of regulations to protect young people under the Misuse of Drugs (Decriminalisation of Cannabis) Amendment Act 2017;
- support the development of social hosting liability legislation where required.

Mr. Chairman, the Department for National Drug Control will continue to work collaboratively with other key ministries such as Health and Education as well as with various departments, such as Corrections, Court Services, the Bermuda Police Service, Customs, the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard and international partners to ensure the implementation of a balanced approach to the efforts made in achieving a healthier and a drug-free Bermuda.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend Ms. Joanne Dean and her hard-working team for their sterling work throughout the year.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, that finally ends my presentation of Head 88, Department for National Drug Control.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

Members, we remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the [fiscal] year 2026/27. We are considering Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45, and 88.

And now that the Minister has concluded his presentation, I would just like to remind Members that,

to my recollection, 6:03 [pm] is the end of the debate as it relates to the end of our consideration. And so, it looks to me to be about maybe 50 minutes or so that the Minister has left for the Honourable Shadow [Minister] to speak on these important matters.

Does anybody else wish to speak as it relates to this matter?

I recognise the Honourable Shadow Minister. Mr. Robert King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Members of this Honourable House, and the listening public.

In the interest of time, I am going to start at Head 12, Customs and Immigration.

The Chairman: Head 12, yes.

Mr. Robert King: And I will be beginning on page B-278.

The Chairman: Page B-278.

Mr. Robert King: Mission statement: Protecting Bermuda's border and promoting economic development.

The Chairman: Carry on, Shadow [Minister].

Mr. Robert King: But I would be remiss if I did not thank the uniformed services—

The Chairman: It would be appropriate.

Mr. Robert King: —who have committed to doing the difficult work, making sure that we are safe and secure on this Island. Which means they have to work when we are sleeping. Whenever we hear an ambulance or a police car, they are the ones who respond to traumatic incidents on our behalf.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: So, I thank them, their families, for the very important work that they do and the sacrifice they make for us.

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister. So noted.

Mr. Robert King: I am looking at page B-7912 [sic], the Training budget. What accounted for the additional \$11,000? Regarding training and equipment, our officers are faced with increased risks to their personal safety when processing yachts that have prohibited weapons, including firearms and tasers. Will the Minister make additional funds available to ensure that officers receive the necessary defensive tactics training, including weapons and self-defence?

Would the Minister also make available funds for handheld devices that can detect drugs, explosives, and firearms?

Would the Minister ensure that training and resources are provided and coordinated with the Department of Corrections, the Police [Service], the Royal Bermuda Regiment, and the Fire [and Rescue] Service, and report back on progress in three months?

Page B-7912 [sic], Travel budget. What was the purpose of the travel? What material benefits were realised? For example, programmes, staffing, and equipment.

Page B-279, Employee numbers. What is the strategic plan to ensure a full roster by the 26th of November, for example, understanding the critical importance of this department to national security? We know that people are going to be retiring, people will be on vacation leave or might be on medical leave. And that it is a normal part of succession planning to ensure that staff are trained and recruitment happens on an ongoing basis to make sure there are no gaps in services, especially since their positions are of critical importance.

Performance Measures, business unit 22020, Airport Commercial. *Maintenance of prescribed service levels to the client base 90 per cent time, measured by percentage adherence to published Quality of Service Levels* is zero. Can the Minister provide some clarification on what this actually means? I am not sure if this is good or bad. And I am sure the listeners are wondering as well.

Business unit 22030, Air[port] Arrivals Travelers. *[Collect] forced duty . . . incorrect duty declarations, imports not declared in excess of [\$]15,000, and seizures of illicit items to exceed 40 per cent.* What accounts for the high seizure rate in 2025/26? Was it equipment, scanners, training, et cetera? What accounts for the reduced original 2025/26 and revised, and the new target of 2025? Why is the target being reduced as opposed to [being] raised? What is informing this target?

Business unit 22030, *Authorising release of imported goods measured by volumes of declarations processed*, is zero. Again, can the Minister provide clarification on what that measure actually means?

Business unit 22040, Airport Shift B. *Incorrect duty declarations, imports not declared in excess of [\$]15,000, items exceeding 40 per cent.*

Again, business unit 2205 [sic], Investigations/Audit. *Number of cases dealt with to be greater than 100.* What accounts for the significant fluctuation and projections? *Additional duty collected to be greater than [\$]20,000.* How are these targets determined?

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, correct me if I am wrong. [Business unit] 22050 is where you are, Investigations/Audit. Am I correct?

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

The Chairman: Carry on. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Business unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops. *Maintenance of prescribed service levels to client base is 90 per cent of the time, measured by percentage adherence to Quality Service Levels. Authorising the release of imported goods measured by volumes of declarations processed.*

Why are the forecast and target frozen at 70 per cent if we are always seeking to improve performance? Ensuring that the Government receives its taxes and that the Island is safeguarded from dangerous goods, weapons, and drugs, why was the target reduced? Why has the target been reduced if we are seeking to improve performance? What data is being relied on to make these projections?

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Regarding the dog that is being retired, when we are looking at staffing levels, the dog is an integral part of staffing. So, understanding the increased risks and that the scanner hall has yet to be built, I am trying to understand why another dog has not been hired to fulfil the duties that are required, understanding the increased risks, both external and internal to the Island.

The Chairman: So that is the increase of canines, am I correct?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, increased to the original number of two.

The Chairman: Appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Robert King: [Pages] B-280 through B-281 performance measures. Business unit 28080 Administration. *Processes all entry declarations in accordance with our prescribed Quality Service Levels. Average time between receipt of the purchase invoice and the authorisation rejection of payment should not exceed 10 working days.*

Question: How many entry declarations were processed? What accounts for the lower quality outcome target that is 100 per cent worse than 2025? What is the rationale for aiming for a target outcome that is worse than what we achieved previously if we are seeking to provide quality service?

Page B-281, business unit 28090, Vessel Clearance. *Process 100 per cent of cruise ship passengers. It is expected that the number of arriving passengers will exceed 350,000.* Question: Has this ever been an area of need? If not, why are we measuring this? You cannot improve on 100 per cent, so obviously, this is not an area of need.

Prepare and issue the invoices to collect revenue from arriving vessels in excess of \$900,000. How

are the targets arrived at? What is the basis for the adjustments up or down?

Page B-281, business unit 22100. *Percentage of positive search and detentions from total search and detentions undertaken to exceed 50 per cent.* It would be helpful in the performance measures to see both quantitatively and qualitatively what was seized. The quantity of the items, and by what means. This would allow us to see what works, what is not working well, and where resources should be allocated.

Page B-281, Seaport Enforcement Team. *The number of imported containers were scanned by the Hamilton Docks.* Can the Minister inform this House what the status is of the scanning hall? I understand that it is not operational, but does he have a start date for when it will begin operations?

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-280, Customs Immigration performance measures. Building a dock, scanner hall. Okay, I have already asked that question.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-278, business unit 2200[0], Yacht Reporting Centre. HM Customs and Immigration dock located at number three Ordnance Island. The Yacht Reporting Centre was not included in the performance measures. Can the Minister explain why this is so, understanding its key role in protecting our borders?

Can the Minister inform this Honourable House the number of seizures for the HM Customs and Immigration Dock, which has been unsafe for use since October 2024? How many vessels were inspected to ensure that they did not bring drugs, guns and ammunition, and other dangerous goods to this Island? How does this number compare to 2021, for example, or when was the dock last fully operational?

Can the Minister please show in the schedule B Capital Development where the budget allocation is found for the repair of the HM Customs and Immigration Dock located on Ordnance Island?

What we do know is that on 7 November 2025, the Honourable Minister advised the House that the Government had an engineering consultation regarding the repair of the HM Customs and Immigration Dock on Ordnance Island. On 12 December 2025, I asked the Honourable Minister about the status and progress of the HM Customs and Immigration Dock repairs, understanding its critical importance to our border security. At that time, the Minister reported that the planning number was PCON004025, and that the estimated cost of the repair works was projected to be \$350,000. When asked about budget allocation, the Minister stated [as reported] in Hansard that the repair works will be done by the Department of Works and Engineering.

The Chairman: Honourable Shadow [Minister], one must be careful not to refer to another debate. I confess and understand that you are forming your view. However, questions should be asked as they relate to the different heads, and so you should steer away from a debate that has already been here.

Thank you so much. Stick to the [Budget] Book.

Mr. Robert King: Sure.

Can the Minister explain to this Honourable House why no application has been submitted?

The Chairman: That's fine.

Mr. Robert King: Can the Minister also explain why he informed this Honourable House that the dock works will be done by the Department of Works and Engineering and be due to start on or about April when the Minister of Public Works confirmed on the 10th of March, during the Committee of Supply, that the Department of Works and Engineering will *not* be repairing the HM Customs and Immigration Dock?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. Carry on, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: I would like, given the time, for the Minister to answer those questions, and then I can come back.

The Chairman: And if you have something else to answer—I mean to ask. Very well. Thank you, Shadow Minister.

The Honourable Minister in charge, Mr. Michael Weeks, are you prepared to answer the beginning questions that he asked? Or is . . . Are you prepared, Minister?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Oh, you are not ready at this precise second.

Honourable Shadow Minister, would you continue with any further questions? Or, if you do not mind my asking, are there any other Members, other than yourself (if you are prepared to hold), who wish to present some questions to these heads?

I recognise the Honourable Member, Linda Smith.

Linda Smith, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My questions come under National Drug Control, Head 88. The Minister spoke about a couple of things, and I just wanted to get some clarification. I was not really clear why the men's and women's drug treatment programmes merged, and what the benefits are of that.

The Chairman: We are under Head 88. I am struggling to see where we are on that page. Where are we on that page?

Ms. Linda Smith: I actually do not have the page. These are comments that he made in reference to, I think, performance metrics, and so . . . He made these comments, and I just was not clear.

The Chairman: That is fine.

Ms. Linda Smith: There is no association with the page in this.

The Chairman: And I appreciate you, Honourable Member, but it is standard procedure that if there are questions that are being posed, they must at least come from the pages—

Ms. Linda Smith: —Okay. Okay, B—

The Chairman: —so that we can refer to, with the greatest of respect—

Ms. Linda Smith: —Yes, B—

The Chairman: Let me finish. With the greatest of respect to you, by just making sure that we can . . . and that is how we actually do our work here.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chairman: I recognise the Honourable Member and thank you.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay. I believe it is page B-288.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you.

So, the question is, why are the men's and women's programmes being merged? And what are the anticipated benefits of that?

The Chairman: That is fine.

Ms. Linda Smith: On page B-284, the subjective analysis of current account estimates shows Professional Services up by \$1.5 million. That is an increase of \$628,000, or 120 per cent, and I was just wondering what was driving that as well.

I think that should do it. Thank you.

The Chairman: Very well. Thank you very much.

Does any other Member wish to speak to these heads? I recognise the Shadow Minister.

Shadow Minister King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am now going to page B-288, Head 88, National Drug Control Performance Measures—

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: —Action Plan. Business unit 98080. *Number of community activities held to disseminate highlights of the Master Plan.* [The] target [is] two.

How is this target arrived at? What is the purpose of providing highlights of a comprehensive programme, given the complexities of substance abuse disorders, mental health, and the criminal justice system, for example? The public requires accurate and detailed information so they can make informed decisions for themselves, their families, friends, and others.

Page B-288, business unit 98080, NDC Master Plan and Action Plan. *Identification of critical leadership to ensure implementation of the actions of the Master Plan.* Outcome 2025/26, “No.” The target for 2026/27, “Yes.” If I understand this measurement correctly, we are deciding to hire a critical leadership person, or persons, based on a performance measure, “yes” or “no.”

Critical leadership is required for the Master Plan, but the person is not being hired to lead the Master Plan. So, the NDC is basically informing this Honourable House that we need to hire a leader because, according to the revised 2025/26 forecast, they do not have a critical leadership person. Please explain; I will settle for the highlights.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Shadow Minister.

And Members, I am obliged to just make mention of the fact that this is a question-and-answer period. And while I recognise that Honourable Members are willing to make the stretch of attempting to try to explain or trying to lead into the questions for which they have, I would recommend that Members refrain from moving too much into the debate stage, as we have already done that.

And now is the time to ask critical questions, for the Minister to assess them, and for us to get to the questions as quickly as possible.

The reason why we run out of time is not because I am talking. It is because we—we—sometimes elaborate on the questions that we are [asking]. If we give quick, brief [questions] then we can move forward as we go.

I take it, Shadow Minister, you have a few more questions just before, or you are good?

Mr. Robert King: I do, sir, unless the Minister is—

The Chairman: The Minister has not indicated that he is ready to answer any questions at the moment. I see there are about 23 minutes left. If you can get your questions in, and then I will keep my eye on the Minister should he wish to rise.

Mr. Robert King: I will go until a quarter to two, and then I will sit down and get—

The Chairman: Carry on, Shadow Minister. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: B27707 [sic], Police Performance Measures.

Business unit 1700[0], Bermuda Police Service. *Public satisfaction, perception, response time, feeling safe, investigation, antisocial behaviour.*

What is the actual number of the survey group? How many surveys were completed? What was the breakdown of the survey participants by age? Did the survey include responses from the Gang Violence Reduction Team?

Is the data from these services used to consider promotion and pay rises for officers? How is this data used to improve service towards achieving departmental objectives, reducing crime, serious crime, gang-related criminality, and reducing antisocial behaviour? The performance measures do not appear to have any correlation to the actual performance of the police.

One of the performance measures was speaking to road safety, reducing crime, and serious crime, as I said before.

The Chairman: Do you have any idea where that is located? What are you speaking—

Mr. Robert King: I will get it for you.

The Chairman: If you do not mind, obliging the Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Sure. [Page] B-277.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, sir. Thank you.

The Chairman: Performance measures. Carry on, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, when we are looking at the performance measures, as I said, it was based on [what] people thought, felt, and believed the police service was doing.

When we look at the actual numbers from the police statistics themselves, in 2022, we see that road traffic accidents were 1,482. [In] 2023, they were 1,401. In 2024, they were 1,461. The 2025 statistics are not out yet.

Gun murders, we had 5. Serious injuries, 5. Incidents, 5 in 2022. Knife murders, 3. Serious injuries were 16. And 17 incidents in 2022.

In 2023, road traffic caused 130 serious injuries. Gun murders, 3. Serious injuries were 3. Incidents were 8.

And then we go down to 2024. Road traffic, serious injuries, 128. And then you have 19 incidents of

gun shootings. And then you have 36 incidents of knife crimes, with 34 receiving serious injuries.

So, when we look at people's perceptions, it is not actually based on what is happening. So, the question I have is: Why aren't the performance measures related to the police statistics as directly related to the department's mission and objectives? Because what's being measured does not inform best practice.

The Chairman: Very well. Shadow Minister, I have allowed you some latitude for a moment. Let's keep it neat and tidy. You have done well thus far; but let's keep it neat and tidy.

Mr. Robert King: Business unit 93008, Gang Violence Reduction Team, [page] B-267.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: And the question is: How does the Gang Violence Reduction Team's programme operation impact the number of gun and knife incidents and deaths? From available data, can we say that the programme has prevented "X" number of deaths? And also led to the confiscation of "X" number of weapons? Have the people who have completed the programme remained crime-free and employed for "X" number of months or years?

What accredited programmes are currently being offered at Westgate and DCFS, in primary, middle school, and high school? How many programmes were delivered? How is success measured?

Have violent altercations in schools been reduced? By what number and what percentage?

The Chairman: You are on page B-267, am I correct with that particular question?

Mr. Robert King: Yes. Business unit 93008, Gang Violence Reduction Team.

The Chairman: Carry on.

Mr. Robert King: How many students completed the programme? How many were crime-free after one year or two years? Are clients being tracked? How many? How many were supported in aftercare? How many were arrested?

[Pause]

Mr. Robert King: Actually, I will leave it there for now.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Shadow Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak to these heads?

No other Members wish to speak to these heads. I recognise the Minister in charge, the Honourable Michael Weeks.

Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I would like to thank my Shadow Minister, and MP Smith for the questions they had.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I would like to start by answering questions concerning the Department of National Drug Control.

The Department of National Drug Control is one of those agencies that does yeoman work in our community, Mr. Chairman. But one question: Why merge the men's treatment with the women's treatment?

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Simply put, both are located on the same site. And they both utilise much of the same services and are managed by one treatment coordinator. Since they already share support staff and are overseen by one treatment coordinator, it makes sense to merge the two programmes. And they will begin to share all staff to improve coverage of the 24-hour programmes.

While we are still on the Head 88 National Drug Control, there is a question that was asked about the Master Plan Leadership. As I said in my brief, the Cabinet had approved the formulation of a Steering Committee, which will include leaders from all related areas to provide the lead actions of the Master Plans. So, no; there is no need for us to hire anybody.

And in relation to providing too many highlights of the Master Plan, the National Drug Control is the country's plan, and therefore, highlights of the achievement of the Action Plan should be shared with the public. Hence, that is why the Department of National Drug Control is updating the National Master Plan, which they will release for public consumption.

I was a little less clear on the Customs.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Customs, which is—

The Chairman: Customs, which is Head 12.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Head 12. Right.

The Chairman: Did you ask him to clarify, Minister? Did you need him to clarify anything for you, or are you all right?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Let me try—

The Chairman: Go right ahead.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —to do what—

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, let him move with it and see how we go.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Okay.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: You are going to let me answer, and then you come back to me.

The Chairman: Yes, he is satisfied.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, for Customs, Mr. Chairman, why are the performance measures getting worse? They do not appear to be getting worse. They are consistently 100 per cent and are meeting the target of processing all entry declarations.

The second measure is also not worse. The average time between the receipt of the purchase invoice and authorisation consistently exceeds our target of five days, which is obviously better than 10 days.

So also in Head 12, Customs. Where is the budget for the dock in St. George's? It is not with Customs because the dock is not a Customs dock. It is a dock that is *used* by Customs and others. It is no more the Customs Department's responsibility to fix the dock than it is to fix the roads upon which they drive to fulfil their job responsibilities.

I have made it clear in the House on a few occasions that the dock is under the remit of the Department of Public Works and Works Engineering. I do not want to—

Mr. Robert King: Point of order.

The Chairman: I think the Minister is reluctant to turn it into a debate matter, but I will recognise . . . Minister, give him 60 seconds. I will listen.

Carry on.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Robert King: He is misleading the House because I confirmed with Minister Adams yesterday that it has nothing to do with Public Works. So, for the Minister to suggest that, is patently false.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, thank you.
I recognise the Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to turn this into a debate.

The Chairman: I didn't wish to either.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: My understanding was that it was a matter for the Public Works. But what I will do, I will endeavour to clarify.

The Chairman: Please, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Not only for this Honourable House, but for the public. Because once and for all, the dock has to be repaired. That is a part of the safety and security of our border protection.

The Chairman: And a particular department will take responsibility.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And a particular department will take responsibility.

The Chairman: That's fine.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And I will make sure that I get that information clarified, and I will bring it to the House.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister he has an undertaking. We're good.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member.

I am not sure I need clarification on the fact that the Minister is going to get back to us on that matter.

Mr. Robert King: I have a question, though.

The Chairman: Not yet. Let the Minister continue with his . . . and then . . . on this matter?

Mr. Robert King: It's a brief question.

The Chairman: Okay, give a brief question, and then he will undertake it.

Mr. Robert King: So, regarding the repairs, we know that the dock has been—

The Chairman: Oh, good. Right.

Mr. Robert King: —inoperable since April 2024. And we understand that it is part of the critical infrastructure necessary to protect our borders, understanding the scourge that drugs and guns have in this community.

So, the question I have for the Honourable Minister is: Why is it taking more than two years to talk to the right people to ensure that the dock is fixed by whoever has responsibility for it? Why do we keep coming back here, having the same conversation about the same matter of critical importance?

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you.

The Chairman: I recognise the Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Some things I am going to have to wait on my team to give me.
As it concerns the security of our country—

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Right? Customs is doing its job at the dock in question on Ordnance Island. I visited that dock myself, and I observed the officers in question inspecting yachts as they came in. So even though the dock is not being repaired at this point, it is an inconvenience.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I think it is unfair to suggest that the security of the country is not being handled by the Customs Officers who are stationed in Ordnance Island. This is not something that somebody has told me. I have —

Mr. Robert King: Point of order, Mr. Chairman. Sorry.

The Chairman: I am going to take a point of order.
Minister, Shadow Minister.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Robert King: The Minister is unintentionally misleading the House. The information—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: He saw the dock himself.

Mr. Robert King: And so have I.

The Chairman: Bear in mind, we are about 13 minutes.
Let's be careful.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, no problem.

The fact is, that less than 10 per cent of boats coming in, whether I say it here or not, the people on the outside already know how things are. There is a major gap and vulnerability in our border security.

When we suggest . . . when it is being suggested that they are doing their best, absolutely, they are doing their best. But they should not have to operate under those conditions because of the crumbling infrastructure that ought to have been given priority for repair.

The Chairman: Good.

Mr. Robert King: Instead of a public dock.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Shadow Minister. I recognise the Minister in charge.
Minister Weeks.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: And I note your reluctance, Minister, to turn that into a debate, but carry on.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. There were other questions asked. I would like to get to them. But let me deal with the dock issue hopefully again.

The Chairman: Sure. Very well, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The vessels . . . the dock issue. Customs has used other measures to board and inspect vessels as they come in. Are we going to spend the last 10 minutes going back and forth over whether it's 10 per cent, 20 per cent, or 50 per cent? I have personally seen Customs officers board and inspect vessels. So, their job is still being performed. They are still doing the job in the performance of their duties. They are protecting our borders at this point in time until the dock is repaired.

Okay?

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: There is another question. Will we be replacing a canine? The department is actively working to recruit a new canine handler. The department is working with the FCDO in the UK to provide new canines once that requirement is complete.

A question for the police. This is in response to the police survey questions. This data from the omnibus survey—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This is a response to the police survey questions.

The data from the omnibus survey, 400 people surveyed, which occurs 4 times a year, Mr. Chairman. The breakdown of the survey participants of age, sex, and other demographics is contained in the omnibus survey.

The survey did not exclude responses from the Gang Violence and Reduction Team [GVRT]. It is a public survey. Data from the survey is about overall service performance and cannot be disaggregated to make performance or pay differentiations.

The survey data is used to measure the impact of our actions on the community, particularly the levels of confidence they have in the police. It also helps to drive policing plans and deployment. In essence, the performance measure indicates the community's confidence and trust in the police. This is as a result of the activity of the police.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: There was another question about how many declarations were processed.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, 533,481 declarations have been processed.

The Chairman: It looks as though you are being attacked by a Fox's Glacier Mint. Carry one, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: I will allow you just a few minutes, Minister.

Members, we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And they are Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45, and 88.

I recognise the Honourable Minister, who is finishing up with the questions that have been given to him. And I will then ask if any other Members have any further questions.

Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

And in addition to where they are talking about the survey question, I am just made to understand that the survey did *not* include the GVRT.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I had another question about how the Gang Violence Reduction Team measure whether individuals have successfully completed the programmes it delivers.

Our response is that the Gang Violence Reduction Team delivers a range of prevention programmes and services across Bermuda's primary, middle, and high schools. Each programme collects data using specific metrics to track participation, engagement, and outcomes.

So, Mr. Chairman, data that is gathered from initiatives such as the I AM programme, the Work Placement and Mentoring programme, and the G.R.E.A.T. programme indicate positive outcomes among participating students. Feedback from parents, teachers, and schools highlight improvements in student behaviour, including fewer behavioural challenges and suspensions.

In addition, [Mr. Chairman], the Violence Reduction Programmes, we are trying to move away from the Gang Violence Reduction Programmes, as they are more comprehensive. So, we are trying to move to just "Violence Reduction" programme. This team provides case-by-case support and intervention for incidents involving students, both in school and in the wider

community, working closely with schools and partner agencies to support young people.

That is the answer in a nutshell, but I must add, while I am talking about the Violence Reduction Team—

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This particular team is looked at as being a nine-to-five team. But, trust me, Mr. Chairman and Members listening, they operate on a 24/7 basis. They are on call like other departments that are on a 24/7 basis. So, at this point, I just want to take my hat off to them, while I am talking about the Violence Reduction Team, for an yeoman's job. I am also asking them to keep up the work they have done. And by my colleague MP, Bishop Leroy Bean, who is now a colleague, MP, and is the coordinator of the Violence Reduction [Team]. So, he and his team do a yeoman's job. So, every chance I get, I like to take my hat off to the work that they do behind the scenes.

The Chairman: It is so noted, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. [Chairman], as I was waiting for other questions and answers, I noticed that I have a guest in the back there. And I have to—

The Chairman: You may continue, Minister. Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, the guest is my son.

The Chairman: Yes.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And he has come to support me and to see how we operate, doing the business of the country.

The Chairman: And following your presentation, Minister, we will ask him to share his assessment.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We have to be mindful—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —of the messages that we send to our young men and how we work together for the betterment of our country.

The Chairman: Yes, sir. Well done, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Thanks for being here, son.

Another question: Why aren't the performance measures related to police statistics directly related to the departmental mission and objectives? That was a question referencing the police.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The performance measures track confidence in the police, and the statistics provide a measure of police activity and levels of crime, incidents, and collisions. They are two separate measures in two separate documents.

We had a question about the scanner. Reference, Customs and Head 12.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: When will it be operational?

Actually, for the listening public and for the Member asking the question, the X-ray is operational. It was down this week because they were doing maintenance and replacing parts, but it should be operational this week. The work on the X-ray building will commence this month, and we expect to have it completed by May 2026.

So far, Mr. Chairman, I have only had questions, really, about Customs and the police. If I am missing anything, I welcome the Members opposite to remind me, and I will make sure I get the answers in the next five minutes.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Thank you, Minister

I recognise that there are about four minutes left, if I am correct. Well, five minutes left.

I recognise the Shadow Minister.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Regarding the G.R.E.A.T. programme, it is a psychoeducational programme. It is not a cognitive behavioural programme. And it is approximately about . . . what is it? . . . thirteen to sixteen sessions. Right?

An Hon. Member: Right.

Mr. Robert King: So, if we understand criminal attitudes and beliefs, we do know that there is a difference between a person who is *at risk* and a person who is *involved*. The treatment modalities used for both would be materially different. You might have the person who has entrenched criminal attitudes and beliefs, who would start off with the psychoeducational in the beginning, as kind of a warm-up to go ahead and increase motivation, and then go into the deeper stuff.

