



2020/2021 SESSION
of the
BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

5 MARCH 2021
Virtual Sitting

Sitting number 8 of the 2020/2021 Session
(pages 513–614)

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

Disclaimer: The electronic version of the *Official Hansard Report* is for informational purposes only. The printed version remains the official record.

BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
VIRTUAL SITTING
5 MARCH 2021
10:05 AM***Sitting Number 8 of the 2020/2021 Session*

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

The Speaker: Members we are now officially into today's session.

Mrs. Beale, will you lead us in prayer? Thank you.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Ms. Kara Beale, Assistant Clerk]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 26 February 2021]

The Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Beale.

Members, the House is now in session.

The Minutes of the meeting of the 26th of February have been circulated. Are there any omissions, corrections or amendments required?

There are none. The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

[Minutes of 26 February 2021 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING****GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA'S RESPONSE
TO COVID-19, AUDITOR GENERAL'S
PUBLIC INTEREST REPORT**

The Speaker: I received the [Government of Bermuda response to the COVID-19, Auditor General's Public Interest Report](#). And that will be tabled for all Members to have a look at, at your pleasure to read through.

APOLOGY

The Speaker: And I also would like to announce that I have received apologies this morning from MP Adams. He is apologising that he will be absent today. And I think we all can support the reason why he is

absent today is that his first child was born last evening. And he is spending time with his family today as a result of that.

So, we would like to offer our congratulations to Mr. Adams and his family on the birth of their first child.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: There are two to be introduced this morning. The first is in the name of the spokesman for the Minister of Youth, Culture and Sport, Minister Furbert.

Minister Furbert, would you like to present . . . well, both papers today. Would you like to present your papers, Minister?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

**NATIONAL SPORTS CENTRE ANNUAL REPORTS
AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE FISCAL
YEARS ENDED 31 MARCH 2012 TO 2015**

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the National Sports Centre Annual Reports and Financial Statements for the Fiscal Years ending the 31st of March 2012 to 2015.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Would you like to present your second?

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
ANNUAL REPORT 2019**

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Human Rights Commission Annual Report for 2019.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Minister.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: This morning there are some seven Statements. The first is in the name of the Premier.

Premier, would you like to present your Statement?

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. And good morning to you and good morning to colleagues.

The Speaker: Good morning.

THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN— IMPLEMENTATION

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in his Statement in Support of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Fiscal Year 2021/22, the Honourable Member, the Minister of Finance captured the essence of the critical nature of rebuilding this economy. Without exception, the world in 2021 is consumed by managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the arena of public health, but equally as important is restoring the economic health of communities and countries.

Mr. Speaker, following an assessment of Bermuda's past performance and current state and with detailed input from all ministries and the broadest possible stakeholder groups, an [Economic Recovery Plan](#) has been devised to renew this economy. The Economic Recovery Plan focuses on the implementation of 30 key initiatives that will boost economic growth resulting in increased employment.

Mr. Speaker, seven key themes emerge from this plan, and it is in these key areas that the economic recovery will be driven. They are as follows:

1. Economic diversification—diversifying Bermuda's economy through growth of new industries; targeting external finance multipliers, separate from a government commitment; energising the private sector to invest and by allowing individual Bermudians themselves to also invest so that the broadest range of Bermudians can benefit.

2. Financial markets—making financial markets work better for businesses and consumers, principally through the lowering of interest rates and supporting the diversification of the banking sector.

3. Infrastructure investment—we must build critical new infrastructure and enhance our existing systems, including urgent attention to water and waste management.

4. Expanding the resident population—the success of the one-year Work from Bermuda Certificate, the repatriation of Bermudians due to the Repatriation and Mixed Status Families Act [Bermuda Immigration and Protection Amendment Act 2020] and the delivery on the promise to introduce the Economic Investment Certificate demonstrate both the demand and the priority of achieving positive net migration, thereby driving growth through the expansion of the working population.

5. Labour market and social development measures—as we continue to deliver on the promise of education reform, the full impact of economic recovery will depend on delivering skills, employment and living wages for workers in Bermuda's future economy.

6. Health care—the introduction of affordable universal health care and the Bermuda Health Plan will lead the much-needed reform of health care delivery in Bermuda.