The question is: Is there consideration for the Gang Violence Reduction Programme including cognitive behavioural therapy as a component of it, not just psychoeducational, not for just at-risk kids, but for youth who are gang-involved, so that we can break the attitudes and beliefs that drive the behaviour? Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister. Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for that. And I want to make it clear that the coordinator of the Violence Reduction Team, actually, recently, I think it was last year, got a doctorate in behaviour therapy and cognitive behaviour and trauma. So, I think that only adds to the strength and the ability of that team to address the cognitive issues that the Member opposite has raised.

And I want to take my hat off to him because his background is also there. So, I appreciate his view and his analysis of it. But I want him [to] rest assured that this Violence Reduction Team, yes, is really fit for purpose. And like I said, hats off to the now Bishop Doctor in leading the Violence Reduction Team and they are doing a yeoman's job.

So, in answer to the question by the Member opposite about the effect of [the] G.R.E.A.T. programme, it is being led ably and we have a lot of success, not only in the G.R.E.A.T. programme, but in the I AM programme.

The Chairman: Great. You are free to sum up, Minister. There are about another 60 seconds left.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay. As I sum up, I want to thank Members opposite. You know, I wanted to leave Member King about three hours, but I changed my mind halfway through.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I changed my mind halfway through and decided to take a [bit] more time.

The Chairman: Odds were on *no time at all*. But with this, you saw that.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. But in wrapping up, I just want to thank Members for participating. I want to thank my Permanent Secretary for his yeoman leadership in making sure that our department heads gathered the information that we need. You know, he is a former colonel, so he is kind of firm, and he tells people, *Put stuff together*. So, thank you, sir.

And thank you [to] all my department's heads for what you do. And my boss away from home, my comptroller. Make sure that we all do what we got to do. So, thank you, sir.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Minister.

And we would like to thank the Shadow Minister and all those who participated, including the Honourable Member, Linda Smith.

Minister, go right ahead and move your heads, and we are good.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, as I take my seat, so prior to taking my seat, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks:—I move that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. It is agreed to.

Thank you, Minister.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of National Security, Heads, 83, 6, 7, 12, 45 and 88 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.]

[Gavel]

The Chairman: And now we will move to . . . I recognise the Honourable Minister for Housing and Municipalities, the Honourable Zane De Silva.
Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go ahead, move your heads, Minister.

MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, I move the following Heads, Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities; Headquarters 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation [BHC] be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been so moved that Heads 90 and 53 be considered. Agreed to.
Carry on, Minister.

HEAD 90—MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for the opportunity to lead the debate and present the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

The Chairman: Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This is found on pages B-318 through B-321, C-8, C-16, and C-22 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2026/27.

Ministry Headquarters is comprised of one business unit, 100000 Administration, which supports

the Minister's office and directs the development and implementation of policy and legislation. The Ministry Headquarters also provides leadership and coordination for its affiliated bodies, which are

- the Bermuda Housing Corporation,
- the Bermuda Housing Trust,
- the Bermuda Land Management Corporation [BLMC],
- the Corporation of Hamilton,
- the Corporation of St. George's, and
- the Morgan's Point Development Company.

Mission and Objectives

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, as can be found on page B-319, the mission of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities is, *To enhance Bermuda's quality of life through affordable and sustainable housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and innovative urban development.*

To achieve the mission, the Ministry Headquarters has the following objectives: one, *to guide and coordinate the Ministry's initiatives through collaboration with government agencies and key public and private stakeholders;* two, *to deliver essential logistical, financial, and administrative support to the Ministry Headquarters and its constituent entities.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: As noted on page B-320, the Ministry Headquarters and Administration have been allocated a total budget of \$937,000 for the 2026/27 fiscal year. This amount represents approximately 11.4 per cent of the Ministry's total estimated budget of \$8,206,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: For clarity, the other 88.6 per cent, or \$7,269,000, is allocated to the operational grant for the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

Of the Ministry's Headquarters budget allocation, \$597,000, or 63.7 per cent, is designated for salaries. Mr. Chairman, \$257,000, or 27.4 per cent, is earmarked for professional services to support studies and specialised assistance. And the remaining \$83,000, or 8.9 per cent, is allocated to operations.

Mr. Chairman, for the Ministry Headquarters, the 2026/27 budget reflects an overall increase of \$23,000, or 3 per cent compared to the 2025/26 budget, primarily due to salary uplifts. While the total budget remains stable, salaries have increased by \$132,000, or 28 per cent to accommodate the addition of a second special advisor. As a result, professional services has decreased by the same amount, representing a 34 per cent reduction.

Revenue

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Ministry Headquarters will not collect any revenue given that it is not a revenue generating department.

Manpower

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The manpower estimates for the Ministry Headquarters, as outlined on page B-320, is five full-time posts. This includes a policy analyst, a comptroller, executive assistant, and two special advisors to the Minister.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Ministry Headquarters does not anticipate purchasing capital assets during the fiscal year 2026/27.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, as shown on page C-8, the Ministry Headquarters has a total allocation of \$32,863,000 for grants and contributions.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This will support the following entities, including the Bermuda Land Management Corporation, the Corporation of St. George's, and the Bermuda Housing Corporation. The specific grants and contributions are as follows:

Bermuda Land Management Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The following grants facilitate payments on three projects currently secured through a single loan with Clarien Bank. The increase in each loan reflects the rise in Clarien Bank loan interest from 4.5 per cent to 6 per cent.

- Cost centre 75054 BLMC Capital Grant, \$1,262,000, increased from the revised estimate 2025/26 of \$1,254,000 for the affordable housing and infrastructure project at Victoria Place. This included the installation of sewage collection and reclaimed water supply extending to Boaz Island Village.
- Cost centre 75334 BLMC South Basin land reclamation—this was \$3,078,000, increased from the revised estimate in 2025/26 of \$3,061,000 for the Cross Island reclamation project completed for the great America's Cup 2017.
- Cost centre 75346 BLMC King's Wharf, \$850,000, increased from the revised estimate 2025/26 of \$845,000 for the King's Wharf dock and terminal upgrade.

The Chairman: Yes.

Bermuda Housing Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, full details will be provided in the Budget Statement for Head 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation. However, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight several key items as shown on pages C-8 and C-22.

The Chairman: Just before you do, Minister, [I am] just reminding Members that this is a three-hour debate as allocated by the Opposition, and so the Minister will be, for the three hours, going through Heads 90 through 50 and 53. He is now on Bermuda Housing Corporation, Head 53.

I recognise the Minister in charge.

7032, Rental Assistance Grants

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation, Head 53, will receive an operational grant funding totalling \$7,269,000, representing an increase of \$629,042 over the prior year. The increased grant allocation reflects higher operating costs related to the addition of new housing units, increased maintenance, and make-ready works, also the engagement of two additional staff members, higher staffing costs arising from the collective bargaining agreement and statutory obligations, the requirement for an on-call residential supervisor for rooming houses, and expanded training and professional development.

75320, BHC Residential Housing Grant

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, over the past four years, the Government has steadily increased its investment in affordable housing demonstrating a clear commitment to addressing Bermuda's housing challenges and supporting Bermudian families. In 2023, the Government allocated \$4.3 million to the Bermuda Housing Corporation under the Residential Building Programme. In 2024, that investment increased to \$5 million reflecting continued efforts to accelerate housing development. In 2025/26, funding rose again, Mr. Chairman, to \$6.5 million, further—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —strengthening the programme's capacity to deliver new housing units and improve existing properties.

In 2026/27, this commitment will expand significantly with funding increasing to \$16,355,000—

The Chairman: So, noted, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —to support a major scale-up of affordable housing initiatives. This sustained and growing investment will enable more Bermudians to

access safe, quality, and affordable housing. It will support the construction of new homes, the refurbishment of existing housing stock, and assist with the implementation of Phase 1 of the draft Affordable Housing Strategy 2025–2035.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will speak more about that strategy a little further on, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the BHC has outlined a comprehensive renovation plan to bring much-needed housing units back into service. In 2026, a total of 16 units will be refurbished, including the following:

- twelve units at Harmony East in Paget—that's 6 studios and 6 one-bedroom apartments;
- four two-bedroom units in Middle Town, Pembroke;
- as well as an additional 33 units [that] are slated for renovation—that would be
 - 16 studios at Harmony North in Paget;
 - 12 units at 18 Battery Road, St. David's, comprising of 4 two-bedrooms, six studios, and 2 one-bedroom units;
 - five family-sized units at Chelsea and St. George's, which consist of 2 three-bedrooms and 3 two-bedroom units.

Additional funding of \$10,555,346 has been allocated to support the development of new housing units in alignment with Government's draft Bermuda Affordable Housing Strategy 2025–2035. This funding will support enabling infrastructure for selected housing projects, architectural and engineering services, and the conversion of Channel House to provide senior housing.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Funding for the major projects will be provided through a local banking facility secured by a government guarantee. I look forward and am excited that we will be providing further updates to this Honourable House in the very near future.

The Chairman: So, noted, Minister.

75332, BHC Capital Grant

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Bermuda Housing Corporation has been allocated \$10,518,000 in its annual capital grant, representing a small increase of \$18,000 compared to last year's original estimate of \$10,500,000. This increase reflects additional funding required to cover bank interest associated with housing development financing.

The grant will also facilitate significant repairs to BHC-managed facilities, and those include:

- Langley House room refurbishments, kitchen and laundry, \$757,500;

- Gulfstream room refurbishments and plumbing replacements, \$900,000;
- Swanston property 10 two-bedroom units refurbishment, \$950,000;
- Cedar Park, the long-awaited electrical, plumbing, lighting and sewage upgrades, \$800,000;
- Alexandra [Road] and Mary Victoria Road electrical, plumbing, lighting and sewage upgrades, \$1.2 million.

Mr. Chairman, these projects represent investments in dignity, security and quality of life.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The St. George's Corporation will receive a grant, cost centre 75003, of \$800,000 for the fiscal year 2026/27, consistent with last year's estimate. This funding will support infrastructure improvements within the municipality of St. George's, and some of the planned initiatives include the resurfacing and bricking of Ordnance Island car park, various road resurfacing projects across the municipality, [and] renovation of a three-bedroom dwelling located at 26 Wellington Street. These upgrades aim to enhance the town's infrastructure, improve public amenities, and contribute to the overall revitalisation of the area.

The Chairman: Yes.

Output Measures

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: [Regarding] output measures, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the Ministry Headquarters primarily provides an oversight role, and there are no direct output measures.

Major Policy Changes

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, recognising that the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities is a new Ministry established in February 2025, there are no major policy changes to report on for the fiscal year 2025/26.

The Chairman: Yes.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the establishment of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities in February 2025 reflects this Government's commitment to addressing Bermuda's housing challenges while ensuring effective oversight of the Island's municipalities and affiliated public bodies.

As we enter 2026/27 fiscal year, the Ministry will continue focussing on practical and sustainable solutions that expand housing opportunities, strengthen communities and improve coordination across the entities responsible for housing and municipal services.

Mr. Chairman, recent data from the Bermuda Housing Corporation underscores the growing pressure in Bermuda's housing market. Between November and December in 2025 alone, the housing wait list increased from 333 to 357 households with growth across every priority category. While urgent cases remain significant, the fastest increase is among working individuals and families who contribute to our economy yet struggle to afford market rents.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Nearly 60 per cent of applicants are seeking studio or one-bedroom units, reflecting mounting pressures on seniors, smaller households, and individuals living alone. Beyond the statistics, the Ministry continues to receive daily calls from families who are underhoused, overcrowded, or housing insecure.

Mr. Chairman, housing is not simply a social issue, it is also an economic one. Businesses cannot attract or retain talent if housing is inaccessible. Young professionals cannot remain in Bermuda if accommodation is unattainable. Families cannot build financial security when rent consumes an unsustainable share of income. They just cannot do it.

It is important to note that our approach addresses both affordable housing and attainable housing. Affordable housing supports low-income households who cannot access market housing without assistance. Attainable housing focusses on working and middle-income households who are priced out of the market but do not qualify for the traditional subsidies. Both are essential to the strength of our economy and the stability of our communities.

The Chairman: Yes.

Development of an Affordable Housing Strategy

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, this budget supports the development of a long-term, data-driven, affordable housing strategy that will guide future investment, planning, and home ownership opportunities. A coordinated three-year delivery framework is being developed to address the Island's housing needs and build a more sustainable housing system.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the consultative draft of the Affordable Housing Strategy has now been completed. The Ministry has also concluded consultations with internal government stakeholders to ensure alignment across departments and agencies involved in housing delivery.

Mr. Chairman, the draft strategy will now be presented to Cabinet for consideration. Following Cabinet's review, the Ministry intends to undertake consultations with external stakeholders in April, including representatives from the private sector, non-profit organisations, community groups, and other key partners whose perspectives will be critical in strengthening the strategy. We may even talk to some of the Members opposite if they are good.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Ministry will then finalise the strategy and develop a detailed implementation plan.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, while the plan is being finalised, we will not delay. The work to address Bermuda's housing needs is already underway. More than 30 publicly owned sites have been identified for potential development, many of them development-ready, with clear ownership, zoning, and supporting infrastructure already in place.

Six priority locations have been selected for the first phase, including Albert and Victoria Row in Sandys, the government-owned site adjacent to Dr. Cann Park in Southampton, and the sites at Tommy Fox Road, Harbour View, and Channel House in St. David's.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I am pleased to confirm that implementation has already begun. Three priority sites have been confirmed for accelerated development. Together, they are projected to deliver over 200 homes within the next 18 months, primarily one-bedroom units aligned with demonstrated demand alongside a smaller proportion of two- and three-bedroom homes. These developments will include both affordable, subsidised units and attainable homes for working and middle-class households available for rent and for sale. The homes will be delivered using precast concrete and modular construction technologies, efficient and cost-effective approaches that respond to rising global construction costs while ensuring local contractors remain actively engaged.

Financing will be provided by local financial institutions supported by our government letter of guarantee. This represents a responsible public-private partnership model—Government providing oversight and financial backing, local banks providing capital, and the Bermuda Land Management Corporation and the Bermuda Housing Corporation acting as landlord and managing project delivery.

For the business community, this provides pipeline certainty, construction activity, job creation, and measurable economic stimulus.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Housing investment, Mr. Chairman, is economic investment.

Emergency Projects

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: At the same time, Mr. Chairman, we must respond to the immediate need. Nine modular units have been procured for installation at Boaz Island to provide transitional housing for urgent cases. The planning application has been submitted, and the units are expected to arrive within the next four to six weeks.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This initiative will provide rapid relief while serving as a live pilot for scalable modular housing solutions in Bermuda.

The Bermuda Housing Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Bermuda Housing Corporation continues to play a vital role in delivering safe, affordable, and accessible housing for Bermudians across all sectors. With three grant allocations totalling over \$23 million for operational support, capital works, and new residential construction, BHC is well positioned to advance its mission with urgency and with impact—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —Mr. Chairman. As outlined earlier in this statement, these funds are supporting significant renovations to existing housing stock, targeted upgrades to transitional housing facilities such as Gulfstream and Langley House, and the continued expansion of the residential building programme.

Mr. Chairman, several development projects are already underway across the Island. These projects will collectively deliver 37 new affordable housing units with the majority expected to come online within the next couple of months.

Looking ahead to 2026/27, additional works are scheduled to commence, those being at

- 13 Middle Town, 2 three-bedroom units;
- 9 King Street, 3 two-bedroom units;
- 45 Elliott Street, 2 three-bedroom units;
- 39 Battery Road, 4 two-bedroom units;
- Swanston property, 5 two-bedroom units.

Together, these developments will further expand the housing delivery pipeline and strengthen supply across key communities.

The successful HomeStart programme delivered in partnership with Clarien Bank is also helping more Bermudians achieve first-time home ownership. With 88 units completed or in progress and additional developments planned at several strategic locations, BHC continues to respond to rising housing demand reflected in its growing wait list.

Support for seniors and the most vulnerable remains a priority through initiatives such as interest-free home improvement loans and the long-standing H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme, now in its 19th year.

As economic pressures continue, the work at BHC is more critical than ever. The corporation remains ready and resolute, responding to Bermuda's evolving housing needs through data-driven planning, strong partnerships, and targeted investment.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to the Ministry's housing responsibilities, the following initiatives are also underway:

- Bermudiana Beach Residences—Mr. Chairman, as of February 2026, Bermudiana Beach Residence has reached 73 per cent secured occupancy, up from 35 per cent as of May 2025. Continued lease activity reflects growing confidence in the development and suggests a promising trajectory toward full occupancy in the months ahead. [It] cannot happen fast enough.

- Master planning for neighbourhoods of Alexandra Road, Mary Victoria, and Cedar Park—Mr. Chairman, the Ministry, working in collaboration with the Bermuda Housing Corporation and the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, is committed to developing a comprehensive infrastructure master plan for the Devonshire neighbourhoods of Alexandra Road, Cedar Park, and Mary Victoria Road. This initiative will address long-standing and critical issues, including water supply, sewage, and street lighting. Work continues with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment on water infrastructure improvements. Discussions are ongoing with the Bermuda Housing Corporation to address water-related concerns, while coordination with BELCO is underway to improve street lighting.

As part of our commitment to inclusive community engagement, we are identifying multiple ways to consult with residents. Water testing with the assistance of the Ministry of Health is ongoing for interested residents. A survey on dog ownership has been completed to inform future community planning and policy development.

To report non-emergency issues in the interim, residents may contact the Ministry of Housing hotline—something new—[at] 246-8400. For emergencies, the Bermuda Housing Corporation should be contacted directly at 524-8623. Further updates on next steps, timelines, and opportunities for resident engagement will be provided in the coming weeks.

The Chairman: Members, we remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates in

Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. The Honourable Minister for Housing and Municipalities is going through Heads 90 and 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation and the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Legislative Reform

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry will pursue amendments to the Acquisition of Land Act 1970 to streamline processes for reclaiming vacant and derelict properties. The objective of these legislative changes is to create a clearer mechanism to increase the available housing stock in the country.

The Chairman: Yes, Deputy Premier.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: To support this work, the Ministry is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, as well as the ministries responsible for the Department of Land Valuation, the Land Title Registry, and the Department of Planning.

Mr. Chairman, the Government remains committed to modernising and strengthening Bermuda's system of municipal governance so that it better serves our communities and reflects the democratic standards expected in Bermuda today.

As Honourable Members are aware, the Government recently received the decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council regarding the municipal reform legislation previously approved by this Honourable House. That decision has now brought final clarity to the legal challenges surrounding those reforms. With that matter now concluded, the Government will move forward with amendments to the Municipalities Act 1923. The Bill advancing these updates is scheduled for debate later today.

Mr. Chairman, this step represents the next stage in ensuring that Bermuda's municipal governance framework is modern, effective, and aligned with the broader interests of the country. Further details will be provided during the debate when the Bill is brought before the Members for consideration.

Bermuda Land Management Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, in the year ahead, the Bermuda Land Management Corporation will focus on completing major infrastructure works at both the west and east ends of the Island while advancing strategic initiatives that support national development. In the west, several capital projects are underway at the North Arm, including the Marine and Ports tug dock repairs, the King's Wharf dock expansion, and the commercial excursion dock extension. The tug dock repairs are approximately 90 per cent complete

and are expected to be finalised by the end of March 2026 with interim berthing and shore power arrangements already in place.

Phase one of the King's Wharf expansion commenced in December 2025 and will extend the dock approximately 90 feet to the existing berthing dolphin, increasing docking capacity and improving cruise vessel servicing. Works will pause in early April to accommodate the active cruise season and resume in November 2026 with full completion anticipated ahead of the 2027 cruise season.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The commercial excursion dock expansion began in February 2026 and will continue through September 2026.

In the east, where there is no Cup at the moment and will not be for a while—

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the water and waste infrastructure project is now 99 per cent complete and will enable sewage transfer from St. George's to the Southside treatment facility once final pump upgrades are installed and the system testing is complete.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The specialised pumps are expected to arrive in April 2026, after which final commissioning will take place before the system becomes fully operational.

BLMC also continues to advance its residential and land management initiatives. Progress is being made on the leasehold to freehold transition for 38 residential units in St. David's with legal conveyancing underway. However, the full process will extend beyond March 2026 due to the complexity of completing individual property transfers.

With strong operational management, high occupancy across its housing portfolio, and several development opportunities under evaluation, BLMC remains well positioned to support housing delivery and economic activity across both ends of the Island.

Morgan's Point Development Company

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: As Honourable Members are aware, the Morgan's [Point] Development Company, established under the Morgan's Point Development Company Act 2022, continues to lead the Government's approach to the redevelopment of the former Caroline Bay site through a measured and financially responsible framework. Over the past year, the company has focused on stabilising operations,

strengthening governance, and maintaining oversight of the site while laying the groundwork for a comprehensive master planning process.

Looking ahead, priorities for the 2026/27 fiscal year include finalising land consolidation, advancing the master planning process through a competitive request for proposals for experienced planning firms, and undertaking further structural and infrastructure assessments to guide phased redevelopment options. These steps will help ensure that any future development pathway is carefully planned, financially sound, and aligned with Bermuda's broader economic and housing objectives.

Mr. Chairman, the Government remains committed to ensure that the redevelopment of Morgan's Point proceeds in a disciplined and transparent manner that protects the public interest while positioning the site for sustainable long-term economic value.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Omar McIntosh, board members Bernard Opoku and Permanent Secretary Kirk Outerbridge for their dedication and efforts over the past year. I also wish to acknowledge Executive Director Sue Khan for her continued leadership and support. I would like to extend sincere thanks to Mr. Marlon Williams for his service and contributions during his time with the organisation and wish him well in his future endeavours.

I am also pleased to welcome new board members Mrs. Shannah Butterfield and Mr. Nadir Wade and look forward to their contributions to the continued work of the board.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, this Government stands firmly on the principle that every Bermudian deserves a safe, secure, and affordable place to call home. As we move forward with purpose and determination, we remain guided by a simple but powerful truth: our people come first.

As Bermuda enters the 2026/27 financial year, the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities remains focused on delivering practical, sustainable housing solutions that address both immediate needs and long-term affordability challenges. Through prudent budget management, stronger coordination across government agencies, and continued investment in housing and community development, the Ministry will continue working steadily, responsibly, and with urgency to improve housing outcomes and enhance the quality of life for Bermudians.

Mr. Chairman, the work ahead is significant, but this Government remains fully committed to expanding access to affordable housing and strengthening the communities in which Bermudians live, work, and raise their families.

Mr. Chairman, at this time, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the staff at headquarters, including my hard-working PS, Permanent Secretary Andrew Pettit, Mrs. Wendy Pond, Tracey Wilkinson, Mrs. Jane Brett, [and] Mrs. Julie Marshall. Please

accept my sincere appreciation for all your hard work, valuable contributions, and for putting up with me.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation on Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities Headquarters.

The Chairman: Very well, Minister.

The Minister has concluded his presentation on Head 90. And [I am] reminding Members that we are on the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, and as the Minister mentioned, that he has Heads 90 and 53.

Minister.

HEAD 53—BERMUDA HOUSING CORPORATION

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 53, the Bermuda Housing Corporation, found on pages B-321 and C-22—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —of the approved Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure.

Mission

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the mission statement of the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *To provide accessibility to adequate, affordable housing and promote independent living to enhance the quality of life in Bermuda.* The vision statement of the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *Every Bermudian will reside in an adequate and safe environment.*

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation will be receiving three grant allocations this fiscal year to support both its operational and capital requirements.

Firstly, Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities allocates an operational grant that is utilised to subsidise the following:

- annual cost of repairs and normal maintenance of BHC properties;
- support services for families and individuals;
- rental assistance via rent-geared-to-income clients of the corporation;
- and for the continuation of the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme.

BHC is budgeted to receive an operational grant of \$7,269,000, as noted on pages B-321 and C-22.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: This represents an increase of \$629,000, which will help cover operational costs, including energy and other related expenses, like

- the addition of approximately 60 new housing units to the public housing stock;
- increased make-ready works;
- remedial repairs and painting;
- landscaping, electrical, and plumbing maintenance;
- engagement of two additional staff members, a project manager and a support services officer;
- higher staffing costs arising from
 - the collective bargain agreement,
 - payroll tax obligations,
 - and a 0.7 per cent increase in public service superannuation fund contributions,
 - the retirement for a residential supervisor,
 - on-call for rooming houses,
 - and expanded training and professional development.

The second grant BHC is budgeted to receive is a capital grant, 75332, of \$10,000,518, found on page C-22, an increase of \$18,000 from the previous year, as I mentioned earlier. The capital grant will be used to pay for the interest and principal amounts due to the corporation's outstanding bank loans. It will also be used for capital projects on BHC properties, such as

- Langley House for room refurbishments, kitchen and laundry, \$757,500;
- Gulfstream room refurbishments and plumbing replacements, \$900,000;
- Hornston property, 10 two-bedroom units refurbishment, \$950,000;
- Cedar Park for the electrical plumbing, lighting, and sewage upgrades, \$800,000;
- and Alexandra and Mary Victoria electrical plumbing, lighting, and sewage upgrades, \$1.2 million, as stated previously.

The third grant BHC is budgeted to receive is the BHC Residential Housing Grant, 75320, in the amount of \$16,355,000. As listed on page C-22, part of the funding, \$4,800,000, will be allocated to Phase 5 of the Residential Building Programme, which began in October 2022. Additional funding of \$11,555,000 has been included for the development of new housing units as guided by the Government's new Bermuda Affordable Housing Strategy 2025–2035.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, through the Residential Building Grant, BHC continues to renovate and refurbish its housing stock to expand the number of affordable housing units available to our people. Under this programme, the following projects are currently under construction:

- 18 Battery Road—12 units, \$3,750,000. Work is underway. An estimated completion date is August this year.

- Chelsea apartments—five units, \$2,968,183. Work is underway. [An] estimated completion date, July 2026.
- 7 Middle Road—four units' refurbishment, \$775,000. Work [is] underway. [The] estimated completion time [is] March 31, 2026, within the next couple of weeks.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: In the 2026/27 budget, the grant of \$4,800,000 funding is allocated as follows:

- 45 Elliott Street—two three-bedroom units, \$800,000, [which is] in Planning.
- Harmony Terrace North—16 studios, \$1,000,000. The building permit has been received. Demolition work has commenced.
- Harmony Terrace infrastructure—upgrading the electrical power from single phase to three phase, adding individual metres to all units, roadworks, landscaping, and a storage unit, \$3,000,000.

Mr. Chairman, there are no other changes between the 2025/26 and 2026/27 grant allocation.

As a reminder, Mr. Chairman, the primary functions of BHC are to provide housing in Bermuda, to promote home ownership, to undertake and carry out housing schemes, and to undertake such other functions in connection with housing as the Minister responsible for Housing may require.

The Bermuda Housing Corporation administers a range of programmes in pursuit of its mission, including the management and leasing of [a] substantial inventory of properties comprising houses, apartments, and building blocks. These properties include both those owned by the corporation and others leased from the private sector. The BHC manages approximately 539 government and private residential units island-wide and eight transitional homes comprising of 171 rooms. In addition to this, BHC also manages 151 leasehold units at Alexander Road, Mary Victoria Road, Greenwich Lane, and Cedar Park, along with 94 units at Bermudiana Beach Residences.

How do they do it, Mr. Chairman? That group deserves medals.

The Chairman: Quite a lot.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight several of the programmes and initiatives currently being implemented by the BHC to maintain, support, and expand its housing stock.

The corporation has entered into a public-private partnership with Clarien Bank, known as the HomeStart programme, to support hard-working Bermudians in achieving home ownership. To date, the programme has successfully assisted over 30 Bermudian families—30—in becoming first-time

homeowners. This initiative has proven effective in making properties available for purchase at affordable prices. I am pleased to report that this number will soon rise to 33, as three additional families are expected to complete their closing in the coming months. Through this partnership, properties within the portfolios of either Clarien Bank or the Bermuda Housing Corporation that require repairs are listed on the BHC website under the HomeStart Programme. The initiative is designed specifically for the first-time homeowners and offers 100 per cent mortgage financing. BHC provides a guarantee to Clarien Bank on the first 25 per cent of each mortgage, making the programme both accessible and secure for new homeowners.

The corporation, in partnership with Age Concern and the Government of Bermuda, continues to support our valued seniors and persons with disabilities through a programme designed to help families care for their vulnerable loved ones. This initiative enables individuals to remain in their own homes with dignity by providing interest-free loans up to \$15,000 repayable over a period of no more than 10 years. This funding is for the purchase of furniture, fixtures, and fittings, and/or to make modifications or renovations to their home, which will make it easier for them to remain there rather than be housed in a seniors' facility. As a reminder, the purchase of the fixture and fittings under this programme are duty-free.

Since the inception of this programme at BHC, BHC has provided loans for 35 seniors with a total of \$476,000. That is not a bad number.

The Chairman: Not bad at all.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Applications for this programme remain available through the BHC website at www.bhc.bm, or they can be collected in person at the corporation's reception desk at the Seven Arches Building, 44 Church Street, Hamilton.

Mr. Chairman, as of February 23, 2026, the former Grant Atlantic, now operating as the Bermudiana Beach Residences, has leases for 73 per cent of the units, or 68 of the 94 condos. The units make up 25 studios, 25 one-bedrooms, 28 two-bedrooms, and 16 three-bedrooms.

Mr. Chairman, as mentioned previously, the BHC also manages and controls the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme, the acronym for Helping the Unemployed Sustain Themselves with Limited Employment. That's the H.U.S.T.L.E., which has been in successful operation since 2007. This year marks the 19th anniversary of the programme. There were some who said the programme will not last a year or two. It is still there and still flourishing.

The Chairman: It has lasted a while. It has lasted a while.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It sure has.

This programme, Mr. Chairman, has helped over 2,050 unemployed Bermudians in need of short-term temporary employment and assisted them with finding full-time jobs. In addition, the programme has provided much-valued assistance to our seniors, community groups, churches, schools, and neighbourhoods. It assists with tasks such as removing furniture, collecting and disposing of large bulk waste, landscaping, relocating tenants, public area cleanups, and many other jobs. For the last calendar year, the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck team completed 677 requests from the community.

The Chairman: That is a lot.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: [Transitional] housing, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: As previously mentioned, the BHC operates eight rooming or transitional homes that contain approximately 177 beds. The various houses are located throughout the Island and provide a safe habitat for BHC clients. The rooming houses cater to households that need immediate, safe, or emergency accommodation. These facilities are known as Langley House, Gulfstream, Victoria Terrace, Union Street, 7 Middle Town, 9 Middle Town, Roosevelt, and Beacon Hill.

Mr. Chairman, the Support Services Department holds regular meetings at the rooming houses to hear residents' concerns and address any complaints. Satellite offices at the largest rooming houses in Southside are utilised for those meetings, as well as for conducting support classes for clients who have fallen onto hard times. The support provided includes economic, social, and psychological guidance all aimed at helping occupants transition from the facility into more traditional forms of living in Bermuda.

Gulfstream multi-unit rooming housing, Southside, St. David's—Mr. Chairman, the Gulfstream multi-unit rooming house is comprised of 79 rooms and currently houses 41 families. Some families have adjoining rooms or [a] family suite to ensure adequate privacy between parents and children.

Mr. Chairman, refurbishing work continues at Gulfstream as we work to improve the overall conditions of the rooms and infrastructure of the building. The roof was recently repaired and new waterproofing applied. Work is underway to renovate the kitchens and bathrooms. Also, windows and entrance doors needed replacing due to age.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Minister, if you would not mind just pausing for two seconds while I acknowledge the presence of Senator Lauren Bell; she is in our Galleries. We are happy to have her here. Very good to have her.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Minister, you may carry on.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to have her here too.

The Chairman: You remain in Committee.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you.

Langley House, Mr. Chairman, the multi-unit rooming housing, Southside, St. David's—Mr. Chairman, building 632 [at] Southside, St. David's, known as Langley House, is a 63-bed rooming house facility located at Southside, St. David's. The rooming house is used specifically to house men in need of affordable and safe accommodations. There are currently 50 men residing at that rooming house. The corporation has qualified social workers working out of the satellite offices, including a former police officer, to monitor and correct any antisocial behaviours.

Mr. Chairman, like the work at Gulfstream, we are in the process of carrying out refurbishing work at Langley House also. In the previous financial year, the project team refurbished a set of washrooms and showers, along with 10 of the residence's rooms. They were all completed in March 2025. We will continue this refurbishment with another 10 rooms, which are nearly complete, along with the second set of washrooms and showers on the first floor. In addition, we are upgrading the laundry room and kitchens.

Harmony Club—Mr. Chairman, the corporation is in the process of transforming Harmony Club property into studio and one-bedroom units, which will include intergenerational living, those 50 years old and older, who are mobile and can live independently. Construction has been completed on Harmony Terrace West, which has eight units, Harmony Terrace East, which has 12 units, with the construction of the Harmony Terrace North underway [at] 16 units. Work is also underway on the parking lot, new electrical upgrades, landscaping, and the storage unit. The Harmony Terrace property is also used as a H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office, warehouse storage, and the Bonnie-Jean Tweed House, used to provide emergency accommodation for people in immediate distress or in need of immediate rehousing.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Yes, Minister, we recognise the presence also of Senator Lindsay Simmons, who has

entered our Gallery. We are glad to have her in the [Gallery].

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you. We have much talent coming to—

The Chairman: Well, you have got all the support, Minister.

BHC Office Staff

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation's head office is located at the Seven Arches Building, East Entrance, 44 Church Street, in the City of Hamilton and presently consists of 50 personnel. Of that total, three H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck members operate from the office space at the Harmony Club, and five staff members under the Support Services and the Property Operations Department operate off-site at a satellite office in the Southside complex. The current structure of the BHC consists of eight departments:

- Project Management, four;
- Property Operations, 12;
- Finance, Collections and Home Ownership, eight;
- Support Services, 14;
- Administration, five;
- Human Resources, two;
- Information Technology, two;
- and the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck, three.

Project Management

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Project Management Department assists with advice regarding major repair work necessary on existing buildings owned by the corporation to ensure longevity of the corporation's assets.

Project managers oversee the multiple dwellings that come under the BHC remit to ensure effective and cost-conscious maintenance programmes keep the units in a safe and healthy state. The department consists of two project managers, one senior project officer, and one senior property administration officer. They are also responsible for initial drawings of projected capital projects, as well as the project management of the properties through to completion. As mentioned previously, with the economic stimulus grant, Residential Building Programme, repairs and renovations of the rooming houses, day-to-day work on the rental units, including make-readies, this team performs to the highest standards.

Property Operations

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Property Operations Department is responsible for maintenance of BHC's housing stock of approximately 700 units, including the rooming houses Island-wide.

The Chairman: Seven hundred.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Seven hundred. The department's responsibilities include the regular maintenance of buildings under the control of BHC and providing advice and assistance to clients of BHC on housing-related matters.

The department is comprised of four property officers, six maintenance officers, one building officer, and one administrative assistant.

The department conducts regular maintenance checks of its buildings under the management of the corporation and is responsible for small maintenance works, along with coordinating more difficult tasks with trusted and able contractors. Last year, the Property Operations Department completed approximately 3,095 maintenance requests. These requests for maintenance, that this capable department handles, are wide-ranging—very wide-ranging. They tackle everything from simple plumbing, electrical, water, sewage and roof repairs, to landscaping, painting, flooring, and also major renovations.

Finance Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Finance Department has a total staff of eight, consisting of one chief financial officer, one financial controller, one assistant financial controller, one senior financial officer, three finance officers, and one cashier. The Finance Department carefully monitors the corporation's spending and compliance, ensuring that policies and procedures are adhered to and that clients act responsibly in paying their bills in a timely manner. The Finance Department fields questions of a financial nature, provides mortgage advice, and assists clients with understanding their financial obligations to the corporation.

Support Services Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Support Services Department is the department responsible for ensuring that adequate housing is found for BHC clients.

The Chairman: Minister, if you just would not mind pausing just for a brief minute, I am just going to allow for the change of Chairs. It will be the Honourable Lawrence Scott will be sitting in my place.

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

The Chairman: And, Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay, thank you. Welcome, Mr. Chairman. Welcome.

Mr. Chairman, the department conducts regular inspections of BHC housing inventory to ensure clients are compliant with their rental contracts. The department consists of 14 people: one manager, one senior social worker, four social workers, one senior leasing agent, one leasing agent, four rental inspectors, one intake officer, and one intake administrator.

There is a current wait-list [for] BHC accommodation of 408. This number is steadily increasing year over year.

The Chairman: [I am] just asking if you wanted the lectern.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: If I want what?

The Chairman: The platform for—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No. I am good. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I do appreciate that. My eyes are still pretty good.

Let's just repeat that. I think that we need to make sure we took note of that. There is a current wait-list for the BHC accommodation of 408. This number is steadily increasing year over year.

The Support Services Department offers a myriad of services to clients that include money management, housekeeping, social and behaviour problem eradication, child care, and health and safety guidance. In addition, the department offers advice and support from other agencies that stand ready to assist clients who need professional counselling.

Administration

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Administration Department consists of the general manager, one executive assistant, one receptionist, and two office assistants. The Administration Department is responsible for the orderly daily business of the corporation.

Human Resources

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Human Resources Department has a total staff of two. The HR department ensures that staff members have the required skills to carry out their daily roles efficiently and successfully as the corporation ensures employee welfare and provides mentoring and training services.

Information Technology

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, the Information Technology Department has a total staff of two. The IT department ensures that the corporation maintains its high standard of delivery and support in the provisions of IT services to all stakeholders.

Helping [the] Unemployed Sustain Themselves with Limited Employment—that is the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck. Mr. Chairman, the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck Programme has proven itself over the years, assisting unemployed persons who actively seek work. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck headquarters operates out of the Harmony Club and caters to 20 temporary employees per week. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck continues to be of valuable assistance to Bermuda with the ability to adjust to the needs of the community as they arise. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck Programme allows 20 people per week through the year, with persons able to remain in the programme for up to three months per year, taking one week off each month to seek regular employment. At this level, the corporation can rotate through approximately 260 different people per year. The programme is available for any unemployed Bermudians.

The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office keeps a database of information on the unemployed and their skill sets for the specific purposes of making a good fit when partnering with employers. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office regularly receives requests from employers for qualified, suitable, potential employees. Upon receipt of these requests, the database is checked and those people who have the required qualifications are sent to interviews in the hopes of achieving full-time traditional employment.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation continues to play a vital role in our society by supporting some of the most vulnerable members of our community, including seniors, individuals with mental challenges, former inmates, young people, and those experiencing financial hardship. This commitment has remained steadfast, particularly in these challenging times marked by economic uncertainty, global supply chain disruptions, and rising prices.

The reality is clear. The more difficulties Bermuda faces, the greater the demand for the essential services provided by the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Chairman Thomas Famous, the board of directors, the CEO Mr. Paul Martin, and the entire management team and staff of the Bermuda Housing Corporation for their tremendous hard work they continue to do in the service for people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The Minister just wrapped up his brief on Housing and Municipalities, speaking to Head 90 and 53.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to these heads?

The Chair recognises the Honourable Member Michael Fahy.

Michael Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to the Minister for his comprehensive briefs and the time that we have been allocated to engage in some meaningful debate.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, it is about the same as last year.

First of all, I do want to, if I may, Mr. Chairman, thank those people who do such amounts of work on behalf of those in need because it is a huge task, and the Minister has accepted that. He has got a huge task in dealing with the housing issues in Bermuda that have been changing over time as a result of different types of population and the different types of need. And I say that, I accept that the job of the Minister and his team is not going to be an easy one because, of course, what we hear all the time is, *Why is there a housing problem in Bermuda when we have less people?* The Minister has also accepted that that is, a lot of times, due to some of the changing demographics and ageing population, the types of needs that people now have. With those comments out of the gate, I will get into some of these heads and ask some questions.

Now, Mr. Chairman, last year was the first year that this Ministry had a budget, and it was very new in that it was a combination of different areas for the first time. We now have a year measurement. We only have a yardstick of a year for this particular Ministry. Last year, I did make mention of a couple of things. I had hoped that they would be a little different this year, and right out of the gates, it is the objectives within the actual Budget Book. They do not align with what the Minister said. He said exactly the same thing last year with the objectives of, say, the Bermuda Housing Corporation on [page] B-321. He gave us a very good list of objectives that do not align with what is actually in the Budget Book. Maybe they can correct that next year so that it gives some more context. I think that is the same generally for headquarters.

That is a minor point. The main thing is that if we go from the Budget Book . . . And I am going to start with page B-321. I will jump around again a little bit as I go through my notes. It says the mission statement for the Bermuda Housing Corporation is rental and mortgage assistance. That is a wider definition that, again, appears on their website and what the Minister read. And I think the mission statement for the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *To provide accessibility to adequate and affordable housing and to promote independent living to enhance the quality of life in Bermuda.* Let us go with that one because I think that one obviously has a wider definition. I think we will start there.

In respect of the Bermuda Housing Corporation, the Minister has given a very comprehensive idea as to the number of projects that come underneath the remit of the Housing Corporation. He made it clear that

there are 408 people that are on that waiting list. I think last year that same waiting list was 376.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry. Families. Thank you. I appreciate the Minister's clarification.

Last year it was 376 families, as the Minister said, and this year it is 408. That is a mammoth task.

As well, what we have seen . . . And this is, again . . . The Minister last year had made mention of the fact that he has to move with haste. And I seem to recall he challenged me and said: *I hope you don't mind if I move with haste. I am getting on with haste.* The difficulty here is we have moved with haste without the master plan. And I am going to go to what the Minister has said in his Statement because it is obviously not necessarily in the Budget Book itself, but we have heard an awful lot now of the 2025–2035 housing plan. It is now end of February 2026. I would give a bit of a word of advice to my counterpart. Let's call it the plan 2026–2036. Let's get it right at least out of the gate and say the plan is a little late. Look, we will give the Minister some opportunity here because he only just started this plan last year.

The thing is this. The consultation period has been ongoing within Government, and we heard this evening that consultation period will extend to stakeholders in April. And I would absolutely take the Minister up on his pseudo offer. *If I am good*, I think, was his statement. If I am a good person or I do not treat him too badly in this debate, maybe he will consult me. I say that for fun. No, we will consult because I think that is important. I know the Minister will happily do that and give input and thoughts because it is a national problem that needs to be addressed.

Again, the issue is that the master plan has yet to be published, and yet the Minister has this evening reamed off a whole bunch of projects that we have heard a lot about in the last six to eight weeks. And as I said in the original debate . . . and I will not reflect too much, but the point remains the same, Mr. Chairman. And that again is I find it very difficult to understand how we are putting lots of projects in place and moving with haste without actually having had sight of the plan.

So, again, I urge the Minister to bring this plan quickly to the House. As quickly as the Minister is making announcements about the project is as quickly as the plan should be revealed because then it gives, hopefully, an understanding to the public of the overall holistic view that the Government intends to take. Because what has been suggested over the many different plans that have been proposed by, say, the Chamber of Commerce, from HOME, [and] Charity Bermuda, [is] that you need to have those kinds of different layers of housing. And the Minister has alluded to those layers of housing in his statements that we have heard today. But again, we must have sight of that plan.

What is concerning, of course, is that the numbers of homeless and [those] facing homelessness have increased. We have heard that the waiting list for families has also increased. I think the number of people facing homelessness or homeless has risen by some 21 per cent. And again, I am using that number that has been supplied by HOME. It was in a recent report. It is an updated report from last year where that number was 1,100 or so facing homelessness or homeless. So, the problem is not improving; in fact, it is getting worse.

So, if I may now turn very briefly to . . . Again, I am sticking with what we have heard in the Statements, Mr. Chairman, from the Minister today that there is going to be some very swift emergency housing plans, and the Minister again has made reference to the rapid relief (I think was the phrase he used) for modular housing that will be, I suppose, arriving in the next six weeks. The Minister could correct me if I misunderstood that. I am assuming that these are the original expandable container homes and modular homes that the Minister made mention of in a statement to the House last year, that those are those units.

Now with great fanfare that announcement was made last year. It does not seem now to form a central plank of plans. It seems now to be strictly emergency housing. Perhaps the Minister can explain why that is when he has an opportunity to get back on his feet.

And perhaps he can share as well, if in fact I am correct, that the emergency housing units that are modular and/or expandable container homes . . . How many people will actually benefit from that development? How many families are expected to occupy that particular development? [What is] the timeline from arrival to building that development? [What are] the costs that may very well be engaged in respect of servicing that development? And what I mean by that, so we get the terminology understood by everyone, is ensuring that it is provided with proper electrics, sewage, lighting . . . I said lighting, but sewage, water, et cetera, and make sure that it is proper for Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, as well, what is the lifespan of these particular units and what are the long-term costs of those units? I ask those questions because you will recall that there are at the moment some dilapidated units that still sit at the entrance to Morgan's Point that have been used for offices and the like over time, but I believe they are now unoccupied. And those were brought in as emergency units that do not seem to be in use anymore. So, it is, again, just getting the detail from the Minister on that particular unit of housing.

The Minister made mention of the HomeStart programme, which he did mention last year. And again, I think . . . Minister, I think Clarien Bank is what you had said. Good for them for engaging in the programme for HomeStart, and that I believe that . . . I want to make sure I am getting the programme correct. Is that . . . Yes. It is the HomeStart. And the Minister said that it is a private-public partnership with Clarien Bank and that

there are over 30 Bermudian homeowners, and that it soon will be 33 or 34. That does not seem to be that much different from what the Minister said last year. I think the numbers, in fact, are pretty much the same. So, perhaps the Minister can clarify the numbers that have happened in the last . . . since his Statement in May of last year to now. About how many have actually been approved in the last (what is that?) nine months since his last Statement in the House in relation to that particular programme.

I also would like to know—and I think the people of Bermuda would like to know—how many individuals have been rejected from the programme. How many families? How many? Or let's rephrase that. How many applications have been rejected, if data is kept on that? How many people have applied for the programme? And if, in fact, from what my numbers have seen from last year, maybe three additional families or applications . . .

The Chairman: Member, if you could just remind me which line item and head you are speaking to.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, I am speaking on BHC. The Minister made mention in his Statement, I am making references to his Statement, where he talked about the programmes that the BHC is responsible for. He made specific mention in the debate of the HomeStart programme and gave figures and numbers about that particular programme.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: It is not appearing as a particular line item within the Budget Book. Rather, it is some statements made in the Minister's Statement.

So, again, looking at those numbers because that all comes underneath the role of, I suppose, the Ministry of Housing [and] Municipality's Headquarters and their mission statement as well to make sure that . . . See, my eyes are bad. I cannot read that. "Housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and innovative urban development."

I would like some further information in respect of the Bermudiana Beach Resort. I am pleased to hear that there is now 73 per cent occupancy. I think what is important is that the Minister gives a breakdown of how many of those occupants are Bermudian, given what the original project was supposed to be for.

As well, I would like a little bit of clarity.

The Chairman: And Member, just letting you know that even though the Minister may have mentioned it in his brief, we still have to speak to specific line items.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Well, I can put you to Bermuda Housing Corporation because I believe that is where the information was contained, and I will simply refer to the objectives of the actual BHC and what it is intending

to achieve for housing for Bermudians. Is that sufficient, Mr. Chairman?

[No audible response.]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay, thank you.

With that in mind, just bear with me for one moment. I just want to look something up because I want to make sure I get the wording correct.

Mr. Chairman, in the Minister's Statement, again, underneath BHC . . . what had been said is that under legislative proposals that different amendments would be made for the purposes of acquisition of land. The Minister made that same statement last year, and perhaps, therefore, he can give us some clarity on the progress that has actually been made since the statement was made last year in respect of the acquisition of land that was made reference to in his Statement—again, referring to the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

And the reason that is important is because the Minister . . . In the Budget Book itself, it does make mention of the fact that there has begun [an] exploration of options for the future of the Bermudiana Beach Resort and Grand Atlantic site with the clear objective of returning this public asset to productive use for Bermudians over time. I do not see anything. There was nothing specifically mentioned in the Statement about that, but again, that is being managed by the Bermuda Housing Corporation. What is the intent there in respect of returning that asset for use by Bermudians? Again, 73 per cent sounds grand. Forgive the pun. The point is, what is the number of people who are occupying it who are actually Bermudians benefiting from that project?

In respect of ongoing management that the BHC provides and in respect of any number of different projects, the one that I was most interested in was to hear again about the progress of sewage and water issues that existed at Alexandra Road, Cedar Park, and a number of other developments. We know the issues in those developments have existed for some time, and perhaps the Minister could advise this Honourable House what the anticipated timeline is in respect of the various projects that you mentioned that fall within that grant.

I can take you to the grants and contributions from which that came, that is page B-321. As well, if you go to [page] C-8, you will see that there is the Bermuda Housing Corporation, line item 75320, the BHC Residential Housing Grant, which was going to cover some of those issues. I will make that clear. Thank you for the clarification. There was going to be better engagement.

The Minister made mention in his brief, and again I will take you to page C-8, Mr. Chairman, where the Minister took some time under line items . . . Sorry. I have the wrong glasses . . . 75334, that is the South Basin Land Reclamation. We have heard about that. We have got 75346, the work ongoing at King's Wharf.

I understand that that work will be paused during the cruise ship period, and perhaps the Minister can share with us whether that work is actually running on time. Was it always the plan to in fact have this work start and then halt during the cruise ship season itself?

I happened to have been up in Dockyard this past weekend, and that particular area does not look great. And I do not think it looks good when tourists are coming off, and the first view they have is a half-completed arm of a wharf area. This was on Sunday. The crews down there were working diligently to continue. It looked like there were pylons going in off the shoreline there. Perhaps the Minister could add further clarity to the ongoing works and expected final completion date. He said it would be the end of the cruise . . . and it would start again in November, I think the Minister said.

As well, the commercial excursion dock. The Minister made mention (again, that is under the BLMC line items on page C-8) that that particular commercial excursion dock is work ongoing, and that will happen through the season. And again, was that always the plan to have that work in the middle of the season? I am not understanding why that would not be done in the off-season. Is it simply because of a tendering process? Did it take too long? Or was that always the intent? And obviously, if it is being done in the middle of a tourism season, then it must have been in dire shape. Maybe the Minister can add some context and some clarity to that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: That was some time ago. You can put the emphasis, but it was nine years. So, we got to stop going down that road blaming someone else for the failings of a number of years.

I also would say that it would be incumbent upon the Government to continue exploring the funding. And I believe some of this is being funded, or some works have been funded, by the cruise ships themselves, since they are the ones that are getting the great benefit from these works.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, there were some other innovative Ministers as well, including ferries and the like, but I will leave that there.

I am pleased to hear that the wastewater and sewage work will be completed for the East End. I am sure East End colleagues will be very pleased with that as well.

The Minister made mention of the BLMC having continuing issues of land transfers. He made mention of that in his Statement. And this was in relation to acquisition of land under different names, et cetera. Can he give a definitive timeline when that might be complete?

When we look at the Morgan's Point Development Company . . . And that as well was mentioned in the Minister's Statement, and that would fall, I suppose, under the Housing and Municipalities HQ. A statement was made that, . . . um . . . Lost my point there. Oh. We know that the work is ongoing. We heard from the Minister in this place the other day about land transfers. We heard about the great work that is being done by the Morgan's Point Development Company. Perhaps the Minister can opine on where this medical tourism facility fits into all of this. I have not heard anything about that. It seems to have been missed out.

Right. In respect of the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck. And again, that is under the Bermuda Housing Corporation. The Minister made mention of the fact that 2,050 individuals have had opportunities to enter the workforce because of the work undertaken with the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck over the last number of years. Perhaps the Minister can say how many have happened in the last 12 months, since the last budget update.

In respect of Langley House, the Minister advised of the staff that were there and that there is an ex-police officer that is on site, presumably due to safety concerns. Can the Minister advise as to whether there have been any major incidents at Langley House? How many times, if in fact there have been instances where police have been called? The number of residents has increased, I believe. I believe the Minister said 50. I think last year the budget brief said that there were 43, so that number has increased in that particular place as well.

In terms of performance measures, there are none. And in last year's budget debate, I inquired as to why that was. And I would hope, again, that next year when we come, there are some proper performance measures because the Minister has read out a raft of information today in terms of the number of homeless, the number of people that are facing homelessness. We have heard that from HOME, but he has also shared the numbers of people who have acquired opportunities through different programmes. And I think there must be some performance measures that we can look at that we can compare year on year, so that we know if in fact the BHC is fulfilling its mandate, and as well, if the headquarters is fulfilling its mandate. So, perhaps next year when we stand here, we can have some details and some actual measurability because now you will have had by next year at least two years of data. So, that would be helpful, rather than getting it in a one-hour Statement.