7. Regulatory framework—the global reach that Bermuda needs comes with global obligations and requires a supportive legal and regulatory framework to encourage the growth of emerging industries.

Mr. Speaker, the 30 key initiatives have been identified following an assessment of numerous policy proposals. These proposals were assessed using three basic metrics—economic impact, fiscal impact and implementation complexity. Mr. Speaker, on March 16, the Honourable Minister of Finance will table for the information of Honourable Members and the public the detail of the Economic Recovery Plan. However, Mr. Speaker, I can advise this Honourable House that initiatives include:

- lowering interest rates to reduce mortgage costs;
- boosting the development of approved residential schemes in the economic empowerment zones;
- the implementation of affordable universal health care;
- the development of a fit-for-purpose water and waste treatment facility; and
- the creation of a National Digital Bank for Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, public officers have been doing more with less for a decade. And the strains on them personally and professionally are real and would be exacerbated by superimposing yet another task on the vital core functions they perform every day in support of this country. In the midst of all that must be done in the vein of economic recovery, mail must still be delivered, roads must still be paved, and legislation must still be drafted and critical government services provided. With the decision to defund vacant but funded posts, there will be a genuine shortage of personnel to deliver on business as usual, never mind additional measures for implementation.

Mr. Speaker, as the Honourable Minister of Finance said last week (and I quote), “the Government knows that a good plan poorly executed can be worse than no plan at all.” It is clear that the scope of the identified priority projects and initiatives will require a dedicated project management office comprising a team of individuals with the experience and skill sets necessary to take good ideas from the pages of an Economic Recovery Plan and execute on them in the name of creating the recovery that Bermuda demands.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the Economic Recovery Plan proposes a governance structure that will see the creation of a dedicated Economic Recovery Project Management Office. This team will require proven experience in planning, stakeholder management, budget and resources management, quality assurance and risk management, knowledge management, and a clear understanding of various public and private delivery models. It will be necessary to bring to the fore our best and brightest from the public and private sectors and potentially from an international talent pool. The urgency of this mission is such that we must be determined to secure the right team.

Mr. Speaker, reporting to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Development, the Economic Recovery Project Management Office will have one mission: to ensure the effective implementation of the 30 highest-priority economic policies that provide a clear path to growth, employment and greater economic equity. The work in fulfilling this mission will be supported by all ministries and all government quangos.

Mr. Speaker, this dedicated Project Management Office will work closely with the Department of Economic Development, who are leading on the execution of policies that cross ministries. In addition to monitoring the successful implementation of policies, there will be regular reporting on the overall implementation status, risks, and resource requirements. Needless to say, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance will play a critical role in implementation by regularly updating the economic model underpinning the economic recovery plan and determining the impact of the plan on related processes such as the budget and investor management. On this and other related activities, the Ministry will be asked to report monthly to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Development.

Mr. Speaker, this is work that cannot wait. The Government’s role is to create the conditions in which economic recovery can occur—not just the traditional recovery of business that often follows economic downturns, but the recovery of families and hard-working people whose labour also drives this economy and who we pledged in the last election would become owners in this economy. As the Honourable Member, the Minister of Finance noted last week, we are set now on a clear path to recovery, and the Government will provide the leadership demanded in these times to ensure that path is smoothed by effective

and equitable implementation of an agenda for economic renewal. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Deputy Premier.

Deputy Premier, would you like to present your Statement at this time?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead, Deputy.

REPORTING PROGRESS ON THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on the progress undertaken toward the elimination of single-use plastics in Bermuda. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we have produced a policy paper, “Regulating Single-Use Plastics in Bermuda—An Opportunity to Clean up Our Act.” The paper outlines the direction the Government wishes to go in order to [eliminate single-use plastics](#). We intend to publish this paper for discussion so that the general public, businesses and environmental organisations have their say and contribute to the solution.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members may recall that in the November 2018 Speech from the Throne the Government spoke of the impact of plastic on the environment and how it has become a horrible global issue, and noted in particular that Bermuda must act to preserve its oceans from plastic waste. This view has been echoed more recently in December of 2020 when the Secretary General of the United Nations [UN], António Guterres, made a statement concerning the state of the environment and climate change. He stated (and I quote) that “Humanity is waging a war on nature. This is suicidal. Our oceans are overfished—and choking with plastic waste.” The UN has made tackling global warming one of its central objectives for 2021, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has highlighted its focus on marine litter.