In terms of municipalities, and that will come, in the first instance, under the grant. And again, for the benefit of the Chairman and others, that is [page] C-8. The municipalities housing HQ gives a grant of \$800,000. And we heard that that grant is going to be utilised for the purposes of road repaving and other such projects. That was exactly what was said last year. And you might recall, if people were listening, one of the questions that was posed was: What is the status

of the accounts and et cetera for the levy that is placed on petrol that comes into the docks that was put in place in 2013 for the purposes of ensuring that the town of St. George's retains its UNESCO World Heritage Site status? And with that in mind, perhaps the Minister can advise whether or not he has given any specific directions to the Corporation of St. George's in respect of that fund or others. And that would fall within his powers under section 7 of the Municipalities Act 1923, which gives the Minister the ability to give the corporations directions. Maybe he—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Oh, I am. Maybe he can share with this honourable place if he has in fact given any directions in the last 10 months since he took on this portfolio, and if so, what they are related to.

And again, Mr. Chairman, I am using some liberties from the grant that is given for the purposes of the Corporation of St. George's, \$800,000. Does the Minister—

The Chairman: So, you can speak to how that \$800,000 is being spent. But if I am following correctly—and I could be mistaken—it sounds like you are asking about fuel taxes, which would be outside of that.

Hon. Michael Fahy: What I was doing was simply drawing a comparison. But I appreciate that. I know I can't ask questions on that specifically, but perhaps the Minister can share if he has given any directions to the Corporation of St. George's under his powers that exist as a Minister, and if any have been given into the use of the \$800,000 that has been given as a grant. Because what concerns me is that the use of the money, of the \$800,000 grant, again, is to be for road paving and these other types of little infrastructure projects when we have a town of St. George's that must retain its World Heritage status. And I did not hear the Minister make any mention of that at all in his Statement. And I am sure that a UNESCO World Heritage Site remains at the top priority of the Government in the future of St. George's and tourism. So, I would hope that the Minister could opine on that particular point.

Oh, I have closed the Budget Book. Give me one moment.

The Chairman: And while the Honourable Michael Fahy is looking for his page in the Budget Book, just for the listening audience, we are in Committee on Supply of the whole [House] for appropriations of the budget debates for 2026/27. We are currently debating the Housing and Municipalities Ministry, headed by Minister Zane De Silva. And we are speaking to Heads 90 and 53. This is a three-hour debate that started at 6:07, and so it will end at 9:07.

MP Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, now turning to page B-320 in the Budget Book—and this is Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities HQ. The Minister made it known that the professional services budget has decreased by, what, \$131,000, but that is because the professional services that were being offered in that particular head have transferred into salaries. And we heard that that was now that the HQ has two ministerial advisors. Maybe the Minister can share who they are and what special advice is being given and the skill set for those particular individuals. I do not know. Special advisors hopefully will bring the skill set that is required to assist the Ministry. Because that is nice to see that professional services go down; but in fact what sounds to have happened is that an individual has actually gone on payroll, which has all the attendant long-term costs with that. And if so, so be it. But perhaps the Minister can opine on that particular issue.

In respect of the . . . I will turn to the mission statement of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, and that says, "Enhancing Bermuda's quality of life through affordable and sustainable housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and innovative urban development." Perhaps the Minister can opine, when he gets to his feet, about the innovative urban development that the Ministry has advised upon or intends to undertake, because when I read that, I am making perhaps a leap of faith that that also includes the City of Hamilton, which, if things go the way they will likely go with the numbers in the House tonight, the Minister will have direct control over the way in which urban development can proceed within the municipalities, at the very least.

So, I flag that because we did debate last year on a number of different areas in respect of that particular line item, and that is the objectives, to have innovative urban development. And again, I am wondering if there is anything in here, and it does not appear that there have been any directions or grants or anything given to enhance Bermuda's cities, or the City of Hamilton, in respect of empty lots. I banged on last year about the old police station lot that is still empty. Innovative urban development would include at least putting in a park there or something that makes and beautifies our city. Again, I would hope that ideas are coming out. Perhaps the special advisors will give the advice when they listen to me this evening about what we can do to enhance our urban development and make a more beautiful city.

The department's objectives are to guide and coordinate the Ministry's initiatives through collaboration with government agencies and key public and private stakeholders, and to also deliver a central logistical, financial, and administrative report to the ministry headquarters and its constituents' entities. Now, the Ministry has a number of constituent entities, one of which appears directly in the Budget Book as BHC, and

the remaining appear by way of the grants that are given on [page] C-8. For the listening public, the Minister did say it is the Bermuda Housing Corporation, Bermuda Housing Trust, the Morgan's Point Development Company, the Bermuda Land Management Corporation. And I would make a suggestion here because it may become of importance after the municipalities debate. The Urban Development Authority might be a best place to come within this Ministry to help coordinate the efforts of fulfilling the mission statement of the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities of innovative urban development. I think it would make sense to have that considered going forward.

Again, in respect of this particular head, Head 90, and the mission statement, perhaps the Minister can opine, given that mission statement, as to whether or not he has given any specific directions to the Corporation of Hamilton under section 7, and if so, what those directions were, assuming that we are looking to ensure vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and urban development.

The special advisors might consider taking into account a number of different areas, and that is in relation to making Hamilton that vibrant place under the Municipalities Ministry, and that is mixed-use housing opportunities. And when I say that, that means having higher builds. You recall we have had a previous debate where the City of Hamilton plan now allows for a much higher building without restriction if they can demonstrate that it is useful, and we would propose—and have proposed—that building higher and enhancing the vibrancy of the city and bringing people into the city into, say, one-bedroom and studio apartments would be a really good idea. And so to avoid having one level of income in a particular building, there are examples in other jurisdictions, Mr. Chairman, where individuals can be part subsidised by the wealthy in particular units. And we think that this comes under having good ideas, innovative urban development. It is a way of enhancing the city.

I want to—

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Member, [I want to] just take a moment to recognise former Minister and former MP Wayne Caines in the Gallery.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you for that.

In respect, again, of enhancing Bermuda's quality of life through affordable and sustainable housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship, and urban development, we have seen nothing in

budget presentation or these line items on two major initiatives that had been championed . . . or one, excuse me . . . one major initiative that has been championed by the Minister in the budget. And that is, in fact, acquiring land and housing that is derelict. And there was no mention made of that in his brief tonight.

And again, Mr. Chairman, I am going simply under the mission statement that we also heard in the budget debate itself, that there is this drive potentially to have, essentially, acquire Bermudian land for the purposes of increasing housing stock and presumably sell or rent to other Bermudians. Perhaps the Minister can opine as to whether or not there is anything in any of the line items that we have seen in terms of grants, probably, maybe the BHC, that would enable monies to be utilised for that type of project and what timeline would be on that. It is not in the brief, but it is supposedly a project that is supposed to be undertaken. So, it is not aligning in terms of a government desire versus what is in a budget line item.

As well, we have made different proposals, and perhaps, again, the special advisors can look into this for the Minister in terms of utilising some of that government grant under the BHC for the purposes of reutilising and repurposing empty school buildings for the purposes of emergency housing. And we believe that is important, Mr. Chairman, because, again, what the Minister has said is that there are grants that are being given for emergency housing. And again, the Minister can opine on those modular or expandable container homes. If we can do that, then it would appear to me that we can also use some monies to repurpose empty school buildings that will end up becoming a burden before we start doing other types of major projects. It seems to us—it certainly seems to me—that people would rather have a safe and warm place to put their head at night, even if it is an old school building with new drywall and very quick renovations, than perhaps expandable container homes of which we do not know much about until we see them.

[I have] just a few more points, if you just give me one moment while I have something to wet my lips.

The Chairman: And for the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply of the whole House for the budget debate for budget 2026/27, debating the Housing and Municipalities Ministry Head 90 and Head 53, a three-hour debate, which started at 6:07, which will end at 9:07, and Honourable Michael Fahy is having the floor right now.

MP Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you very much.

[There are] two other points I would like to make in respect of the mission statement of the Ministry, and their affiliated bodies that receive grants, because these all tie into the way in which the Ministry headquarters administers itself and actually gives out those grants.

So, the mission statement . . . And just for the listening public, this is actually from the Housing and Municipalities website itself for these particular areas. The mission statement of the Bermuda Land Management Corporation is “to drive sustainable growth, foster community partnerships, [and] create dynamic spaces for people to live, work and thrive.” They are “committed to building a stronger future through collaboration, innovation, and strategic development.” [Those are] very lofty goals. And I did not feel that there was too much shared in respect of what the BLMC will be doing in terms of that housing assistance. But there was some detail. But there is quite a lofty mission statement.

When you look at the mission statement of the Corporation of Hamilton to provide positive experiences for everyone for the delivery of quality initiatives and services . . . And again, that is why it is going to be very important to be thinking about that now and probably later. And also, you have the mission statement of the Corporation of St. George's. “We are committed to being effective stewards, working collaboratively to enhance the heritage and culture of the birthplace of Bermuda and maintaining the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation in the most effective way to serve the town of St. George's.” Again, I simply go back to the \$800,000 grant there that made no mention of enhancing the town for the purposes of the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.

We have also got the Bermuda Housing Trust. We have heard statements from the Minister about the purpose of the Housing Trust. It does very good work “to provide quality and affordable rental accommodation for Bermuda's independent seniors and [to] create a sense of community that enhances the quality of their lives.” And again, whilst there is no grant, that would certainly come underneath the mission statement of the Ministry Head 90.

A few more points, I think.

The Chairman: So, Member, just so that I am clear, so your last question was: Where in the budget is that objective supported?

Hon. Michael Fahy: I believe it would be supported underneath the Ministry Head and objectives there. I will leave that there.

And for the moment, I will take a seat and give the Minister opportunity to reply. And then I may very well have some questions after that.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Fahy.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to Housing and Municipalities Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises the Member from constituency 2, the Honourable Kim Swan.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I appreciate the opportunity just to make a little

contribution on a very important topic—housing, particularly, and municipalities, but more specifically housing—as we are on [page] B-318 with a grant of \$6.6 million to . . . well, \$7.2 million to the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

Just a general point with regard to that head is that housing has been something that has been around and been an issue with Bermuda for many decades. I remember in 1983 as a young 25-year-old candidate, newly married, [a] candidate in the 1983 election for the United Bermuda Party, living in the studio apartment of a tourist accommodation owned by one of my dearest friends, Lloyd James, who was the PLP sitting MP. That collaboration between us . . . Their . . . politics never separated us at all in life. And he said, *Listen, come stay in my studio apartment*, as a young Bermudian who was at that time, as I mentioned, newly married and playing professional golf internationally. So, housing does not discriminate against anyone no matter what their standing is or their popularity or whatever they are doing. It is a very sensitive issue.

And I feel for persons in the community who are impacted. I felt it necessary to say one thing. It is that we have drifted in this consideration of housing to a place where everything wrong with housing is falling on the shoulders of the Minister responsible for Housing. And if I go back, and if I cast my mind back to those times in the 1970s and 1980s, much housing was built by the private sector, JWS, John Swann Limited, Rego Limited, [Coleman] “Risky” Robinson, Kangaroo Wilson, and many others. Somebody is going to send me a WhatsApp pretty soon, or WhatsApp the Minister and say, *Swan, you forgot so-and-so*.

The Chairman: And just for the listening audience, you are speaking to this under [page] C-8, 75320, the residential grant?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, but more specifically about the Bermuda Housing Corps, I am speaking to Head 53, where \$7.2 million is allocated under housing. I think the grant then rolls up the housing thing, but the policy of housing would come in there. And I am saying that it is important because you hear it out in the public where everyone who needs a house is looking at Government. We call it *looking for government*.

And where the things have shifted in this country is that you do not have today people venturing. You could pick up the newspaper, and you would see two-page ads of houses that were newly built and the like. And that is because of the shift of the economic needs of the country. Right? And at that particular time that I am referring to as well, the dynamic that came into play was that you had persons who owned many tourist accommodations who started to shift towards residential homes because you had international businesses starting to take long leases on houses.

And that certainly also tied into the time when you did not get a mortgage. Persons were getting five-

year loans, and if they were lucky, they were getting a three-year balloon payment to pay off their mortgage. So, all of those impacts . . . So, I applaud the Ministry, and I will go to the capital grant for the Bermuda Housing Corporation specifically, because the Bermuda Housing Corporation carrying this burden is enormous.

And when you think about it, that a Minister alone is carrying that burden . . . You see people out there advertising to sell homes all over the world to persons and locally and the like for all types of money. But the emphasis that would have existed in a bygone era when a lot of housing was built is not being done at all by the private sector. And then persons will come here and say, *Listen. But you have got to go through all this red tape.* The person who needs a house and needs it now, you know, sometimes . . .

I liken it, Mr. Chairman, . . . I liken the need for housing almost . . . I liken it to the type of urgency of now that Martin Luther King, [Jr.] always referred to and other persons have used to the type of urgency we use during COVID-19.

COVID-19 was accepted as a global pandemic. And as a consequence, we had to roll up our sleeves, collectively. And the Minister of Finance had to make decisions that were not in keeping with normal traditional best practices to meet an immediate need. Persons out there who have the need today may not necessarily be, and some are, in an income bracket where they can afford to pay because there are many persons earning a good living that cannot find a house that they can afford. So, we may need to collectively . . . And I say the collective *we*. Both the Government and the Opposition agree that maybe we need to, you know, cut the housing a little bit of slack as to the type of urgency that is required in this country to build houses.

And in addition to that . . . In addition to that, maybe look at incentives that might encourage some private sector folks to get involved more readily to building these . . . to building these necessary homes as well, and to take on some . . . take on some of the risk. Because I am not . . . I am convinced that there is capital floating around in Bermuda. If they can find themselves getting a better return than investment, they might then speculate. There might be some folks who have some property that you could say, *Well, listen. I will give you some favourable . . . some favourable zoning for emergency situations.* And if we can do that, and it is tucked away where it is not as visible, using the topography of Bermuda to have them shaped and located, you know, we might be able to get a win-win.

But I felt it necessary to say that the Minister of Housing is carrying an extreme burden that I do not think has existed in the previous years I can remember. And I just have to say this. In my lifespan of being, trying to get in the legislature, and being in the legislature, two previous Ministers stand out as being exceptional. One just retired. The former Member Lieutenant Colonel Burch built a lot of houses up and down this country

with the Bermuda Housing Corporation during different tenures of being the Minister responsible for Housing. You know. I can turn to St. George's where he converted places down at Anchorage (to declare my interest) in my constituency, which was met with some concern because persons wanted to make sure. But look at what is there now—beautiful places down there at Anchorage, right next to the golf course, and up and down the country.

And the other one is the late Quinton Edness [QE], who through his Ministry built a lot of houses in there. So, those two from two different political parties. Unfortunately, I cannot look at the Honourable Members, Cannonier or Fahy, for that because during their four-and-a-half-year tenure, I do not think they built any houses. So, you know. But I can look certainly at the late QE and Minister Burch especially.

Loughlands just stands out because Loughlands went in a non-traditional housing community. And I think it is an outstanding job. Anchorage Road was another one. Perimeter Lane [was] another one. So, we need to start looking at those types of opportunities and find a way to engage the private sector in it to take the burden off of the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

And just a final thing on the grant . . . And, you know, [I] just salute the work that is done by the Bermuda Housing Trust, who provide housing for seniors. And, you know, seniors and young professional families, men's facilities, and the like are extremely important. And I am sure those studying the demographics have already identified who needs it the most and the soonest.

So, I just needed to speak ever so briefly on that, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for the opportunity.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Swan.

Are there any other Members who would like to speak to Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises the Honourable Michael Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I have a number of other questions, specifically in relation to the grant, again, that the Minister has procured for his Ministry. And what he said in his Statement is that six priority sites have been selected for the purposes of the 200-or-so homes that he is saying will be delivered within the next 18 months. And seeing as we do not have sight of the often-spoken-about-but-never-seen affordable housing report or housing strategy that I know the Minister will take up my suggestion and move it to 2026–2036, [I have] a few questions about that.

In respect of the modular way in which these homes, I understand, will be developed, what was the procurement process that was followed in respect of these 200-or-so homes? Where are they coming from? How many people or entities responded to any RFP in respect of these homes? Because it has been done in

absolutely quick speed. And again, I get it. But it is important that we understand how that process was followed. And were the proper procurement processes followed or were they sped up, either through the Ministry or the BHC in procuring these units?

How many local construction entities or sub-contractors—and I say again, local—will have been trained or have the ability to in fact help develop and put these units into place? Is there likely to be any overseas entity that is giving some form of supervision to these types of buildings being put up if they haven't got the skill set here in Bermuda? And who in fact would that be? Are there any favoured contractors in respect of these units? Again, 200 new homes is a lot to build in 18 months, notwithstanding the modular consistency of these units.

The Minister has previously said that they are tested to a very high standard and that they will stand the test of time, I think was the statement that he has used previously. And what is that time period, standing the test of time? Maybe he can opine on that.

And are they . . . obviously he is going to suggest that they are absolutely suitable for Bermuda's climate. We hope they are. Maybe he can opine on that.

In respect of the phraseology of . . . I think it is *affordable and attainable homes*, great for those different people and different families and different circumstances. Perhaps the Minister can give some further detail on of the 200 homes that are to be developed over the next 18 months, how many of those are allocated for affordable and how many of those are going to be allocated for attainable?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: And it might be in the plan. Maybe it's in the 2025 plan, which we'll look for.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good, 2026. It's been accepted!

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: The 2026 plan has been accepted. Thank you, Minister, for that. We look forward to the front of that report being changed. The PS, I hope, has heard that too.

So, with that in mind, how many of those are affordable and how many will be as attainable?

Of the waiting list of over 400 families, are families that are on that particular list going to obviously be able to utilise or have the opportunity to either fit into the affordable or the attainable?

And if, in fact, [there is] a differential of the 200 precast homes, are all the ones that are affordable the same size? And all the ones that are attainable, are they different size? Because there has to be a cost

differential between the two, between the affordable and attainable.

[Inaudible interjection]

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'll give him that. He said, *like lawyers*. Okay.

I see the Minister has a sense of humour this evening. I join him in that. Good distraction.

Of that waiting list, how many families does the Minister believe will be able to, in fact, take advantage of that programme? And how much does he believe that that list will reduce over that period of time? It's still 18 months away.

Can the Minister also give us some details on the actual proposed start date of the construction of those units? And 18 months from there, obviously, is the finish date. But the start date would be helpful. We have six priority sites that have been selected, three confirmed for accelerated development.

Has the Minister received some form of advanced Planning permission or some form of other guarantee that these homes will, in fact, be approved? We have to make an assumption that some form of preliminary Planning permission has been sought. And if it has, has it actually been sent into the Ministry or is it waiting to be sent into the Ministry until we actually have these homes delivered? When is it expected that these homes, these precast homes, will actually be delivered for the purposes of construction

The Minister made mention as well, in respect of these particular homes (and I believe he was making mention of these 200-or-so homes), that some will be available for sale, some will be available for lease. Can the Minister give some indication about how many of the 200 will be available for sale? How many will be available for lease? And of those that are available for sale, is that, again, affordable and/or attainable? And how many fit into each category for lease and for sale?

So, in other words, you have leased homes, affordable and attainable, and then presumably you have homes for sale that are affordable and some that are attainable. In terms of those six priority sites, three confirmed for accelerated development, there's 30 sites in total that primarily are under the Bermuda Land Management Corporation and the BHC. Again, I can take you to the grant and line items for that.

Again, given the waiting lists and suitability, when suddenly into a particular area you might have, I don't know, 20 homes in one space, are there going to be suitable and adequate services in the neighbourhoods to ensure that those houses are going to be, in fact, desired by those? We know that people do need the local services available, opportunities if they are perhaps of low income thresholds, that they have adequate transport. Are there going to be adequate

transport links to all of these identified properties? All of this has to come in.

Now, again, I have to ask these questions because we don't have a plan. And I have said before it is very difficult to approve things and say that everyone's in favour if we don't actually have sight of the plan. The Minister has a plan. The Cabinet hasn't yet approved the plan. So, we are talking a lot about plans that we don't know about.

So, there's going to be a lot of pressure on the Minister, I think, to kind of get those details there so that people really understand. And what then happens if it then goes out to public consultation and it turns out this is not what people actually want? We are, again, just got to be very careful not to put that cart before the horse.

Another point, and I share to a certain extent comments of the Member from constituency 2, MP Swan, where he says it's important to get the private sector further involved. In fact, we have made proposals of that so perhaps the policy people under section or Head 90 can consider some form of tourism investment-style Act. And what I mean by that is having some form of investment Act to encourage the private sector to get more heavily involved in housing.

And, again, we say in the City of Hamilton, with higher developments, to allow for that private sector involvement because it should not simply fall to the government to get grants, to then implement those grants, and then have to, in fact, manage the process of the procurement, making sure that it's done within a cost-effective time, that it's not open to any kind of nefarious activities at all. It's a lot of responsibility for the Members.

In terms of the oversight of all of these projects, I assume that there is adequate coverage within the Bermuda Housing Corporation. They have a lengthy list. I believe the Minister said some 500 . . . I think the number is 517 properties or units to manage, which is an extensive amount. It will then add another 200, now you are at 700. I didn't see anything in the budget that there would be some very large number of staff increases. And, again, I can take you to the number of staff that fall within the budget on the relevant page, Mr. Chairman. Under page, I think it's two . . . Let's get the right page number there. Yes, [page] three . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: [It's page B-]321. Thank you.

In respect of the likelihood of requirements to have those properties maintained, perhaps we will see in 18 months, two years, there will have to be, I suspect, quite an increase in staff to make sure that those units are maintained, that those units and their surrounding gardens are maintained, that the adequate water is provided, et cetera. And that's got to be a major part of this.

Also, perhaps the Minister can advise as to whether or not these particular module homes will

become part of the HomeStart programme, given that that is a 100 per cent mortgage with a 25 per cent guarantee for those mortgage payments. While I'm on that, again, it comes under the grant and what the Minister had talked about in respect of HomeStart. Have there been any calls on the guarantee to date for the purposes of that HomeStart programme? And if so, what are those amounts that may have been paid out in respect of that guarantee?

Hopefully none, because obviously we don't want people to be in a position where they are unable to afford and then the government has to actually be called on that guarantee.

Thank you for the time being.

The Chairman: And is there any other Member who would like to speak to the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, Heads 90 and 53?

We're not seeing anybody else.
Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Okay, let's see what we have here. Let's see where we're going to start.

Let's deal with the Strategy 2025–2036. I'm sorry to disappoint the Shadow Minister, but I will not be changing those dates as he suggested or inferred. Surely, he must know that the process started in 2025 and there was a lot of work done in 2025. I'm sure when the Shadow Minister sees the report, soon, he will agree that 2025 is very appropriate for the start of the Plan, especially since this Ministry was started in February 2025. So . . . but the Honourable Member keeps asking for it, and he will get it. It's coming. I am sure he understands that when someone produces a 10-year plan, and consulting, a lot of consulting must take place if you are going to develop a plan that is going to be realistic for the people of this country.

And as I said before, a little tongue-in-cheek, and even though he threw out a little word that a lot of people may not understand, I will just take that word and give the meaning for it, which was in some dictionaries it was "fake." But I think that the Honourable Shadow Minister knows that since I've been in his seat, I don't think I have thrown anything really fake at him just yet. And I don't intend to.

So, with that being said, that document will be made public in the very near future, as I said. A lot of that work has been done. It will be presented to Cabinet, and then it will go out to the public for further consultation, because that document, when it is finally proofed and we stamp it, will have a lot of people in this country's fingerprints on it. And I would think that most, if not all people who read it will be satisfied and agree with it.

Now, the Honourable Shadow Minister Fahy, did also say that he hopes that I do consult with him. I think he will agree that my record since I have been Minister, I have invited him to every press conference

that I have held. Every one. Now, he hasn't showed up to any yet, but I have been very inclusive, and I have invited him to every press conference.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And the Honourable Member says, *What will happen if he gets a microphone?* When I have a press conference, you're happy to take the microphone alongside me too, because every time I have a press conference, it's great news for the people of this country. And if you wish to opine at one of those, I'll be happy to share the microphone with you, Honourable Member.

Now, there were also some questions about the capsules that will be arriving on the Island soon, within the next few weeks. Those capsules, as I said in my brief, are transitional homes, and they will be for people who are in desperate need of housing in the country. And hopefully that transitional period will be a short one, and one in which we can help some people who are falling on hard times and are in a desperate state.

The Honourable Member talked about the emergency housing that was used up at Morgan's Point. Now, I think it's important that we explain where that [is]. I don't know if the Honourable Member knew exactly where those are located. But there are 62 acres up at Morgan's Point that are owned by government and always have been owned by government. It's 62 acres on the northeastern side of that property. It's not on the Morgan's Point development property that the former developers were going to develop, and failed. It's property that is in government's name and has been for a very long time. So, I just wanted to make sure that we are clear about that. And the Honourable Member, I guess he hasn't been up to the site lately because those homes are no longer there.

The Honourable Member Fahy also seemed to be questioning the speed in which we are doing things. And he will know that I have given enough press conferences, I have given information to this Honourable House on several occasions. And, yes, I have made the public statement that we will produce a couple of hundred homes in the next 18 months.

And he [asked] about whether or not we are talking to Planning. Where are we with Planning? Is this going to happen? When is it going to happen? It can't happen quick enough, Members. It cannot happen quick enough. I take the calls, I get the emails, I get the WhatsApps. It cannot happen quick enough. And I can assure you that even though we don't get up and beat our chest every week, which we could do . . . we could get a cameraman to come out to every meeting that I have. If I want, I could fill the newspapers up every day of the week. But that's not my MO. My MO is going to be to produce as many homes for the people of this country who are in need as quickly as we can.

And yes, we are talking to Planning on a regular [basis]. The director of Planning is on our team. So, we are working very closely . . . We know how the wheels of Planning go in this country. And they can move slow. But we have the Minister involved, we have the director involved, and we have a full slate of qualified, energetic, hard-working people who are assisting us to produce homes in the country.

The Honourable Member also asked about [if] these precast homes [will] stand the test of time. The Honourable Member might remember that when the OBA did come into power in 2012, there was a project underway up in Dockyard that the PLP started, was 100 homes. Well, when they took power, they cancelled that contract. And I think we built 40 homes out of the 100, or thereabouts, approximate, just saying. They stopped that project. Well, those homes are still standing today. So, from 2011, when it was started, to today, those homes are standing, and we haven't had any issues with them, except for they had a little bit of problem with air circulation, which was repaired. You couldn't tell the difference between those homes and a Bermuda-constructed home, the traditional build. You cannot. So, I'm confident that they will stand the test of time.

Now, if I can just flip through . . . give me a second.

The Chairman: For the listening audience, we are in the Committee of Supply of the whole [House] for a debate on the budgets for 2026/27, currently debating the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities' budget for Heads 90 and 53. This started at 6:07, will end at 9:07, and the Minister has the floor.

Minister Zane De Silva, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There was a question on Bermudiana Beach Resort, the breakdown between occupants, how many were Bermudian. We have five Bermudians who occupy the units on site. So, with a little bit of simple mathematics, you can figure out how many non-Bermudians we have there.

With regard to the progress on the acquisition of land, the Ministry has met, well, several ministries, because as you would appreciate when we talk about Acquisition of Land Act it's not just one Ministry. There will be several ministries that will have to coordinate getting this done. And I know the policy is currently circulating, and stakeholder ministries have undertaken the visual surveys across the Island to identify all the uninhabitable or derelict buildings. So, that has been done, and now the legal teams have to look at it.

It's not going to be easy. I think we all know that there are several situations with regard to derelict or uninhabitable homes in the country. We have homes that no one knows who they belong to. I suggested, of course, my PS put a stop on me. You talk about doing things quickly. A couple of homes have been identified

as derelict homes. They are just sitting there. No one can find out . . . I said, *Well, look, I'll donate a bulldozer. Let's just go knock them down and see who comes out of the woodwork.*

But, of course, you know, *Don't do it. Don't do it.*

Free of charge, by the way; free of charge.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So that's one example.

Of course, we are familiar with homes being left to several members of the family, and the family can't seem to come to an agreement. So, we have had that situation. We know that happens. We have probate sometimes. Probate can go on for a lengthy period of time, depending on what the situations are. Sometimes probates are done without too much fanfare, but other times they get quite tricky and sticky. And that can take several years to resolve. So, that is going to be a work in progress, and it is not going to happen overnight.

Some questions were asked about Devonshire neighbourhoods. We call them "the big three" in the Ministry, which are Alexandra, Mary Victoria, and Cedar Park. I did hold last year . . . it was probably about 10 months ago now, 11 months ago. The first time. I think a lot of residents said [it was the] first time they had ever met with any Minister. I asked them all to come out, tell me what the concerns were. We listened. We took notes.

We knew there were some water issues. There were some sewage issues. We had dog issues. And as I said in my brief, we completed a dog survey. We are going to take that information; we are going to look at it and see what we can develop in terms of policy going forward. We know that we have done some work on the water in terms of water testing. That was done. [The] water is fine. We did find some issues with some of the sewage pipes and whatnot. Those are being looked at.

So, what we are doing is a master plan is being developed for those three sites. And for the first time in, I don't know how long, but we have actually allocated, and this budget will be approved, and we are looking at supplying \$2 million for those three properties to improve the lighting, the water, the sewage, and any other issues that have been burning to be done for a long time. So, I'm very happy about that. And I think the neighbours, the residents are going to be very happy as well.

With regard to the work in Dockyard, with regard to the wharf and the construction starting and then stopping for the season and then commencing back in November. That was all part of the plan. We knew what work had to be done, and we knew the timeframe in which we would need to do it. So, the plans were made and they were executed, and they will commence in November when the season closes.

With regard to the leaseholds becoming freeholds, that timeline, the 38 units that we are looking at

moving from leasehold to freehold, we were hoping to have it finished by the end of this month. But as it goes, I'm sure the Honourable Member, being a lawyer, will know sometimes things don't quite go as quickly as you want. But we are very hopeful that that will be all complete by the end of the second quarter.

H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck individuals. Over the last, I can say, nine months, we know that five individuals who were on the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme actually got full-time work in the last year. I think, Honourable Member, we had stated that we had over 2,000 jobs since it started, and we had five people last year. And, of course, performance measures will be, we will have something to go by next year. So, I'm sure the Honourable Shadow Minister will look forward to that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Good numbers. Of course.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITORS

The Chairman: And, Minister, we just want to recognise former Senator Arianna Hodgson in the Gallery.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay. All right.

[Desk thumping]

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hi.

The Chairman: And we also want to recognise the Attorney General back there as well in the Gallery.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, don't you guys all beat at once.

There is a question from Honourable Member Fahy. Can I advise whether I have given any specific directions to Corporation of Hamilton? No, I haven't. I have had many meetings with the Corporation of Hamilton since I've been in the seat, and I think they have had more meetings than anyone, probably broke a record there. But, no, I haven't given any specific directions.

And I spoke about that . . . there was a question about repurposing old school buildings. That has not been lost on us about some of the old school buildings. We have had some of those conversations. In fact, Mr. Arthur Wightman from PwC, we have met several times because he has a vision for one of the schools in particular. And I have written off to the

Minister of Public Works and Environment and just asked him for his take on it. But, no, we are looking at that. We know we have some buildings that we may or may not be able to use, but it's not off our radar, no.

The procurement process for these 200 homes that we are going to build in the next 18 months, it's probably been . . . let me say this. A committee was formed. That committee has met with . . . my dear. I'll get the list for the Honourable Member if he wants it. But we have met with a substantial amount of people around the world. If I don't receive two or three emails or inquiries every week from people all over the globe with regard to housing, different housing . . .

The Honourable Member will know that I've looked at expandable containers. I've looked at capsules. I've looked at precast. I've looked at modular. I've looked at, I think, everything on the planet, just about. So, we have had many, many, many meetings with overseas construction companies with regard to untraditional Bermuda building, and I will be happy to supply all of those in due course, too. So, that is a work in progress. Decisions will be made. I can tell you this. Decisions will be made to procure at least two companies to start this building for Bermuda. And all companies . . . I can say that any company that has reached out to us, or we have reached out to them, we will sit down and have a conversation with their product and the construction methods that they use. And we have had a substantial number of meetings with many of those who are in the business, with more planned.

With regard to services for the new houses, this is why we identified over 30 sites on the Island. The reason that we picked the six sites that we have is because the infrastructure is pretty close or right on the site currently. For example, you will know that I mentioned that we are going to build some units up in Dockyard, so the infrastructure is there. We are also looking at doing units opposite Dr. Cann Park in Southampton. Infrastructure is there. And of course also down at Bermuda Land Management down the East End, and we know that infrastructure is there. And the reason these sites were chosen is because if the infrastructure is pretty close by or right on site, obviously we can move a lot quicker, and it is less work.

Will those homes become part of the HomeStart programme? Everything is on the table. When it comes to home ownership or rental of units to people who really need them, everything is on the table.

I think I answered most of the questions, Mr. Chairman, for now.

The Chairman: With the Minister having answered all the questions that have been posed to him, is there anybody that would like to speak to Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises Honourable MP Michael Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Minister has answered some but not close to all of the questions posed during the debate. And maybe he didn't get a good note of them, but what I will do is I will ask some questions based on the responses that were just received.

The remark that I made in respect of standing the test of time was essentially repeating what the Minister had said, standing the test of time. Perhaps the Minister can clarify a couple of things to help answer that question. If he is comparing the units in Dockyard to the units that are going to be procured, that has now been (what?) 14 years for the particular units that were put and built in Dockyard. Presumably, there must be some manufacturing timeline as to the suitability of the units and the like. So, I'm sure it's going to last more than 15 years.

I think it's just adding clarity to what does standing the test of time, in fact, mean. Are these units supposed to last 50 years? Are they supposed to last 100 years? Is it dependent on the maintenance that's undertaken by the Bermuda Housing Corporation or one of the other companies that are affiliated with the Ministry, whether that's BLMDC or whether it's one of the others?

In terms of the procurement, I didn't really get clarity on that particular point, Mr. Chairman. I heard that there is a committee, that there's been lots of phone calls back and forth between perhaps the Ministry, the Minister, lots of people making approaches. What I'm not clear on is whether or not the units have, in fact, been procured. Have they, in fact, been procured? Or are they about to be procured? And if so, how many companies were, in fact, considered? Because I didn't hear anything about the actual procurement process that was followed in respect of those units for the purposes of suitability, cost, et cetera.

I also heard the Minister say that he has examined lots of different options from modular to containers, et cetera. And let me just get this—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry, thank you again. Let me get this . . . I've got a problem with this. I'm too tall for these microphones.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'm going to have to lean down. That's better. I can hear myself now.

In terms of the types of homes that are going to be used for the transitional homes, the terminology that is now being used is "capsule." Are there going to be any expandable container homes for the purposes of the transitional housing? And the question that then arises from that that has yet to be answered is, Is the numbers of individuals or families who would be utilising those properties for what periods of time . . . is it

anticipated that families would be in that transitional property?

An Hon. Member: It's transitional.

Hon. Michael Fahy: And that's the point. It's transitional.

So, at what point are they transitioned to another type of property? Because obviously you want a step-up programme where people have the ability to have leasehold and then hopefully buy their own property, whether it's through the HomeStart programme or otherwise.

In terms of Planning, the Minister made mention in his latest reply that he has had lots of meetings with Planning. The Director of Planning is involved. There's lots of different departments involved. Has permission been granted or preliminary permission for the 200 modular homes and for the transitional emergency homes? And if not, what's the anticipated timelines for these? We still have not been told, despite my questions, as to what the actual start date will be for the 200 modular homes. We have heard nothing about that at all.

In terms of the comments about the Acquisition of Land Act, this is where you have the value proposition, because it will take, as the Minister's own admission, quite some time to identify the owners of particular properties. And as much as I have no doubt the Minister would be very pleased, as I'm sure many people [would be], *Let's just get on with it. Let's knock down properties.* Okay. I know it's tongue-in-cheek because it's frustrating, I get it, when you have to go through these legal processes to identify.

The point I'm making is that the appropriate thing to be spending time on . . . we have all these other types of projects that are in the burner that will hopefully be successful. But the point I'm making here is the cost and time value proposition on the research and purchasing—because you still have to assume that the properties will be purchased at fair market value before you even knock it down—before you do anything.

You are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars for any plot of land in Bermuda. And I'm under stating that. So, I'm not really following the purpose of that. There's nothing mentioned in any line item for that particular plan. So, I'm not sure where this is. It's a statement of fact that this is what the Minister has said, but there's no line item for that particular project. So, is it something that's just being said, or is it likely to actually happen? I'm not following that particularly well.

In respect of the big three, "the Devonshire big three" is the phrase that the Minister used in respect of the various developments that he paid a visit to last year. Has the Minister had any other further meetings with the residents to update them in respect of the master plan that's being developed? The Minister said the master plan is being developed. So, the question that naturally is going to arise from that is, When is that plan

going to be complete? When are the works within that plan going to be commenced? When are those works likely to be finished? So, again, it's one thing to say it's happening, but details are certainly required.

The questions that were completely ignored relate to, again, the breakdown of affordable and attainable of those 200 modular homes. Is there a split that the Minister has in respect of each one of those? How many of those 200 are leased for the purposes of affordability? How many will be leased for the purposes of attainability and equally for sale? Because the Minister had said that some of those units would be for sale. Again, based on that phrase, which I accept, affordability and attainability, how many of those will be available at affordability rates and attainable rates?

The Minister did not answer the question in respect of whether or not any directions have been given to the Municipality of St. George's. He certainly answered the question in relation to Hamilton. So, the Minister can opine on that, and recall that the specific reason for St. George's was because of the utilisation of the grant of \$800,000. There didn't appear to be anything mentioned in relation to that \$800,000 for the purposes of ensuring that the Municipality of St. George's or the Town of St. George's will be able to continue to ensure it retains its World Heritage status. Again, I'm sure this will change at the conclusion of tonight's House debate on another Bill.

In terms of the decisions that will be made in respect of companies that will be constructing the 200 modular homes, are those going to be local companies or are they from overseas? Has the Minister identified any entities locally that have the expertise or knowledge to build these homes? I'm sure they do, but it would be good to know, [for] the people of Bermuda good to know, that this work will be undertaken locally was one of the questions of that. And again, the start date of those would be helpful.

The Minister did not answer the question about what work the special advisors are doing within the Ministry because there has been a change from professional services to having special advisors who are now salaried. And is that just a Ministerial appointment and who are those individuals?

In respect of . . . just bear with me for one moment if you may, if I may, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: For the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply for the budget 2026/27, debating the Housing and Municipalities Ministry budget, mainly on Heads 90 and 53. This started at 6:07 [pm] and will end at 9:07 [pm].

And Minister [sic] Fahy . . . MP Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I keep getting upgraded, thank you. He said Minister too.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Don't get excited.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'm getting very excited.

Just . . . I did want to address one thing because I'm not sure what I might have . . . I don't think I said anything that was suggesting that what the Minister was saying was fake. I want to put that to bed because there's certainly not any intent to say that, if that's what was heard, because it certainly was not what was suggested. I make that clear. The Minister has been sharing the information as best he can.

In respect of the services that will be in place for those modular homes, yes, we have heard that research has been done in respect of those places. But we also want to make sure that there is proper transport links, that the buses run effectively. Because you are talking about whole neighbourhoods that will suddenly, essentially pop up where there has been nothing in the last 20, 30 years.

I will take my seat and hopefully the Minister will answer those questions that have been posed in some instances a second time.

The Chairman: Is there anybody, any other Members who would like to speak to Housing and Municipalities, Head 90 and 53?

Recognising no one . . . Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Okay. Let me just be clear to the Honourable Shadow Minister. I don't ignore anything that he said. I may have forgotten. I may have not wrote down a particular note, but I assure you that I haven't ignored you.

Now, the Honourable Shadow [Minister] asked about the two special advisors that I have. And I do have two. One specialises in social issues, also housing. The other one has been in the construction business for a long time. [He] sat on the Bermuda Housing Corporation's board for the last three, four years, I believe. So, I've taken him on because of his experience not only in the construction sector, but also his experience with being on the Bermuda Housing Corporation Board for the last three, four years. So, those are the two special advisors there.

Let me be clear. I think the Honourable Member asked about if there is going to be any expandable container usage. At this particular point in time, [it is] not on my agenda. Did I look at it early on? Absolutely. As I said, I was inundated with . . . as you can appreciate, things float around on TikTok like nobody's business, right? So, everybody who saw something on TikTok about housing, trust me, I got it. If I didn't get a couple of thousand of those, I didn't get any. So, everybody and their mother and father were sending me, *Look, you got to look at this. You got to look at that. You got to look at this.* Some we took. I passed on. Some I just ignored. But as far as expandable containers are concerned, they are not on the agenda at the moment.

Not to say that they won't be in the future, because I think that's a possibility.

With regard to who is going to go in the transitional units that we are importing, we are looking at seniors. We're only bringing in nine. I would have liked to have brought in about 50 myself. But anyway, that's another story for another time. But we are looking at seniors. We are looking at seniors and maybe single mothers with a child that might be in a very bad situation. And we have seen some of those.

Start date for the 200 homes? Not quick enough. The Shadow [Minister] even mentioned in one of his chats how he knows that I want to push things and move at lightning speed. So, with regard to a start date, not soon enough. All I can tell Honourable Members is that I am pushing those buttons as hard and as quickly as I can. All he has to do is talk to my PS or any one of the people that surround him.

With regard to derelict homes, I believe the Honourable Member is correct. I think he may have asked, Why are we spending time looking at that now with the amount of time that it's going to take with regard to whether it's lawyers, whether it's probate or what have you. But we can chew gum and walk at the same time. I agree with the Honourable Member. But I know . . . I think I have a little bit of experience in construction. And we know that if you take an old building and you talk about you want to renovate it and get it going, that can sometimes be 10 times worse than building a brand new house.

But we have had a call for it from the people of the country. At one stage it was in the newspapers every other day. All over social media every other day. So, we will look at it. But we can chew gum and walk. Is it high on the agenda? No. I want to produce homes for the people of this country as quickly as I possibly can. And that's the intention. That's my priority.

Master plan for the "big three"? Again, see, the Honourable Member has a challenge because I've said that we are going to have a 10-year master plan for houses in the country. Not fast enough for him. Where is it? Now he's asking for the master plan for the "big three"—Alexander, Cedar Park, and Mary Victoria. Where's the plan? Well, if we sat around and did nothing while we developed plans, what's going to happen with our people? We can chew gum and walk.

And if we can help people who are having challenges with water, having challenges with sewer, having challenges with lighting around the neighbourhood . . . If we can do that now while we are looking at a master plan, everyone knows that those three developments have been there for decades. And they will need work. And some of it's going to involve millions and millions of dollars. And if we wait to do that, people are going to suffer in the interim. They have been crying out for some help. Fix a couple of lights. These sewage pipes, you know, they have been here for 40 years

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Let's see if we can get the Honourable Member, Diallo Rabain, that's in his constituency. I get all the calls from him all the time. So, would he . . . ask him if he wants me to take . . . take . . . don't do anything until we get the master plan finished. We will work and try to help people along the way while we develop a master plan, which is going to involve a lot of money and a lot of work. So, we will continue to do that.

Now, the Honourable Member also asked about a breakdown of attainable and affordable units. We have an idea, but that's a work in progress. And what—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It is in the plan. What you have to realise is (right?), I can understand why the Honourable Member asked the question. It's not a bad question at all. But the fact of the matter is, we have to start building the units, and we have to get people who are in desperate need for units. We have—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, no. That's not what I'm going to give you. I'll give you another stat.

We have . . . I had the Housing Corporation break down the list. And on that list of people who are on the waiting list, we have 81 who are in a critical category. We have 262 families who we have put in the urgent category. That's 343 families: 81 who are critical. So, when the Honourable Member asked, *Well, how many are going to be attainable, how many are going to be affordable?* I think I just answered that question. We need to take care of folks who are in desperate need at the moment as quickly as we can. And some of those are living in cars. Some are living in tents. Some households have 10 people in a two-bedroom place, and that has other issues. I have heard from females that are under duress because they are in not-so-good situations. Let's put it right there. So, we . . . I understand the question, but we can't answer that question just yet. We are going to build houses first. Let's get people in houses first.

Have I given any directions to St. George's? No, I haven't. Have I met with them? Yes. I have met with the entire staff at both the Corporation of Hamilton and the Corporation of St. George's.

Precast. Overseas? Yes, they will come from overseas, just like Morgan's Point, just like Dockyard They will come from overseas. And they will have local representatives to work along with.

And I think . . . I don't think I missed any, I think I got them all.

The Chairman: With 15 minutes remaining in this debate, is there anybody else who would like to, any other Members who would like to speak to Heads 90 and 53?

The Chair recognises Shadow Minister Michael Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to push the Minister a little bit on this issue of the expandable container homes. And the reason I'm seeking clarity is because he gave a Ministerial Statement in November where he said that there would be four expandable container homes offering two- and three-bedroom units, expandable container homes.

I believe the Minister is saying that there will not be container homes. And that's fine. At least now we know. So, presumably the thought process has changed from the November Statement to now. I think that's certainly something that deserves some clarity. Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I've said it about three times tonight. How many times does the Honourable Member want me to say it? We looked at it. We thought it would be a good thing. And then whilst we were looking at that, we said we are going to order it, the next thing is the capsules come up. We said, *Wow, we think the capsules would be better than the expandable.*

And see? The Honourable Member even just said it, *container homes*. They were never, ever going to be container homes. Not like *The Royal Gazette* put on the front page, *Oh, Ministers*, you know, *bringing in container homes*. Expandable container homes. You know, in Bermuda, if you tell someone, *I want a container in my backyard*, they are going to want a container that's 20 feet long, 8 feet wide, 9 feet high. Right? So, you know, we have to stop saying that.

Then people [will say], *Oh, we're going to have people living in shipping containers*. No. Expandable container homes. And as I said earlier, some of them look like they're quite nice.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right. You can do that if you so wish. And some people do. But the fact of the matter is it was expandable container homes. And whilst we were doing our due diligence, I'm very . . . you know, we found the capsules, we could get them here, and we could get them here quickly, and that's what we've done.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you for the clarification. That's clearer.

In respect of the transitional housing, again, the Minister, if he could please answer the question as to how long it is anticipated that individuals or families

would be in that transitional housing before they are moved on to other more suitable housing. Because transitional is exactly that, transitional emergency housing. Hopefully with the aim that someone gets in at that level, they have a roof, they have a bed to sleep in, they have something that is suitable for them with the intent that they move on maybe to the modular housing, that may be the affordable modular housing. Now, maybe the answer is it's in the 2025 plan, and maybe that is the answer, and we'll look for that plan. So, maybe the Minister can opine on that.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Surely, if the Honourable Shadow Minister has done any homework . . . to get up and make that statement is quite, quite, quite poor, to be honest. Right? Is that transitional homes . . . he would know that Langley [House] and Gulfstream are transitional homes. Right? And the Housing Corporation are responsible for putting folks who are down on the last dime in transitional homes, or people who have fallen on hard times.

The transitional homes at Boaz Island are no different than Gulfstream or Langley [House]. They are just that. Why doesn't the Honourable Member ask about the transitional homes at Langley [House] and Gulfstream? They have been there for decades. Right? People come in and they go out. They come in; they go out. People find that they get a better job, or their spouse may get a job, and then they can move from that home out to a regular home. So, these capsules will be no different. They are transitional.

How long will people be there? It all depends on the situation. It's as simple as that.

The Chairman: Is there any other Member who would like to speak to Heads 90 or 53?

Seeing nobody else, no other persons wanting to speak . . . Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 90 and 53 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 90 and 53 be approved as printed.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, Heads 90 and 53 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Chairman, I move the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

[Timer chimes]

[Pause]

House resumed at 8:57 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Speaker: Good evening, Members.

Are there any objections to the Committee rising and reporting progress?

There are none.

Good.

We now move on to the next item on the Order Paper tonight, and that is the second reading of the Municipalities Reform Act 2026, in the name of the Deputy Premier, Minister of Housing and Municipalities.

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Municipalities Reform Act 2026 be now read a second time.

The Speaker: [Are there] any objections?

There are none.

Continue on, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you can just give me one second, as I'm just going to tidy up a little bit after the . . .

[Pause]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I'm good. I'm good. Thank you. Thank you.

Okay. Mr. Speaker, before I start, I would certainly like to mention one thing tonight: I am happy to

bring this Bill back to the House. And I would like to say that—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Okay, here we go. Here we go. Mr. Speaker, I'm ready.

BILL

SECOND READING

MUNICIPALITIES REFORM ACT 2026

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members of this House, I rise to introduce the Bill entitled the Municipalities Reform Act 2026 [to] now be read for the second time.

This Bill, Mr. Speaker, abolishes municipal elections. It establishes a structured appointment process for Members of the Corporations. It makes consequential amendments to the Municipalities Act 1923, and it ensures that certain ministerial directions to a Corporation are subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a radical departure, nor is it a sudden shift in direction. It is the continuation of a reform journey begun in 2010 to modernise Bermuda's system of municipal governance so that it reflects the democratic principles and administrative realities of the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, to properly frame this debate, we must place it in proper constitutional and civic context. Hamilton was formally established as a town in 1790. Under statute that same year, 155 acres were purchased with public funds and vested in the Government of Bermuda for its use. The land was later divided and sold at auction, except for 44 waterfront lots reserved as public land. Now, we know back in those days, Mr. Speaker, 155 acres were purchased with public funds and then were sold at an auction. Who had the money in this country to buy it at that particular time?

In [1793], Hamilton was incorporated with a mayor, three aldermen, and five common councillors elected by freeholders only of Hamilton. St. George's followed in 1797 with a similar structure. Hamilton became a city in 1897.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members are well aware of Bermuda's democratic evolution, from slavery and age restrictions to dual-seat constituencies and voting rights tied to the property ownership. Our democracy has cast off those discredited practices. Today, we stand firmly on the principle of a single-seat constituency and one person, one vote, each vote of equal value. The same, however, cannot be said in the considerable acreage known as Hamilton and St. George's. Property qualifications for Corporation elections were retained long after they were abolished in general elections in the 1960s, alongside the introduction of modern democratic government under the

Bermuda Constitution Order 1968. In 1978, eligibility was extended to leaseholders and certain businesses. Yet, to this day, the municipal franchise remains rooted in property ownership and commercial interest.

Mr. Speaker, this Government rejects the notion that the exercise of a fundamental democratic right should depend upon land ownership or commercial stake. There are no hybrid forms of democracy. The principle is simple and enduring. Those who are governed by the laws must have a voice in shaping them. In 2019, this House advanced a framework to modernise the Corporations of Hamilton and St. George's. That framework was debated and passed by the House of Assembly. Though it was challenged in the Senate and in the courts by the Corporation of Hamilton, at the taxpayers' expense, it has ultimately been upheld at every level of judicial scrutiny available to Bermuda. Today, we move to implement and refine it. This is not dismantling democracy; it is strengthening it.

Mr. Speaker, our vision, and that of all the stakeholders in St. George's, recognises the town of St. George's as a place of unique historic character, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of global significance. We acknowledge that this distinction carries with it both privilege and responsibility. Its heritage must be protected, preserved, and respected, but it must also live and thrive in the modern world. That vision includes the development of a marina, supported by a sustainable management plan, the creation of a viable year-round economy, and infrastructure improvements that benefit residences, businesses, and visitors alike. Consistent with the direction established in the City of Hamilton, the [City of] Hamilton Plan 2025, our vision for the capital is equally clear. A vibrant and sustainable city of both local and international appeal, one that offers a broad range of services and experiences with a pedestrian-focused and welcoming city centre.

Hamilton's long-term vitality will be sustained not by retail alone, but by fostering a diverse mix of residential, culture, leisure, and commercial life. It calls for development that strengthens identity, protects historic and cultural assets, supports the adaptive reuse of buildings, and places people at the centre of the urban experience. In this way, Hamilton will remain not merely the seat of commerce, but the living civic heart of Bermuda. Realising a vision of this scale requires governance structures that are aligned, accountable, and capable of delivery.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear about what this Bill does not do. It does not eliminate jobs. It does not dissolve the Corporations. It does not abolish the offices of mayor or councillor. Each municipality will continue to have a mayor and eight councillors. It is not a takeover. It is not an asset grab. The Corporations remain bodies corporate. What changes is the method of selection. The transition from property-based electoral model to a transparent, skills-based appointment system that reflects modern governance standards. This is not the removal of democracy. It is the refinement.

Mr. Speaker, the Municipalities Act dates back to 1923. Its voting structure is inconsistent with Bermuda's commitment to universal adult suffrage. Democracy cannot be measured in acres or balance sheets. Our municipal framework must reflect the democratic maturity of our country. Municipal priorities have not always aligned with the country's development goals. Critical infrastructure requires coordinated oversight. In a country of just 22 square miles and approximately 63,000 people, duplication without alignment breeds inefficiency. This reform ensures that municipalities and central government move forward together, not at cross purposes.

Mr. Speaker, the 2019 reforms were challenged in the courts. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Government. The Court of Appeal upheld that ruling. The matter was then taken to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, the highest appellate court available to Bermuda at the taxpayer's expense.

Mr. Speaker, in October 2025, the Privy Council affirmed Parliament's authority to enact these reforms. This reform has not merely withstood scrutiny, it has prevailed at every level. The highest court available to Bermuda has confirmed that this Honourable House acted within its constitutional authority. The rule of law has spoken conclusively.

Mr. Speaker, the updates in this Bill do not alter the governance model approved in 2019, not one bit. They update statutory timelines, align the Selection Committee process with the deferred appointment cycle, modernise technical provisions, and ensure administrative coherence. This is implementation, not reinvention.

The Bill removes outdated election provisions and establishes a governance framework in the fourth schedule, providing for appointments, qualifications, tenure, and transparency requirements. Ministerial directions expending municipal purposes will be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny under the negative resolution procedure. That enhances accountability, Mr. Speaker. Appointees must possess relevant expertise in accounting, law, planning, engineering, construction, human resources, and labour relations. The Selection Committee will publish its criteria in the media. This ensures that the appointment process is transparent, skills-based, and publicly visible.

Mr. Speaker, let us be honest about what is before us tonight. For too long, municipal governance has rested on a franchise rooted not in citizenship, but in property. Not in an equal voice, but in economic interest. That may have been tolerated in another era. It is indefensible in this one. This Bill draws a clear line. Democracy in Bermuda cannot be whole in some places and conditional in others. Equality under the law is not negotiable. Longevity alone does not confer legitimacy. Systems endure until they are challenged, and when

they no longer reflect the democratic maturity of the people, it is the Parliament's duty to act.

That is exactly what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. This is no reckless experiment, no constitutional gamble, no power grab. It is the lawful exercise of the legislative responsibility. This reform ensures that municipal and central governance move forward together under a unified vision of purpose, shared responsibility, and a common direction.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot affirm one person, one vote in our general elections while accepting a different standard in municipal governance. That inconsistency ends here.

Mr. Speaker, I hope for the unanimous support of this Honourable House on this Bill, because when the history of the country is written, the people of Bermuda should look back at this moment with pride, knowing that we acted to remove the final vestige of a system designed to preserve an unnatural imbalance in favour of a few.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I now move that the Bill entitled the Municipalities Reform Act 2026 be read for the second time.

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good evening, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good evening.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, the Minister is tenacious. We can give him that. He has been involved in the municipal reform off and on for many, many years. And we are here today, and the Minister is quite right. It's gone through many iterations in the way in which the Corporation has been administered in the last 16, 17 years.

And he is quite right that the iteration of this Bill was taken before all the courts that the Corporation could quite rightfully go to to get a decision, and they were defeated at each and every point. No one is going to suggest that a kind of a property ownership structure is right in any way for these times. And it's absolutely quite right to make sure that you have equal vote.

And I think what we attempted to do ourselves in 2013/14 was to ensure that there was a residential vote and a ratepayer vote for the municipality, so that those who were being taxed, because the Corporation of Hamilton does levy tax in terms of ratepayers, that they had the opportunity to say what they believed would be appropriate. And what we had done to try and solve a problem that existed was to give ratepayers a certain number of councillors, and to give residents one man, one vote. To give them an opportunity to say as well, so that you could end any kind of doubt that it was just this one-sided business opportunity. That's now being taken away with this Bill. We thought it was a good

compromise. That is now obviously not going to be the case.

Mr. Speaker, it's been interesting because it is very difficult sometimes to get people to stand up for public office. And as we have seen over the years, the elections don't often get high turnouts, and people are elected into positions with very low numbers. The Minister didn't make mention of that. But that was always a concern for me as well when I was Minister, as to how do you get people involved in elections.

The issue here, though, is it's one thing to say, yes, we accept and believe absolutely one man, one vote. But now there is no man, no vote. There's no vote at all. It just seems strange to me that we can say that it's obviously very important but then get rid of any vote of any kind for people. Whether they are residents or whether they are ratepayers they are now not having a direct democratic say in respect of those particular municipal rates and taxes that are going to be imposed upon them.

And from what the Minister's Statement said, it's not a land grab, it's not a takeover. The Corporations will stay as they are for how long, that remains to be seen. But the fact of the matter is that the taxes that the municipal ratepayers pay, whether they are residential or business owners, presumably will continue. So, they are not getting a direct say in how those monies will be spent. The Minister presumably will say, *Well, if you vote in the central government, you have to have faith and trust that the Minister will select the right people.*

But ultimately, the Minister will have complete control, notwithstanding the way in which this Bill is written, because he has the ability to make direct appointments, but then the Selection Committee makes recommendations. He appoints . . . he or she appoints the Selection Committee, which therefore means the Minister has direct control. And I say that because, woe betide, I would assume anyone who is appointed that doesn't abide by the Minister's desires . . . presumably, they won't be reappointed because they would be concerned that maybe they won't get another two-year term. This Bill calls for two-year terms.

And there are flaws in even the way in which this is designed. And I'll get into that in a moment.

But let's be clear, on this side of the House, we do believe in that one-man-one-vote principle because sometimes that gets thrown about as if we don't. And that's absolutely not the case. What we tried to do . . . what we tried to do was find a good compromise with ratepayers. It was not about land ownership, it was about ratepayers, both residential and business, both who contribute vastly to the vibrancy of both Corporations.

Now what's interesting is the Minister made mention of any number of things, Mr. Speaker, about why it's important that this Municipal Bill be brought before the House. And he mentioned a number of items that are, of course, the same or similar to the very points that naturally were made in 2019.

And if I may, I'm going to take a moment because I think it's important. This is, in fact, from the Government website and their consultation document on Municipal Reform from 2019. It's available for anyone to see. And I can circulate this particular piece of paper. And it says that the government has a vision for the City of Hamilton. And it says, "[T]he vision is a 'smart city' infrastructure with a thriving residential centre and entertainment hub with distinct districts . . . In order to achieve this vision, the following needs must be met:

- "i. The development of a multi-faceted waterfront
- "ii. Increased city living
- "iii. Increased use of vacant office space
- "iv. Effective traffic management using 'smart city' technology
- "v. Encouraging the development of 'districts', e.g. financial, entertainment, restaurant, etc."

Mr. Speaker, to achieve those goals, we don't need to make these changes because you have a City of Hamilton Plan [2025] that was brought before this place last year. It approved most of what is actually in this. It was . . . the Government accepted it. We on this side of the House voted in fairness with the City of Hamilton Plan [2025]. We have talked about it in previous debates, Mr. Speaker, in terms of building higher, becoming a more thriving environment.

But we have also spoken throughout the Budget Debates and other debates about the services that government is unable to provide in an efficient manner. And one of the things that the Corporation, certainly the Corporation of Hamilton, has been able to do very efficiently is actually provide the services in a reasonably better way, in my view, than the central government has.

In fact, to the point that oftentimes what has happened, for example, when the central government has been unable to have enough garbage trucks on the road, they have relied on the City of Hamilton to back them up over and over and over again. And so, when you look at the services and you consider, How is the city being run, is it being run well? And it has been run well. And I take the types of services that municipalities offer and deal with that are important for the city to survive and be a vibrant place. And that includes items like rubbish pickup. That happens daily in the City of Hamilton. Every morning those guys are out there. In the evenings they are out there. The men are out there on the streets sweeping up and doing an amazing job. They do an amazing job on the infrastructure. So, let's make that clear.

The other piece that is of interest is section 7 of the Municipalities Act. It gives the Minister, as we heard in a previous debate, the ability to give directions if it's in the best interest of Bermuda. Therefore, the Minister has the ability now to give directions if that's what's in the best interest of making sure that things are going in a certain direction within the city. I unfortunately had to use that power myself for various reasons.

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. But the point is that the Minister has the ability to do that now. We have elected officials who have done an amazing job. And I would like to take the opportunity to just take a moment to remember Larry Scott because he was a councillor in the City of Hamilton for many years. We've given thanks already in the House to Mr. Scott. But I worked very closely with him, and we have some very vibrant people who have served on the council both as councillors and as mayor.

Now, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that if we are going to maintain any form of vibrancy of democracy in either and or the City of Hamilton and the Corporation of St. George's, that why not find some compromise? Because I don't believe that people really want this, that the two Corporations to essentially become quangos without any real understanding of what will happen down the road.

Again, we have talked lots about master plans and the only plan that we have seen from my point of view is what was published seven years ago as to what the reasons are for having to bring this Bill. Everything, as I have said, can be done by the Minister now. Why not at least have an elected mayor, have appointed councillors, if that's what the Minister wishes to have, to maintain some form of oversight and get things pushed in a different direction?

But if you really want to have some vibrancy and you want inclusion and you want people to be engaged and you want them to be part of the city vibrancy and matrix, then have an elected mayor like we have all over the world in different cities and towns. What we have done here is completely eliminate a vote. Completely. And it's not, in my submission, sufficient to simply say *I'm going to a national election and therefore I have to have faith that the Premier of the day appoints a Minister that is going to do what is in the best interest of what I want for the city.* Maybe someone as a resident has a completely different view of what the city should look like versus what the Minister has.

So, then you get into the whole nitty gritty. Where is the accountability for those who are paying the taxes to the very people that are now going to have the ability to levy those taxes? Because the people who are actually in the city living there and working there will now lose that opportunity to have that say, yet they are going to pay the tax. I find that very strange indeed which is why I would suggest that there be a compromise found whereby you at least have an elected mayor so that the people of Bermuda can feel, the people of Hamilton and St. George's can feel that they are having a say in the way in which the cities and towns that they live and work in will be suitably governed based on the taxes that are paid.

A number of items that I think also need to be put under consideration is the fact that members are appointed for two years. There doesn't appear to be

any more staggered approach to ensure that there is longevity of knowledge, that there's some form of continuity of knowledge. It would appear that what in fact could happen is every couple of years there's a whole new council that's put in place, a new mayor, and I think that's something that needs to be thought about. It's always good to have that ongoing continuity of knowledge. Ministers change. Ideas can change with a Minister. You need to ensure that you have continuity.

Again, I have made a brief reference, Mr. Speaker, in respect of the independence of the individuals who would be appointed either by the Minister directly with the caveats that have been put in place that they have to have a certain skill set if they are appointed directly by the Minister. What is their ability to have that independence without the Minister just giving directions and they do as they are told? How does the constituent of the City of Hamilton or St. George's have the ability to opine on who is actually taxing them? Do we believe, in fact, that this model will improve in any way the city's effective governance, which in the last while has been done very, very well.

In relation to assets of the municipality, again, this now essentially will become, in the event that the Bill passes, a quango. So that means that portfolio of property, which is what the Corporation argued, it's not for me to re-opine on that, but how do we protect those assets and make sure that they are not simply sold off to someone else because the Minister believes that's in the best interest? Again, it's just taking it to a further step and ending any form of democracy of any kind within both municipalities.

In terms of the rates of pay that these individuals are now or could potentially engage in, is it sufficient, for example, and I'm certainly not suggesting do it for free, but that is a point of consideration that I think at the moment councillors and the mayor, they get paid per meeting, which is a paltry sum like most of the boards that people serve on, 50 bucks here, \$100 here. We are asking a number of individuals to do appointed work. Presumably, that will not be done for nothing which, given the size of the city and the things that are going to be done on behalf of taxpayers, quite important.

In terms of the issue of double taxation, it seems to me it is double taxation in respect of the way in which the Corporation has been run and that issue does need to be examined. Because now, as I said, you will continue, presumably, you have your sewage tax, you have got your rate tax, you have got all kinds of things that you need to pay as someone within the City of Hamilton. But also, it's the central government that's controlling them. So, we are already paying tax, so does that disappear? Will those continue? How will those rates be re-examined? And will they be re-examined?

What I find most concerning, again, is the lack of a plan. And I know the Minister and I have debated in a previous debate about the importance of plans. But

I do think that it is of interest to everyone that we have an absolutely updated plan. Again, when you are talking about decisions of this magnitude, it would appear that, again, these decisions are made based on old data. And what do I mean by that? Because, as far as I can tell, the last public consultation on these changes happened in respect of the 2019 iteration of this Bill, which then means we are relying on comments that we believe could be the same.

We have heard this on other issues that have been debated in this House before when things linger for as long as this one has for all kinds of reasons. We know it's gone through three court cases. It has taken six years. Yes, it's taken six years. But that doesn't mean that that data that was received in 2019 and feedback remains the same. Now, maybe it does. But I think it would be incumbent upon the Government to at least look into that and see, is this a desire of the ratepayers, whether they be those who are municipal ratepayers, business ratepayers, or residential ratepayers? Do they feel that this is in their best interest to have a central government appointed committee via the Minister and directly appointed members and a directly appointed mayor?

That one, particularly, you can tell, Mr. Speaker, at the very least I would have expected the Government to perhaps take on board some of the concerns from before about completely ending any form of directly elected member and at least do the mayoral option. And that is in respect of both municipalities. It may be as well that we seek the views directly of the public. Again, that is why I feel that this Bill has not been fully and finally considered based on the way in which things have changed and some of the feelings that have existed about some of the issues over the last 15 years.

The biggest issue does sit as to that accountability and how is it that members will be held accountable? Can they continuously be reappointed? All of these things. We know what the Bill says, but it's how it will pan out in practice is what's most important.

As well, I would like to, again, reiterate that the City of Hamilton and the town of St. George's have done sterling work. The elected officials who have been elected over the years have done an amazing job as best they can with sometimes being desperately under-resourced for various reasons.

And it is also, I think, well worth thanking those members who were originally elected back in whatever it was, 2018, who have continued to serve by appointment, which, to be frank, I had a problem with, and I made mention of that previously when elections are postponed. But, nonetheless, they have continued to serve, and they have done sterling work under very difficult circumstances.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the event that this Bill does pass, I think it's incumbent upon this House to thank those members who have served as municipal councillors and as a mayor.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Ming.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good afternoon . . . Sorry. Good evening, Mr. Speaker and listening audience.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start my comments today by giving the definition of democracy. Democracy is a system of government where power is vested in the people exercised either directly or through *elected* representatives. I think that's important and I would like for you to hear that and make sure you remember that this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today and I kind of feel like I'm living a *déjà vu* moment because I remember standing in this very House in 2019 . . . well, not this place, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Well—

Mrs. Renee Ming: —in 2019 and looking at this same Bill.

I want to first of all give some context and background to the Municipalities Act. The Municipalities Act is from 1923 so that Bill is now over 100 years old. And if you ask me, do I believe that the Bill needs to have some upgrade or reform, my answer is absolutely yes. But when we consider the municipalities that we currently have, I think we need to understand the stark differences between the municipalities.

And I'm going to give you the difference in terms of data and numbers for the municipalities. And just for the record, you all know that I live and represent a municipality. Hamilton has over 1,600 business ratepayer voters. And they have probably around 650 resident voters. In St. George's, we have approximately 1,300 resident voters and about 60 business voters. So, I believe you can understand the differences of the municipalities and why if I was to turn the clock back and look at 2019, my comments were and would be the exact same as what I'm going to speak to you about today.

Mr. Speaker, it's funny because this came to my mind, Brussels sprouts. I can't stand the Brussels sprouts. I don't care if you cook it, boil it, fry it, whatever.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mrs. Renee Ming: I can't take it. Just can't take it. And that's from when I was younger. So, even if you were to serve me the same Brussels sprouts today, I still don't like them. In my view, this Bill is the exact same Bill that I looked at in 2019. It just has a different date on it. So, how I felt in 2019 is no different from how I feel today.

I have to declare my interest because not only do I live in a municipality, I am a municipal voter. One of my children is a councillor on the St. George's Corporation. And I myself have served as a councillor and an alderman in the corporation before entering this level of politics. So, if you ask me is this personal to me, my answer would be yes. But I also have the honour and privilege of representing in my area. And I know how important it is to my constituents to choose who they want to represent them. Okay?

So, the idea of centralised government has not gone over very well. In 2019, when we stood in this place and we debated this Bill, my colleague and I were vociferous in lobbying for what we wanted to see for the area. And because we are people who believe that *we're not going to just tell you what the problem is, we want to offer as well a solution*, we did.

And one of the things, and I'm not going to tell you anything that you can't go read because there are *The Royal Gazette* articles on what we asked for. We said because of the differences of the municipalities we would have liked to have seen maybe different legislation as it relates to the two municipalities but more importantly to maintain the concept of elected officials.

We thought that, and I'm speaking specifically to St. George's because that's what I know best, that if there could be a compromise of a hybrid model, meaning that the Minister could choose his four people that we believed should come with some level of expertise, whether that be lawyer, accountant, cultural/tourism, and an engineer. And we felt that the other four councillors did not need to go through a Selection Committee because St. George's people are well capable of selecting who they want to represent them.

In some ways, and it's surprising and not surprising, that the changes that we have seen in municipalities over the years have actually come through, and I'm talking about some real change, the Progressive Labour Party. So, in 2003, the then Premier got rid of the double taxation because, yes, if you lived in St. George's, you paid a corporation tax and you paid government land tax. And that became quite expensive and it was, you know, in listening to people and saying, like, *why do we have to pay double taxes?* And so, there was a listen, an ask, and it happened.

In 2008 or 2009, the whole property tax matter was raised, and that was abolished because we didn't believe that that was the way to go. We felt from this Progressive Government that one man, one vote of equal value.

So, I have some family members who at that time . . . it was their first time being able to vote (for some of them) in a municipal election because they did not own any land and so they were unable to go to the polls and vote. And that door opened to them. I have one of my family members who not only did he go and vote, he ran. And so, up until his death, he sat as a councillor, and a proud one at that, for the Corporation of St. George's.

I think that when I was an alderman and a councillor (councillor first, alderman second, and then I moved on), the will of the people was important. And so, for the success that we wanted and what we aim to look for, I had to knock on doors. I had to meet with residents. I had to speak to constituents face-to-face so I could hear exactly what it was that they wanted from an elected official. The people who I visited believed that their vote mattered and that their vote was safe with me.

I was elected through a democratic process. And I will say this here: Their vote is still very safe with me. They can rest assured that I will always represent their best interests as long as I sit in this space.

Mr. Speaker, democracy matters.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Mrs. Renee Ming: I repeat that.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Democracy matters. I heard the Minister and I also heard my colleagues speak about low numbers in recent elections. I can confirm that there was one particular election where we may not have had sufficient numbers and we did end up having an extraordinary election two months after that. But a lot of that has actually come from (and that was in recent years) the uncertainty that has come with the reform.

I have no shortage of persons in St. George's that I believe can represent St. George's. But with the reform looming over their head, they were like, *I don't know. I don't know if I want to do it and you guys are going to change it, or whatever.* And so, you may have seen low numbers, but I think any of us can understand that that would have been indicative of instability or uncertainty at that time.

I firmly believe that within the municipalities, the people have the right to choose. They should have the right to choose. We are living in a time right now where people want more choice and yet more is being taken away from us. I mean, let's be honest here. In Bermuda, can you choose your own health provider? No. Not if you work for someone. Can you choose a hospital that is outside of your health plan network? No. And more recently, can you decide where you want to go for your prescriptions? We are living in a space and a time right now where, as a people, we want to make more decisions, especially as they relate to our lives and what we do. That seems to be changing.

It would be very difficult, *very difficult*, for me to stand here today and say that I can support, my people in St. George's especially, (but I think about the other municipality as well), losing their right to choose who they want to represent them. Imagine each and every one of you sit here as elected officials. I surely don't

think we ever want to see the day that somebody appoints us to these seats. Yes?

There was lots of talk in 2019 with the then former Minister. And we challenged him. That's our role, to challenge at times. And I think, and I can agree, and I was happy to see that he listened. And the compromised things that we came out with were a hybrid model, which I spoke to you about just a few minutes ago, and possible standalone legislation.

I still believe firmly that that is the way to go.

I know that over the years I have spoken with my constituents and they too recognise that we could use some levels of expertise in . . . especially in our Olde Towne, but they want the ability to choose. And I don't think it's too much to ask if they could choose their four, and a mayor, elected representatives.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke about continuity of knowledge, and I think that's important as well as we go down this path. Each and every one of you, whether you like it or not, started in St. George's.

The Speaker: Hmm.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mrs. Renee Ming: Whether you like it or not, you started in St. George's.

The Speaker: Well, well, well.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Well, well.

[Laughter]

Mrs. Renee Ming: And for that reason,—

The Speaker: Put some red up there. We need some red in this room.

Mrs. Renee Ming: You started in St. George's.

Look. One boat, one shipwreck, two slaves, right? So, we'll leave it at that.

The historic nature of St. George's in itself would . . . brings me . . . what appeals to me, I don't know if it appeals to you, to understand why traditions matter to us. But, more importantly, people matter to us. It's been seven years since we were in this space in 2019, and I think that it's long enough for us to make some serious decisions about what we see from the municipality.

And I don't want you to think that I am against municipal reform, because I am not. I actually believe that it is necessary. I'm just not sure of the path that we are on in terms of what that reform actually looks like.

So, Mr. Speaker, my comments (I'll draw to a close), will say that history will record how we vote and how we speak in this place. And it will show whether

we stood on the side of convenience or we stood on the side of democracy.

Today, I choose democracy. I choose the right side of the people in our municipalities to elect their representatives, and it's for this reason that I cannot support this Bill. But I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those persons who serve within the municipalities, because they may not be big government like us, but they are government, and they do have their parishioners, their constituents, and their areas to actually worry about.

So, Mr. Speaker, I say thank you for allowing me this time.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am rising on a similar point as my colleague and my representative in St. George's. Let me declare my interest upfront. I have a daughter who is a councillor in the municipality in St. George's. I have all of my family who basically live in St. George's and have given me much instruction, including my neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I wish to declare to the House is that I . . . which I think will help you to understand the stance that I take. I did my dissertation in electoral reform. I am firmly opposed not to my Government but to centralisation. I think as parliamentarians and politicians that our action should always be one that enhances and promotes democracy. I believe in democracy. And I believe that this body here should be the most democratic body, and at every stance act to advance democracy.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it is difficult . . . and I will say this. My Minister and my great friend, MP Zane De Silva, is very . . . he already knows basically how I feel in this party. So, nothing that he is hearing me say wasn't said to him directly. I wrote to him and told him what I think, and he asked me if there was any way that I would advocate or could advocate for the position that he is taking today. And I told him that I stand on my principles and that I am unchanged. However, I understand the dilemma that he finds himself in because the institutions that sit have not been . . . have had very little reform in terms of how they operate.

And I can go back many, many years when I was a child and listened to the conversations, especially of my mother, when she spoke about the Corporation of St. George's, even back then, and how many of the actions that they engaged in, she felt back then were not as democratic as they could be.

So, I, too, with my sister parliamentarian, am proud of the PLP Government that did create reform in the space of the municipalities. And I, too, am hopeful that the Minister in charge of Municipalities, in the near future, can look to create a model that he believes will

best serve the . . . I am very biased, the municipality in St. George's. And if he thinks he needs to institute that within the municipality of the City of Hamilton, I say, go full speed ahead. Because I do believe, and I'm not going to be long, I do believe that we as parliamentarians should always act to enhance democracy.

And I do believe that the Minister of Municipalities and Housing will continue to look at this situation to bring about further change that he believes will help promote the democratic process within municipalities, because (I will end as I began) as a parliamentarian, as a person who put together a thesis in electoral reform and believes in the parliamentary process, I cannot support centralisation, because it operates contrary very much to the democratic process.

So, on that note, I will take my seat.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Does any other Member . . . MP Jarion Richardson, you have the floor.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I must especially thank my honourable colleagues from the East End rising today because I was going to make the point of the difference between the Corporation of Hamilton and St. George's.

As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, I grew up on the West End where we have no need of such strange things as these Corporations. But it was very, very helpful to learn of the role of the Corporation of St. George's. I spent a great deal of time in St. George's, and I can appreciate how localised and how important the Corporation is to that community. It's embedded in everything. Everyone in St. George's knows everybody's name. So, all of the aldermen know each other. I mean, it is an incredible working relationship down there and it's very different. The Corporation of St. George's is definitely a centre of culture whereas the Corporation of Hamilton functions more like a centre of commerce.

Mr. Speaker, following on from the Honourable Member from (I want to say) constituency 1, MP Ming. Constituency 1?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

Her story about Brussels sprouts. I have a similar story about corporations. I remember, I only fell asleep in one class in Police Training School and that was city . . . city . . . sorry, Hamilton Traffic and Sidewalk Ordinance 1988. I passed out almost immediately. It was the most boring class that I had ever been in in my life.

And would you believe, Mr. Speaker, on my first foot patrol I come out of the old Hamilton station, I hang a left on to Reid Street, I walk about a block on the junction of . . . I want to say Reid and Burnaby, and an old lady stops and asks me, I kid you not, *Officer,*

can I park here? The first question was the one thing I didn't pay attention to in my whole career. And I will never forget it. So now I don't fall asleep.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, I'm also declaring my interest. I was a ratepayer in the Corporation when I had a company and I rented an office. I believe that a number of people here, in fact, the Honourable Minister as well would be a former ratepayer or current ratepayer.

I'm going to evaluate this argument on the two points that have been made, which is, first, on the need for reform; and secondly, the need for . . . and the need of this Act will be to increase democracy. So, two points, reform and democracy.

I'll start with the fact that the Corporation of Hamilton and the Government's documents outlined in the Government Municipal Reform background paper as well as the corporation's strategic plan, are basically written in the same language. In fact, you would think the same person wrote them.

The Government's stated purpose is to rejuvenate the city of Hamilton into a vibrant economic centre. That's exactly what the Corporation says as well. The Corporation says, increase city living, smart city infrastructure. It says, let's increase the water front development. Let's increase residential population, increase commercial districts. This is all right out of both documents, which is again the Government Municipal Reform vision and the Corporation's Strategic Plan.

The Corporation also goes on to say that they have got all kinds of plans for improving infrastructure, economic vitality, city living. And both the Corporation's budgets and annual reports outline and emphasise an increase on infrastructure improvements and long-term investment in the city, including traffic systems, wastewater improvements, and public amenities.

So, functionally the Government papers and the Corporation of Hamilton are on the exact same page.

Now the question therefore comes . . . this Act does only one thing. And that is abolish elections. So, the question is, If the Corporation of Hamilton and the central Government are on the exact same page, then how does abolishing elections achieve revitalisation of the city? And it simply doesn't. The central question for the House is whether this change in governance actually increases the economic outcomes for the Corporation of Hamilton. And it doesn't.

That disconnect therefore means that one of the arguments for this piece of legislation immediately falls away on the face of it.

Now, as I prepared for this debate, Mr. Speaker, I did look through a number of the Corporation's documents. They do have a webpage, and on that webpage is their strategic plan, annual reports,

business plans, audited financial statements, et cetera, and so forth.

The Corporation is a currently existing and operating municipal authority, and it does deliver on core services, things such as twice daily trash pickup. And I'm sure we all remember when the whole Island had twice weekly trash pickup. But the Corporation does it twice a day. The sanitation, parks maintenance, CCTV, they do all of this stuff. They have approximately 130 employees and an annual budget of around \$21 million, and they manage quite a few municipal assets.

So, as I said, this is a going concern. This is an organisation that already exists and operates as a body responsible for daily municipal administration, and to all appearances, is doing it well.

Mr. Speaker, I'll speak to the evidence of financial integrity and the independent oversight of the Corporation right now, because, again, we are talking about the Corporation. We are doing away with its governance structure. Maybe there's something functionally wrong with it. So, that's why I'm evaluating it. And what I see is that the Corporation's financial statements do receive independent annual audits.

The 2024 audit opinion confirmed the statements present fairly the financial position of the Corporation. I'm looking at the Corporation of Hamilton 2024 financial statements, Mr. Speaker. It recorded approximately \$27.2 million in total revenue in 2024, and tangible capital assets exceeded \$75 million. Accumulated surplus stood at \$61.5 million, and that's in the 2024 financial statements. So, they seem to be doing well insofar as financial integrity and independent audit oversight.

Another thing I thought to evaluate, Mr. Speaker, was strategic planning and organisational governance. Now, as it stands right now, the Corporation of Hamilton operates under a formal strategic planning framework. And those strategic objectives are published and include, as I said before, infrastructure improvement, economic vitality, quality of life improvements, and it's implemented through department business plans and performance monitoring.

The management of this is all overseen through annual reviews and dashboards which track progress. So, it's clear that they are financially sound and well-governed. It's clear that they have a plan that they are following and they are managing that plan.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I thought I should evaluate them on operational delivery and infrastructure investment. As I said before, they are functioning quite well with the trash pickup and maintaining the parks, et cetera. No one's perfect, but they are certainly not so bad that they required us to dismiss them all. Road resurfacing, just right now, on Cedar Park . . . Cedar Hill—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Cedar Avenue. Thank you.

They just tore up a new chunk of road. In fact, on the way here, I walked past the crew that was moving some material from one place to the other, and it was about nine o'clock at night and those guys were still working.

The environmental and infrastructure projects continue apace. And this is outlined in their annual report of 2024. And they continue to invest in public amenities and Heritage assets such as the Fort Hamilton restoration. They also have a vibrant community calendar of events that are taking place not only in the parks but in the City Hall. So, to all outwards appearances, Mr. Speaker, the evidence of their operational delivery and infrastructure investment is for the success.

Mr. Speaker, the public, by the way, thinks the same thing. The Corporation of Hamilton released a satisfaction report. And that independent research shows strong satisfaction with city services among both residents and businesses. Approximately seven in ten businesses report satisfaction with city service with a similar number or proportion of residents, and most businesses in that satisfaction report would recommend the Corporation of Hamilton as a place to do business. So strong financial management, good strategic planning, cooperation in the community, community buy-in and satisfaction.

Moving on, we do have existing government oversight powers. The Municipalities Act already provides for extensive oversight powers for the Minister, as my honourable colleague has already mentioned. The Minister can issue written directions that the Corporation must carry out, and the Minister may assume control of financial governance, or governance of the Corporation in cases of mismanagement. So, the central government is in no way, shape, or fashion cut out of the management of the Corporation, and in fact has substantial and sweeping powers to adjust where they see the Corporation going wrong. And this includes that the Minister can approve certain . . . or must approve certain resolutions and participate in Corporation meetings.

So effectively what we are looking at right now is . . . I have done a performance measurement of the Corporation of Hamilton, and insofar as I can see, they are a successful organisation that is going from success to success.

The Bill that we are looking at today will convert that locally elected authority into one whose members are appointed by the central government, and therefore there is a strong disconnect between the performance of the Corporation as it stands today and this Bill. This Bill, in fact, does nothing to improve on the performance of the Corporation as the Minister has put forward as the reason for the Bill.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, on the second point of evaluation, which is democracy. The Government is making an argument that this will improve democracy in the city, but the simple fact is that it abolishes the

election. And if a democracy is worthwhile and worth propagating, then it's certainly worth fixing and reforming. It's not worth abolishing.

Now, the Government can already legislate on certain electoral changes to the primary Act, and one of the things that's been brought up here is the change in democracy over time, and the Honourable Member from constituency 1 had pointed that out. One of the things that we have done in Bermuda over the last 20 or 30 years is expand the participation in our democracy. In other words, we are bringing more and more people into participating in the electoral process, and that's obviously key to Bermuda's success.

The problem with this Bill, though, is it doesn't do that. It actually limits people from participating in democracy, not including them in.

Mr. Speaker, it also is worth pointing out that municipalities are not national governments. There are millions of municipalities all over the world, and they operate on very different levels for very different purposes, and to that end, there is always some sort of a hybrid mechanism of different kinds of voters. In fact, even here in Bermuda, we see, the Honourable Member who took her seat, Corporation of Hamilton, or I should say the difference between the Corporation of Hamilton and the Corporation of St. George's, where we see more business ratepayers voting in the City of Hamilton than we do in the town of St. George's. And that's fine. They shouldn't be identical. There should be variances between municipalities for their own purposes.

As I said before, the town of St. George's is very localised, it's sort of a heart beating place, it's important to culture, it's important to community. The Corporation of Hamilton is, especially in large parts of it, functionally a commerce centre.

Now, with that being said, Mr. Speaker, and of course that's me coming from the West End as well, where we don't have corporations. The Corporation of St. George's has multiple roles, multiple authorities, multiple lines of accountability. And given all of this taken together, both in terms of its current success, both in terms of this Bill not actually expanding democracy but rather limiting it, in all, this Bill, in no way, shape, or fashion, connects with the stated intent that the Minister laid out. And as such, it leaves the public to entertain ideas about, *Well, why is it happening if it's not doing any of the things that the Government is saying so?*

So, with that being said, Mr. Speaker, I will close with this much: If democracy is so important, and this Government is so concerned about it, then it should get about reforming it and not abolishing it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to speak?

MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good evening, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, and the listening public.

For me, it's not about democracy, it's about results. This Government talks about doing things, great things. One thing that it does very well, it tells us that it does very well, is balancing a budget. Historically, it does that amazingly well.

So, imagine this. The current administration is now going to be in control of the City of Hamilton, and St. George's as well. And what do we see when we look next door? We see the House that we are actually supposed to be in. We already know that there are many government buildings which are in a poor state of repair, badly in need of repair. We have got an asphalt plant which is in Chattanooga (in what?), Tennessee, waiting to come home.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: The point is that when you are looking at the record of the current administration completing projects, when we are talking about housing, what the Minister is saying is, *not soon enough*, we are not going to talk about plans, we are going to go ahead and get it done.

But then we have got the Signature Schools, \$8.8 million and counting, \$16 million and counting for a Casino Commission that we keep talking about and nothing is being delivered. But as long as we talk about it, it's as good as actually getting it done, according to this administration.

What we have seen, though, is with the Corporations of Hamilton and St. George's, they do get the job done.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: They do get the job done.

The people are happy with the level of service. They are happy with the level of representation that they have. And they can see the results. What they don't get is just rhetoric and nothing to show for it, nothing *good* to show for it.

We know that we have got a problem with housing and homelessness. Since November of last year, it went up from 1,101 to 1,331 within four months under the current administration's policy and strategic planning to address the issue of housing.

What we are talking about is performance, and we know, based on history and the pattern of performance and their ways of thinking and doing, that they cannot be relied upon to deliver the results that they say they are going to. They have shown us that this is not going to be the case. Repeatedly. And we would be

fools to go ahead and vote yes to this when the evidence is so strong to the contrary.

We don't need plans, start dates, it's not, you know, soon enough. You know, people are in need of housing. Yes, all of these things are true, and the current condition of people in this country is getting worse.

But what the Government tells you is, *Trust us, we're going to get the job done, don't know when*, and somehow or another we are to believe them that things will be better with them running the municipalities despite the fact that the people who are already running the municipalities are doing a great job that we can see that the people experience. That is not the case with the current administration.

So, it's not about democracy, it's about results. And the Government is not delivering the results, and we should not believe them when they say it's going to be better under them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member . . . ?

MP Swan. Would you like your . . . you have the floor, rather.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, not too dissimilar from my colleague from constituency 1, this is a bit of déjà vu for us because in 2019 we did express concern for the uniqueness of St. George's. And whilst we supported our Government, we had to represent and express our concern on behalf of our constituents. And I will do so once again and be consistent in the way in which I did it at that particular time.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is important to recognise . . . and in doing so, I like to go to our memory lane. It took me back to the 1970s when I had state and local government with Governor Patterson, the former Governor Patterson of Alabama. And he and I used to have many long talks after our evening class there. He used to come down from a little north of Troy down from Montgomery and teach that class. And I would keep him a little late talking about local government.

Local governments are unique to the communities that they serve. And we know that it all started down in St. George's, and the community of St. George's are already very used to and appreciate the significance of having, in addition to a national voice that also has a local responsibility, it has some say in the local community as well.

And when I came to St. George's in earnest (I worked in Tucker's Town in 1980, but when I came to St. George's in earnest in 1985), I found a few cousins who were formerly on the . . . and uncles, who were on the Corporation. I always marvelled at Uncle Clinton Hall who was a very flamboyant . . . my grandmother's brother was a very flamboyant common councillor and alderman back in the 1960s and 1970s. I remember

Cousin Gladstone Trott who was a common councillor and an alderman for many years. I became very close to the late Ronald Smith who gave me a lot of advice and encouragement along the way.

I was very good friends with Jimmy Williams and used to meet with Jimmy very regularly with Dr. Snaith and myself. When I first came to St. George's, my mentor and boss, Terry Brennan, made sure that I got to meet the people of the community who had influence. And Jimmy was a common councillor before becoming a Member of Parliament in 1993. That didn't stop us from networking on what was important for the town.

I remember when Mayor Lois Perinchief was the mayor. And I remember when Henry Hayward was the mayor. I remember when George Dowling was the mayor. He was the mayor when my daughter Zindzi was a common councillor in 2020, until she got ill in 2024. I thank the mayor for his support of my daughter when she had to take a sabbatical during that time. Similar to the Members from constituency 3 and constituency 1, we have all had our children as part of the Corporation and as part of the electoral process.

We want to figure out how we can get more people encouraged in the electoral process. I come from the West End, and it wouldn't be such a bad thing if it happened up there, too. But that's not for me. I don't represent the West End, but I do have a licence to say one or two things on its behalf because I am a son of that soil as well.

There's no bad time to have democracy. There's no time not to speak up for democracy. Democracy is very important. Like I had to hold my nose once before with the will of my Government, I am holding my nose with a clothes peg today and expressing with my mouth some of the concerns I hear in my community as it relates to the importance.

And let us not forget the significance of mayors like Mayor Michael Jones and the late Kenneth Bascome. May he rest in peace. And people who served and they loved, and nobody can pick them, that little vote that allows people in the community to decide whether or not they are going to vote for Mayor Dowling or Mayor Francis or Mayor Bascome or Mayor Jones.

I call every person who was a mayor "the Mayor" because you are a Mayor Emeritus once you have retired, and they still make invaluable contributions and they will still come and sit with me in my clinics and give advice and call me and say, *Listen, this is important for the community*.

I remember when I used the canvass back in 1998. And I remember the words of David White, the editor of *The Royal Gazette*, who said to me, he said, *Never lose sight that St. George's has always been a working town*. There is a balance that's needed between the importance of residences and the importance of businesses in the works. Because when I came to St. George's in 1985—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —when I came to St. George's in 1985, I came there to run a business on behalf of the Government. I ran a quango, one of the largest employers for Bermuda in St. George's in 1985, employed many people. And I worked closely with the Corporation of St. George's. I worked closely with the Government who had a depot in St. George's. We had the western depot, we had the quarry, we had the central depot . . . so there was good coordination. So, I see the wisdom of having both sides, a hybrid, in work.

And I have asked that . . . I will table a few things with you, Mr. Speaker, and I will do it electronically by sending it to Mr. Lamb. I will table an article where the [former] Minister Roban, when these same types of comments were made, when we supported in the vote that he took on board our comments. I have tabled that article. I have also tabled the debate from 2019 and what it contained, and indeed the vote that's taken place, so that I can corroborate what I am saying is consistent with what I said at that particular time.

But the challenges that we have makes eminent good sense for us to enlist persons even outside of the community when it comes to technical expertise as what is contained in the Bill as well because, yes, we do have lawyers and we do have persons with engineers and technical expertise. But whether or not those who are there are available is another thing. We would not want to be limited not to be able to look outside.

And many of us who come from outside of St. George's have come to love St. George's. Notwithstanding many people would say we all come from St. George's. I can prove that. I can prove that my Anderson family have origins in St. George's. I can prove that my Hall family and Burrows family have origins in St. George's.

An Hon. Member: I am a thoroughbred.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And we are all thoroughbreds under the umbrella of Christ. And so, I'm not accepting that.

But I'm here to tell you that, yes, we are special in St. George's. And as such, we are expressing how special we are. And so, as we did in 2019, we are prevailing upon the Minister on behalf of our constituents. And we are doing so again. But as I did in 2019, I'll do so again, Mr. Speaker. I will support the Bill that's been presented as it stands similar to what it was (well, exactly the way it was) prior. I will do likewise again.

But I felt duty-bound to just refresh and I provide for tabling that of which was said then and that which was said now and that which was done then and that of which I will do now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member. Does any other Member . . .

Minister . . . Minister Rabain.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of my fellow Minister in bringing this Bill as I stood in support of the Minister when he brought the Bill in 2019.

While I know times change and people's ability . . . the way they view things does change and they are able to move forward, Mr. Speaker, and I do respect that. You absolutely have to.

Mr. Speaker, what I have not heard (and I do want to have just a small opportunity to speak to) is the actual Bill. We have heard all sorts of reasons why things should stay the same. One thing that I did hear that I actually found offensive is a Member standing up and saying that, *We have come up with a compromise for voting*. Mr. Speaker, there should be no compromise for voting. There shouldn't be. And because the only thing that we can do is come up with a compromise, we have now said *Let's revamp this completely*, so we can have municipalities that are in sync with what the rest of the Island is doing while still retaining the ability to work by themselves to do the things that they need to do.

I have not heard anything coming from anyone [who has] spoken today that says that if this Bill passes . . . nothing that has convinced me that the municipalities will operate worse than what they're operating now. I know some persons would like to say that. But Mr. Speaker, history will state that this Progressive Labour Party has won three elections in a row based on the fact that the people trust that we are leading them in the right direction.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Virtually just over a year ago, we won yet another election that tells us that the people trust what we are doing.

And so, when we hear comments like that coming from someone who was removed after six months—

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I don't understand how anyone can actually listen to anything that he says. I'm not even sure if it was six months.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I can't even be sure why he would get up and continue, why a Member in here would get up and continue to speak about this Progressive Labour Party and about the things they cannot accomplish when in the dark of the night they did what they did.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to move forward. I understand completely where we are.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: [Microphone off]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: But Mr. Speaker, as I said, I want to speak to the Bill.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: The Member is intentionally misleading the House by that comment of what was done in the dark of the night. That is not true. It was done democratically.

The Speaker: You noted that I stopped him before he went down that road. I called him as he started and told him it's time to move on. Before he—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: It is just important for the record to correct that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: —finished it. Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Just keep it on a higher ground. We have had a good tone all night.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, as I said, let us focus on the Bill because I don't think this part of the Bill has been articulated to the people listening to what has been said today.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister does not get to just nilly-willy appoint anyone he wants to the municipalities. Mr. Speaker, a committee of persons who live, who reside, do business or work in the municipalities must form a Selection Committee. That Selection Committee then picks, nominates people to the Minister to become part of the municipality, Mr. Speaker. So, to say that the voice—

Mr. Jarion Robinson: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Minister has more than one

method, and he is just talking about that one method of a committee. There's a direct appointment as well.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I will continue to talk about the part of the Bill that I am talking . . . I am speaking about the part of the Bill that still gives a voice to the persons within the municipality.

And so those persons, that Selection Committee, will then offer nominations to the Minister to choose from to appoint, Mr. Speaker. So, the idea that the voice of the people of the municipality is completely removed from this process is simply not true, Mr. Speaker. And so, with that I just wanted people to understand that that does exist because everything that we have heard today and everything that we have heard spoken makes it seem as if the Minister himself, with no input from anyone else, just gets to appoint people to the municipalities. And that is simply just not true, Mr. Speaker.

And for that reason, I fully support this Bill, as I supported it in 2019, as most of my colleagues, all of my colleagues supported it in 2019, and I support it in 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

None other?

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important that we look back at the history of this particular matter. And I think it's particularly interesting that when we look at the Hansard, because Mr. Speaker, it was exactly seven years ago. It was on March 13, 2019, that, in a different place, we were debating this exact same piece of legislation. And it is particularly interesting that the arguments are the same then as they are now. The challenge is that seven years have gone in between.

And why is that, Mr. Speaker? It is because millions of dollars of taxpayer money were spent challenging the decision of Parliament. And whether it was our Supreme Court, whether it was our Court of Appeal, or whether it was the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, all ruled that Parliament is supreme, and Parliament has the power to act. Those are the principles. And so, nothing contained inside this legislation can be even deemed as contrary to law.

Now, I will revise the speech or reprise the speech that I gave seven years ago, Mr. Speaker, because it's important to remember where this came from.

The Progressive Labour Party did not get elected in 2017 and say, *You know what, we want to fully commit to municipal reform*, et cetera, all the rest. It became an issue of necessity. And it is important that people understand what we are dealing with when

talking about a country trying to plan national infrastructure, and what happens when there is a body of persons who may not agree with what a national government is planning.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda is 21 square miles. Bermuda is a small place. We are, you know, one of the smallest places in the world to have multiple levels of government inside of a jurisdiction this small. Many of our other overseas territories are far larger than us and do not have municipalities for their various regions. But of course, because Bermuda is another world, we understand the history and the vestiges and all the rest of the things that came with it.

However, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that I remember that it was the former Minister of Public Works, the Member, the Lieutenant Colonel Honourable David Burch, who, when we came into office to deal with matters related to a national infrastructure plan, wanted to make sure that we had an upgrade to our sewage systems in the country.

And I remember that there was a conversation and discussion that was held with the Corporation of Hamilton, who, of course, as we know, Mr. Speaker, and I mean, it is public record, so I'll say it, pumps raw sewage or lightly treated sewage onto the South Shore.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Grease balls.

Hon. E. David Burt: Still happening. We know the issues that would happen and all the rest. We got it.

And so, the whole issue is, let's go ahead and commit to the work. And this was a whole master plan, which would tie in from St. George's. It would tie in from the West End, would tie in Central, all these lines which have been digging, et cetera, all the rest.

And guess what the Corporation of Hamilton said? [They] told the Minister of the central government, who was going to pay for a countrywide sewer system, *No*.

An Hon. Member: That's right.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, let's go back to the origin of where this started from, Mr. Speaker. That's where it was, because the Cabinet said that we cannot have sub-regional bodies that will tell the elected government, who has the responsibility for providing for the people of this country, making sure that we upgrade the infrastructure to make sure that we are not dumping raw sewage out onto the South Shore, to make sure that we can tie things together at once.

What sense does it make that a 21-square-mile Island would have two separate sewage systems, Mr. Speaker?

But guess who it made sense to? The people at the Corporation of Hamilton.

Now, some may wonder what interest they may have had in retaining their own sewage system, Mr. Speaker, but that's not for discussion here. We hear

a whole lot of conversations. And let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, I accept the position of the Honourable Members who got voted in from the Progressive Labour Party from the East End. I have got it. They want their own separate Act, the same thing which they said seven years ago. And the Minister will undertake to go through that process.

But what we will not do, Mr. Speaker, is allow for seven more years to go, because as has been stated, and the legal advice is clear, if we make adjustments and changes to legislation that has already been vetted by the Supreme Court, by the Court of Appeal, and by the Privy Council, we can have another seven years before this Government or a future Government has to deal with the major infrastructure issues of this country.

Those are the facts. So, I get it. I understand the perspective. But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. It is important for the Government to govern. It is important for us to make sure that we do not have sub-regional bodies that will have the ability to say, *No, you cannot build national infrastructure because we want our own little piece of the rock*. That is not the way that you have modern governance. It is not the way that it works. It is not the most efficient way.

How on earth would you have two separate sewer systems? How on earth would you have two separate electric grids? How on earth, if we are talking about smart cities and building and things, is the Corporation of Hamilton going to say, *no, no, no, no, no*?

Do we have those problems with the Corporation of St. George's? No.

But the reality is that we have a Municipalities Act that governs both. And the legal advice back then and now was this is the direction of travel which we have to go to. So, I accept the position that was raised by Members in the east that they want their own Act and they don't want to be tied in together. Got it.

The former Deputy Premier accepted that position and gave an undertaking when this Bill was last debated exactly seven years ago. And the same undertaking has been made today. But what we must do is move forward on this seven years' delayed legislation, which delayed progress for seven years and spent countless amounts of taxpayer dollars on both sides to arrive at something that everyone knew from the beginning. Parliament is supreme. Parliament has the right to decide.

That, Mr. Speaker, is why we are here today. And so, I am sure that we will hear other persons talking about matters related to democracy and matters related to, *Oh, people have the right to vote* and all the rest. People did have the right to vote, Mr. Speaker. They voted in a national election to elect a Parliament to make the laws for this country. That is what we do. That is where we sit. And these are the decisions that are being made in the interests of the people.

The Minister has made the arguments. Other persons made the arguments about there is still local

representation. There's still the ability. There's still all those types of things.

But let's make sure that we are clear in this. You cannot advance national policy when you would have persons who will, for whatever reason or not, say, *No, we cannot have a national sewage system. No, we cannot have a national system* because they retain the right to do so under the laws of this House. That does not make sense.

And that is the reason, Mr. Speaker, why this Government, seven years later, will advance this piece of legislation today, because it's the right thing to do for this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? None—oh. MP Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am conscious of the hour, so I will try and keep my points brief—

Hon. E. David Burt: Hopefully as brief as you were seven years ago.

Mr. Scott Pearman: —before . . . we are hearing more about the seven years from the Premier. We will get to that in a minute.

But before I start, Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard the Honourable Minister declare his interest. But let me not make that same mistake. Conyers, Dill & Pearman, where I am as a lawyer, is a ratepayer in the City of Hamilton, and I declare that. And I am sure the Minister will appreciate he has interests as well in buildings in Hamilton.

Mr. Speaker, just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should do something. What the courts have decided in the intervening seven-year period, since we sat in the other place and debated this Bill, is that this Parliament and this Government does have the power to do it. They decided no more, they decided no less.

As the Premier said, it was an issue of parliamentary sovereignty. Just because you can do something, however, does not mean you should do something. And whether or not you should do something ultimately depends on whether or not it is the right thing to do.

The Minister, in his brief to this House, made a number of points about what this Bill is not. And I would just like to touch on those points. He said firstly, *This is not a takeover of the Corporations*. Then he said, *This is not an asset grab*. Really? I am not convinced by either argument. If this is not a takeover, then what is?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: A hostile takeover of the Corporations is when you remove the democratically elected people and you put in people who are appointed either directly or indirectly by the Minister.

And I accept that there is some form of indirect control as well as direct control. And if it's not an asset grab, well again, would we be standing here having this debate if there were no assets in the Corporations? I very much doubt it. I'm not convinced.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am giving a point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading the House. Because the arguments he is making today are completely different to the arguments he made seven years ago. Because seven years ago, he admitted that this was not an asset grab. So, either he was misleading the House then or misleading the House now. I would invite him to clarify his position.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh-oh! Which one is it?

The Speaker: Member.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I do not accept the characterisation the Premier has just given to this House. Seven years ago, I stood up and I made a speech against this very Bill. Tonight, I stand up and make a speech against this very Bill.

What I am addressing now—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Scott Pearman: —without misleading the House in any way—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me. The Honourable Member to be in the House. And I will quote from the ¹Hansard, from Mr. Scott Pearman. He said, and I quote, "No, no, it is not an asset grab by the Government because the entities will remain, the corporations will remain." Close quote.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh!

¹ *Official Hansard Report*, [13 March 2019](#), page 1168
Bermuda House of Assembly

Hon. E. David Burt: Either he was misleading the House then or he is misleading the House now, Mr. Speaker. But he cannot change his position.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Should I, should I give the words some context? “No, no, this is not an asset grab by the Government.” How’s that for sarcasm, MP—Premier?

Anyway, the point I was making is what the Honourable Minister—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Come on.

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: As I have said, the Honourable Member was misleading the House. He either was misleading the House then or [is] misleading the House now. But he cannot have two different positions on the same piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am going to be directed by you, Mr. Speaker.

Shall I continue?

The Speaker: I’m trying to find the right context for this in that . . . you got to see. It has been seven years and in seven years people’s viewpoints can change. I give that.

Wait, wait, wait. Don’t shake heads yet. I am saying your viewpoints can change in seven years.

If your viewpoint has changed, different from what was said, then it has changed. But if your viewpoint is the same as it was seven years ago, then it hasn’t changed.

But it just needs clarity on where it is.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I would be very happy to clarify. Thank you for your direction.

My viewpoint has not changed just as I thought it was an asset grab seven years ago. So, too, do I stand here tonight and say it is an asset grab today. And I am not, therefore—

The Speaker: Wait, wait—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. No point of order. The comment that was read earlier was actually

from the Hansard. And Hansard said that he indicated it wasn’t an asset grab.

Mr. Scott Pearman: That was a sarcastic remark, Mr. Speaker. *No, no, this is not an asset grab*, i.e., question, [mark].

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I mean, listen, I have a lot of points, Mr. Speaker. It was the Honourable Minister who stood up and said that this was not an asset grab. And I have merely said that I find his arguments unconvincing. And if you would like me to move on, I will. But I do not accept that seven years ago, the quote that the Premier has just thrown at me—

Hon. E. David Burt: It’s in Hansard! *No, no, it is not an asset grab by the Government.*

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: And if he insists, Mr. Speaker, I will now address the Premier in this way, which is whatever it was seven years ago, as we stand here tonight, I am wholly unpersuaded by the Minister’s arguments that it is not an asset grab this evening. And I hope that that puts paid to the Premier’s intervention.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: But seeing as he’s intervened, let’s talk about some of the remarks that he made. Because what he said is the reason we are coming back for all of this is because he has been stifled for seven years. Because seven years ago, this Government, with what money (I would ask) went to build a national sewage system. And they had their plans stifled by some municipal authority.

Well, I would respectfully remind the Premier of a point that was made by his very Deputy, by the very Minister who presented the Bill, and indeed by MP Fahy behind me. At any point in the last seven years, Honourable Premier, the Minister could have stepped in and intervened. If you wanted that intervention, if you wanted that sewer system dragged through and pushed through, you had the power, you had the statutory power, as both—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable and Learned Members is misleading the House, because clearly, that was the very first issue that we raised. It was not

the law that was passed. The Municipalities Act gave us the right to possibly and go ahead and direct. And it was the legal advice that says, no, we do not.

Now, the Honourable Learned Member, if he wants to become the Attorney General and the legal counsel of the country, then that's fine. But the fact is, that was the advice that the Government had, and that is the same exact points that were made in the legislature when we debated this seven years ago.

The Speaker: The Premier has cleared out the legal advice that was provided.

Mr. Scott Pearman: There we are.

The Speaker: And they went by the legal advice that was provided.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Well, if the legal advice is the reason that nothing's happened for seven years, then let's blame the lawyers and not the Corporations, shall we? In any event, what is happening—

An Hon. Member: He's right.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I was saying the other point. There was another denial by the Honourable Minister. He said it was not a takeover. And we were wondering whether or not this would be happening, if both of the Corporations didn't have something worthy of controlling, worthy of grabbing. And I think that is an important word, *control*. Because, make no mistake, if this Bill passes here, and in another place, and if it is signed into law by the Governor, the Minister will have control of the Corporations, direct or indirect.

And as someone behind me earlier in the debate, I think from the other side, *one man, one vote*, if we can still say one man, in this day and age (perhaps we shouldn't, *one person, one vote*), it is now *no person, no vote*. And it's interesting, isn't it? Because so far, we've not heard anyone from the Government address the issue of those who are now being denied the vote, namely the ratepayers of the Corporations.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's a great word in history that launched the sailing of ships and massive wars, and that is *no taxation without representation*. Well, that is precisely what is being introduced tonight. And it's a principle that has been fought over, and it's a principle that's important. And I think we really must be careful that we don't have a drift towards corporations of cronyism.

So, Mr. Speaker, what should we do?

Well, rather than just trotting out a Bill from seven years ago, this Government could think big; it could think bold. Where are the great cities of the world going? They are going towards elected democracies. They are instituting mayors, writ large, to run these great cities. So why not two of Hamilton? Perhaps we should have a directly elected mayor of Hamilton,

elected by the entire Island. There have also been some suggestions by the Honourable Members for St. George's, and it wasn't just having their own Act, as the Premier said. If one listened to the speeches that were made, at least two out of three, and possibly all three, mentioned a hybrid system. It was better than what we got tonight.

So again, I made the suggestion, to no avail, the other day, but perhaps the Honourable Minister might want to rise and report and consider the submissions from his own MPs in the back and see whether or not at least some bit of democracy would be better than none at all.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps one of the most famous advocates for democracy in history was the Athenian, Pericles of Athens. He said this, "Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it." *Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it*. Tonight, we can either vote for this Bill, or we can defend the freedom of the democratic vote.

And I respectfully suggest we should all have the courage to defend democracy. *Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it*.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this time? None other? Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find it rather rich that the Honourable Member who just took his seat, talked about freedom and the issuing of freedom. I just find that rather rich knowing the history of this country.

An Hon. Member: Explain it. Why?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You can read between the lines.

An Hon. Member: No, I don't want to read between the lines.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a few things. And when you talk about—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the municipalities, and let's talk about the city, the Corporation of Hamilton for just a second. If memory serves me correct, a certain Minister from the OBA did take control. And you remember the figure \$18 million? Does that ring a bell with anyone, Mr. Speaker?

What did the taxpayers of the country have to pay because of decisions made by the Corporation of Hamilton? How many millions of dollars did they spend

on the court cases over the last seven years? How many millions of dollars did they spend during that process of protecting the city back in 2010, Mr. Speaker? When they took out full-page ads in *The Royal Gazette* at \$4,500 per page, per day. For months on end, Mr. Speaker, for months on end. And here we are again today.

And as the Premier said, and reminded everyone about the sewage issue, because that was a big issue back then. It was a very big issue. And we still have sewage issues in the city. And I know, and maybe others don't know, but I know that there are current plans for the city to revamp the sewage system that they put in several years ago.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's things like that which is why you need a joined-up organisation. And I will say "organisation" to run certain segments of our country.

The people of this country, Mr. Speaker, voted in the Progressive Labour Party three times since 2017. And when they were, because Members over on the other side talked about trust. *You want us to put the trust in the hands of a Minister.* Well, that trust in the Minister came from the people of this country in the general election. If they had an issue with the way we were running the country, they would have booted us out, Mr. Speaker. But instead, they re-elected us three times.

And you want to talk about trust? That Honourable Member who talked about trust sat in a seat for six months. And we saw what unfolded in the paper over that period of time.

And you talk about trust? But that's why the people of this country trust us.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Let's—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order. Come on.

The Speaker: Let's, let's not go down that road.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Let's not go down that road.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's why the people of this country keep voting us in, Mr. Speaker, because they trust us.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They trust us to run the country and to look after the finances of this country. And they will continue to do so.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I heard the East End MPs talk tonight and talk with passion and talk with care about the people they represent. And it's not lost on me, and it's not lost on their colleagues. We hear them loud and clear.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what the former Deputy Premier of the Progressive Labour Party said back then. It's that when this Bill passes tonight, the first call that will be made tomorrow will be to the MPs from the East End. And let's talk about how we can move forward together with the people of St. George's. And that's what we will do, Mr. Speaker.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy Speaker.

House in Committee at 10:49 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

MUNICIPALITIES REFORM ACT 2026

The Chairman: Members, we are in Committee of the whole [House] for the Bill entitled [Municipalities Reform Act 2026](#). I call on the Minister responsible.

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that . . . I would like to move clauses 1 through 12.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider clauses 1 through 12.

Are there any objections? There are none.

Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, as stated previously, this Bill would abolish municipal elections, provide [for the] appointment of Members of the Corporations, and make consequential amendments to the Municipalities Act 1923 (the principal Act). It would also make certain directions given by the Minister to a Corporation subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Clause 1, Madam Chairman, is self-explanatory.

Clause 2 abolishes municipal elections. Elections are replaced by selection and appointment of Members. Apart from clause 5, the remainder of this Act makes consequential amendments.

Clause 3 amends section 1(1) of the principal Act to repeal various definitions that are applicable only

to municipal elections as there will be no more municipal elections.

Clause 4 amends section 7 of the principal Act. Subsections (4)(b) and (8) are amended to delete references to being elected and to insert a reference to being appointed.

Clause 5 amends section 7AA of the principal Act by amending subsection (1A)(a) and inserting subsection (3A). The amendment to subsection (1A)(a) clarifies that if an act or thing done by a Corporation would otherwise not be construed as being for municipal purposes, it will be deemed to be for municipal purposes if done under a direction by the Minister. A direction will have legislative effect, and therefore be a statutory instrument and subject to parliamentary scrutiny, if it expands the meaning of “municipal purpose” by directing the Corporation to do anything that would otherwise not be for a “municipal purpose” (see the Privy Council decision of *Mexico Infrastructure Finance LLC v The Corporation of Hamilton* [2019] UKPC 2, at paragraphs 57 to 59, which construes “municipal purpose” very narrowly). Subsection (3A) therefore provides that directions given by the Minister to a Corporation under section 7AA(3)(aa) of the principal Act (directing the Corporation to do any acts or things that the Minister, acting under the general authority of the Cabinet, requires the Corporation to do) are statutory instruments subject to parliamentary scrutiny by the negative resolution procedure.

Clause 6 repeals the following sections of the principal Act, which currently provide for municipal elections, as there will be no more municipal elections: section 9 (municipal elections); section 9A (eligibility to vote in municipal elections); section 9B (application of Parliamentary Election Act 1978 as modified by order); section 9BA (registration of municipal residents); section 9C (registration of business ratepayers); section 9D (requirements for registration in the business ratepayers’ register); section 9E (registration of persons in business ratepayers’ register); section 9F (maintenance of business ratepayers’ register); section 9G (objections to registration); section 9H (application of Parliamentary Election Rules 1979); and section 91 [*sic*] (false statements, et cetera). It also repeals section 17—

The Chairman: Minister, that's 9I.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Pardon?

The Chairman: [It is section] 9I.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: [Section] 9I, sorry.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Sorry, thank you. Thank you. It's been a long day, Madam Chairman. Thank you for that.

It also repeals section 17 (tenure of office) of the principal Act. The section currently provides that a Member of a Corporation holds office from the date of his election until the declaration of the results of the next ordinary municipal election. Under the repealed section 9(4)(a), the next ordinary municipal election would have been a day in the week following the first Sunday in May (in other words, between 4 and 8 May 2026).

Clause 7 inserts sections 17A and 17B in the principal Act. Section 17A provides that the current elected Members’ term of office will end on 11 May 2026 (at the end of that day). Section 17B provides that the Minister shall appoint Members in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Schedule (inserted by clause 11), and their term of office will begin on 12 May 2026 (immediately after the elected Members’ term ends).

Clause 8 amends section 18 of the principal Act to delete the references to the election and nomination of candidates and replace them with references to appointment.

Clause 9 repeals section 18A (determination of proportion of business ratepayers’ Councillors to residents’ Councillors) of the principal Act, as this is part of the current election process.

Clause 10 amends section 19 (vacancies) of the principal Act to reflect that there will no longer be municipal elections, and to provide that notice of a vacancy will no longer be published by the Secretary or the Mayor (as the case may be) in the *Gazette*, but will rather be given in writing by the Secretary to the Minister.

Clause 11 inserts the Fourth Schedule, which provides for the appointment of Members and for their tenure of office. For each Corporation, the Mayor and four Councillors will be appointed by the Minister. The other four Councillors will be appointed on the recommendation of a Selection Committee appointed by the Minister. It also provides that the name of every person appointed to the office of Mayor or Councillor of a Corporation, and any vacancy in such office, be published in the *Gazette*.

Clause 12 revokes the Municipalities (Election) Order 2015.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 12?

There are no others. Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: Would you . . . it has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I move . . . I move the clauses 1 through 12.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 12 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 12 passed.]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections?

There are none. So moved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Municipalities Reform Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 10:57 pm

[Hon. Dennis P. Lister, Jr., Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

MUNICIPALITIES REFORM ACT 2026

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled Municipalities Reform Act 2026 being reported to the House as printed?

An Hon. Member: Objections.

The Speaker: Objections and names are being called.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: We are officially . . . Mr. Somner, have we officially started the two minutes?

[No audible response.]

The Speaker: Okay.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Can I ask exactly what is attempted to be voted on at this point in time? Because I

understand that there was no objection to the matter being reported to the House. The Bill was approved, it was sent to the House, so I am trying to understand exactly under what Standing Order is an objection currently being launched at this time.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, if I may refer to Standing Orders 29(9) and 29(8). It says *[at] the conclusion of the Committee consideration of the Bill, the Member in charge may move the Bill be reported to the House and the question shall be put without amendment or debate.* That question was put. It was approved without objection.

And Standing Order 29(9), states *When a Bill is reported from the Committee of the Whole House, it shall be [referred] for a Third Reading.*

Those are the Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker. I say that we move to a third reading. The Honourable Members missed their opportunity to object in Committee.

The Speaker: But to be clear, it can still be objected to at the third reading.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: At the third reading, it can be objected at the third reading. So, the time will come at the third reading for it to be objected then. Okay.

We are now at the point where it's been received by the House, and now that there's no other business . . . there's no other business. No other business—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: So, we are now calling for the third reading.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: At this stage.

So, the objection that was just raised will now be put off until the third reading. Now we are at the third reading at this stage.

So, Minister, would you like to do your third reading?

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Municipalities Reform Act 2026 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

An Hon. Member: Objections.

The Speaker: And you are calling for—

An Hon. Member: Names.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: The two-minute clock will start now for Members to be present in order for us to take their names.

[Pause for the ringing of the bell]

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if I may, to refer to Standing Order 30(2).

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: It does say, for “the third reading of a Bill an amendment may be proposed to delete the word ‘now’ and add the words at the end of the question ‘six months hence’; or an amendment may be moved to delete all of the words after [the] word ‘that’ in order to [add] words stating the reason for opposing its passage, but such motion should be strictly relevant to the Bill and not deal with its details.”

So, I am not entirely certain of what . . . so, we are asking . . . I want to make sure that we are clear on what we are voting on at this particular point in time. Because I know that matters are read and referred for the third reading, and then the matters that are stated here strictly state what amendments may or may not be allowed to the motion that is moved by the Member.

The Speaker: At any of the different stages, when we bring it in, and the Chair asks, *Are there any objections?* There is . . . the fact that the question is put, Members have a right to sit here and say nay or yay.

And we are at a stage where the Members have indicated they would like to take a vote on it. And the vote has been called, the two minutes have been given, and in two minutes, about, the two-minute time will be up, and we will take the vote.

[Crosstalk]

[Pause]

The Speaker: You can do your names now.

The Clerk: Okay, Members, the motion is for a third reading by the Minister, and those in favour of the third reading will vote aye. Those opposed to the third reading will vote nay.

DIVISION

[Motion in favour of the third reading on the Bill entitled Municipalities Reform Act 2026]

Ayes: 19

Hon. J. Adams
Pastor L. Bean
Hon. E. D. Burt
Hon. O. Darrell
Hon. Z. J. S. De Silva
Rev. Dr. E. A. Dill
Hon. T. Furbert
Hon. W. L. Furbert
Hon. J. Hayward
Hon. A. Lightbourne
Mr. D. Lister III
Hon. D. V. S. Rabain
Mr. W. L. Scott
Mr. S. Simmons
Mr. H. K. E. Swan
Mr. N. S. Tyrrell
Hon. M. A. Weeks
Mr. P. Wilmot
Hon. K. N. Wilson

Nays: 11

Mr. V. Campbell
Hon. L. C. Cannonier
Dr. D. DeCouto
Hon. M. Fahy
Mr. R. King
Mr. S. Pearman
Mr. J. Richardson
Mr. D. Robinson
Hon. B. Smith
Ms. L. Smith
Ms. R. Tucker

Absent: 5

Mr. C. L. Dickinson
Mr. C. Famous
Ms. L. F. Foggo
Mrs. R. Ming
Mr. J. S. Simmons

The Clerk: Okay, the Ayes are 19, the Nays are 11 [and 5 absent]. The motion is carried.

The Speaker: The third reading has been approved. That now brings us to the motion—

[Motion carried by majority on division: The Municipalities Reform Act 2026 to be given a third reading.]

[No audio]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

Several Hon. Members: No, no.

An Hon. Member: We already voted.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Third time by its title and is now moved.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay

The Speaker: And we will do the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Monday the 16th of March.

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to speak to that? Minister Hayward.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Yes.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST IN BERMUDA

Hon. Jason Hayward: I wish to address a matter regarding English proficiency in Bermuda. I want to make it abundantly clear that this Government will retain the English proficiency test for employees and work permit holders in Bermuda.

Bermuda is an English-speaking country—

An Hon. Member: Last time I checked.

Hon. Jason Hayward: —and it is an expectation that the employees who work within Bermuda have a level of English proficiency. And it's extremely important for a number of reasons.

Mr. Speaker, the previous work permit policies have always had the expectation that workers obtaining a work permit have a level of English proficiency. We trusted that employers were going to do the right thing for many years. And what we found was that there was a flagrant abuse of that policy. As a result of that, when we revised the policy we instituted an English proficiency test to ensure workers emanating from non-English-speaking countries, who did not have a college or university degree from an English-speaking institution, must prove proficiency. And that will remain.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard stories of Bermudian workers who work in a kitchen of . . . in a restaurant that is filled with non-Bermudians, and they speak a different language from that Bermudian, and that person is not able to properly integrate into the work environment within that kitchen. I have heard of young Bermudian landscapers who wanted to build a career in landscaping but have been placed with entire crews that do not speak English and, as a result, cannot communicate with their employees.

Mr. Speaker, I have known of employees who come to the Labour Department to make complaints of abuse and violations to the law but require an interpreter. Similarly, persons make complaints where they are being forced to work outside their provisions within their work permit, and they are unable to communicate to the Immigration Department. These individuals cannot read their employment contracts. They cannot read

the laws of the land that provides them with rights. They do not know their rights because they do not understand their rights.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to business owners who have crews of workers who cannot communicate to each other because they do not speak a common language. I have heard of business owners who then have to hire bilingual supervisors so that they can provide the instruction. But on the days in which those bilingual supervisors cannot show up to work or are on vacation, they have challenges communicating with their staff.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard numerous complaints from Bermudians as it pertains to non-Bermudians providing them with a service, and they are not able to effectively communicate with the service provider.

Mr. Speaker, as Bermuda is a small country, it is important to maintain our cultural identity as well. We simply cannot have growing sub-communities within Bermuda who speak alternative languages and do not communicate in the English language. And, as a result of that, we saw that it was a growing problem, and we sought to address it with an English proficiency test.

Mr. Speaker, it is fundamentally important that persons understand the importance of speaking English in Bermuda. And, as a result of that, this Government will be unwavering in ensuring that workers who enter into Bermuda speak and have a level of English proficiency. I have heard enough from enough employers surrounding the testing scores, and the Ministry of Economy and Labour will put out guidance as it pertains to the testing scores, because some score high in the speaking of English and low in the writing of English. For some occupation categories, the writing of English is less important than being able to articulate in English. And as a result of that, we will ensure that we provide the appropriate guidance.

But rest assured, the test will remain. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

None other?

MP Simmons, are you raising to make a contribution?

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN BERMUDA

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, good evening, sir. I just will speak very briefly on and in support of the Minister as it relates to this one.

I recognise, Mr. Speaker, throughout Bermuda, that we are challenged in labour and that we are also challenged in the way that we relate to each other in our employment and our labour environments.

Mr. Speaker, I struggle on this one because I think that there are those in our community who don't see a problem with our foreign nationals who choose to

speak in their language as they see fit. But, Mr. Speaker, I have existed in environments where our foreign visitors and workers in our different hotels and in our different environments where I have been, from having served in the Police Service, having worked in banks, and also having worked in hospitality and in government.

Mr. Speaker, in this broad spectrum, I must say that we have encountered many who have chosen to converse in their own language, in my humble opinion, for whatever reason they wish to do so.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say this, and I say this delicately and out of respect for our foreign nationals, and I want to *pre-face* this—

The Speaker: Preface.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Preface this . . . it's the first time I've had a challenge.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Because, Mr. Speaker, this subject is a subject that we refuse to address, and we refuse to see it for the value that it is, and it is disrespectful to Bermudians. And we are afraid in our different environments to bring it up because there are those in our community who take exception when we say it and when we are offended by it.

I have been in many circumstances. In hospitality, I mentioned those different occupations that I have been involved in, and it has been very vexatious. But when you bring it up, everybody says, *Why are you making a fuss about that? Why are you upset that I'm speaking in my own language?*

Mr. Speaker, I have to say this, that Bermudians, if they are uncomfortable in environments where the foreigner feels comfortable enough to hold conversations in [their] presence . . . Mr. Speaker, let me say this, if we're going to be frank about this.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Because, Mr. Speaker, I think in a lot of our environments we try to be as accommodating as we can. We try to make people feel comfortable in Bermuda, and I think sometimes Bermudians, as Bermudians, in looking for that level of comfortableness for them, we forget ourselves. And sometimes, Mr. Speaker, I say this with the greatest of respect, we go too far. Sometimes you have to put your foot down. And I think a lot of times, in doing that we feel bad, but we have to realise that sometimes you have to.

I was walking through from the kitchen, and I don't have to express my current capacity in hospitality where I think that if I say it, in most circumstances in the hotel, it is so. But I'll say this, Mr. Speaker: I walked from the kitchen, going into the dining room, and I noticed that from the kitchen to the dining room there was

no English. And there are policies that are in place, and there are procedures that are in place, where English language is encouraged, for a number of reasons, whether it be safety reasons, health and safety, whether it be for, just so that we are able to transition from one department to the next that we have a consistent language. We can't have all departments speaking a different language.

So, I'm walking from the kitchen all the way through to the dining room. No one is speaking English. So, I simply said to the *maître d'*, who was standing there, I said to him, *I don't understand anything that you guys are saying.*

He said to me, *Exactly.*

How do you think I felt? He said, *Exactly.*

I was in another circumstance where individuals know my view as it relates to language in these environments, that we are better served if we do speak English. It is the national language. And the individuals who were in those circumstances chose to take the route they took. And that was . . . *I am not speaking, no, I'm talking in my own language.*

There is nothing more frustrating. Individuals have come into my office at every level I've been in, in hospitality, and have expressed their displeasure with it.

Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat this. There are some things in our Bermudian diaspora, nationally, that affect us. That is a part of our culture. And I will repeat this, Mr. Speaker. Bermudians, we have accepted things. Sometimes, you have to put your foot down.

Now, individuals will say, *but this is not the line in the sand. This is not the time for us to say, you know, that we could . . .* Mr. Speaker, I just believe that we should understand this for the value that it is. And it is out of respect for Bermudians. It isn't difficult for certain parts of our society, certain classes of our society, to accept it because they live very close to the element and the foreign element that lives in this country. For those of us who have some distance between those from overseas speaking these languages and us, we should never feel bad about bringing it up and stating it clearly.

I have to qualify this, Mr. Speaker. I am not against our foreign nationals. I sit in the capacity as chair of the Immigration Board. I am well aware of the behaviour. I'm well aware of the complaints. And I'm well aware of the individuals who now are struggling with this particular exam.

When you decide to travel overseas and become a part of a whole different country, then there are things that happen in that country that you have to accept. There are requirements. And everybody knows the requirements. But, Mr. Speaker, in Bermuda, we relax the requirements because we don't want to offend anybody. We don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. And that is why our foreign nationals on so many issues in this country have absolutely no respect for us.

This is a tough, difficult subject. This is probably a subject no one expects to necessarily come from me because I felt that I had been a part of a society in Bermuda [where] we have tried to work with our different nationalities in this country. But how much more do you want Bermudians to bend?

We say speak English, and suddenly there's a national uproar. What type of foolishness is this? It is the national language. It is simple and it needs to be instituted, and it needs to be; this is what the standard is. And I will say this, Mr. Speaker, I am aware that there are challenges in labour. It is difficult to find Bermudians to fill all the positions that we have.

The challenge that has now started to happen is that in trying to find qualified individuals there is now a difficulty, or perceived difficulty, in finding individuals who speak English to fill those roles. But we have to set . . . if that is the case, then I'm sure that the Ministry will begin the process of looking into how that can be addressed. But until such time, the standard is the standard. And we shouldn't cower from it.

Individuals say this is a small issue. That language is no big thing. Just let them speak in whatever language they want to do and do it. Mr. Speaker, I am speaking of this small issue of language, the smaller, I apologise, issue of language. But I am also speaking about the larger issue of Bermudians always, and the Bermudians always having to bend.

If they say that they feel uncomfortable about something, the minute that they bring it up, all of a sudden individuals say, *You shouldn't feel that way and you have to drop it.* And say, *Oh, now I'm going to do it.* If this is something that is making . . . this is an issue that is making our people in Bermuda uncomfortable, then it needs to be addressed. And it will be addressed. And it has been addressed.

I'll finish on this note, Mr. Speaker, and I say this with the greatest of respect for everyone in Bermuda, my fellow Bermudians. For so long we have had to settle. We have had to say okay, all is well, and have walked away in our own circles feeling as if we have been left behind, we've been ignored, and we have not been listened to. If this is allowed, if it is said in a relaxation, say *Okay, don't worry about the language . . .* this wasn't instituted for nothing. The Minister articulated it. This is part of a greater picture. It's part of a system in Bermuda where we have had to always give, give, give, and give.

So, when did you expect for Bermudians to say they've had enough? There's probably going to be individuals who are going to say, *Well, this is not the issue. Why would you worry about the language. It doesn't matter; this is no big thing.* But feel it for yourself when individuals are standing around talking in their own language, you're not a part of it, and they tell you, *Exactly, exactly.* Something must be done.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke on the fact that we recognise that labour is an issue. We recognise that there are some roles that cannot be filled or are not being

filled by Bermudians, and that it is harder and harder to find those individuals to fill those roles. But on construction sites, for safety reasons throughout our different industries, we must insist that English is the standard language. It must be in writing, it must be on the walls, anything that's giving advice, that it's all done in English, and that is the national language of Bermuda, and that is where we should sit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution at this hour?

Any other Member?

Any other Member? Going once, going twice, it's gone.

Members, thank you for your contribution today, and we will be back here on Monday morning at ten o'clock to do the conclusion of the annual budget debates. So, rest up this weekend, get plenty of down time to relax, and come back for another full day on Monday.

With that, Members, the House now stands adjourned.

[Gavel]

[At 11:29 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Monday, 16 March 2026.]