As if the problems that plastics pose for the environment and our oceans, alongside the fact that plastic is contributing to climate change, are not enough, there is also growing evidence that plastic pollution in the air, on land and in our oceans and seas is having a detrimental effect on human health and well-being.

Evidence continues to grow about the potential harm that microplastics in particular have on human health, especially when they enter the ocean’s food chain, which threatens our food security. Microplastics are those pieces of plastic that measure less than 5 [millimetres]. Larger pieces of plastic remain in the environment and then break into smaller and

smaller pieces. These smaller pieces will remain in the ocean for decades to centuries and are of increasing concern because they represent an increasing proportion of marine litter. Microplastics are known to interact with a wide range of species (plankton, fish, clams, seabirds, marine mammals) in diverse marine habitats. Research is ongoing, but a recent study conducted by the University of Newcastle in Australia has estimated that the average human consuming everyday food items may ingest up to 5 grams of plastic a week, or the equivalent of one credit-card worth of plastic.

Therefore, because of these three threats—climate change, ocean pollution and human health—the Government has committed to eliminating single-use plastics by 2022. We have also committed to educating the public about recycling and reusable items, and encouraging greater sensitivity to the ocean and its importance in our lives. One of the many unfortunate side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is that there is a projected 30 per cent increase in plastics waste in 2020 compared to 2019. So this makes this initiative even more important.

Mr. Speaker, you may ask, *What are single-use plastics?* Single-use plastics (SUPs) are basically plastic products that are used only once before being disposed of. They are made particularly from fossil-fuel-based chemicals (petrochemicals), and they are meant to be disposed of right after use, often in mere minutes. They are most commonly used for packaging and service-ware, such as bottles, wrappers, straws, cutlery and carrier bags. As of 2017, roughly 348 million metric tonnes of plastics are produced each year, and this figure is rising. If left on the current trajectory, the amount of plastic produced will double in the next 10 years. But of this, approximately half of all production is specifically for single-use purposes.

SUPs are also the top 10 most common items found in international coastal clean-up efforts. Bermuda is no different, and although much of the plastic waste in the ocean around us and found on our beaches does not originate in Bermuda, we still need to play our part in the global community's effort to eliminate plastic waste.

Mr. Speaker, we are proposing to approach the elimination of SUPs in three phases, as follows:

1. The first phase will involve beginning public information campaigns on SUPs and holding public consultations this year to review the proposed bans. We appreciate that we must consult with businesses and the hospitality industry to ensure that they will be able to obtain alternative items to those items that will be banned by legislation. After consultation we will introduce legislation to prohibit the importation of certain SUPs by 2022. As part of the first phase we intend also to introduce legislation to ensure that non-plastic alternative products to plastic products subject to any ban are fully biodegradable. During this first phase companies and suppliers will be given time to

use up their existing stock of SUPs products that have already been imported.

2. The second phase will see legislation to prohibit the sale, distribution and use of the banned SUPs. This, as noted, will give importers and businesses time to use up their existing stocks, but also give them time to source biodegradable alternatives.

3) The third phase of the elimination of SUPs will see public consultations recommence after the first importation ban in order to assess the effect of the bans and to consult on the next round of plastic items to be banned with a view to introducing legislation to prohibit the importation, sale, distribution and use of further banned SUPs by the end of 2025. This phase will also see public education campaigns on the dangers of SUPs be continued. Some examples of items that may be subject to the ban may include, but are not limited to:

- styrofoam products such as food service containers—for example, clamshell and hinge containers, bowls, plates, hot and cold beverage cups;
- plastic utensils, which include cups, spoons, forks and knives, lids, straws and stirrers;
- plastic bags that are used to bag food and goods at restaurants, retail outlets and grocery stores; and
- plastic-lined paper cups and food containers.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture I must recognise the retailers, grocery stores, restaurants and hoteliers that have already led the way by replacing plastic bags, containers and straws with green products and encouraging the use of reusable shopping bags. They have demonstrated that this can be done.

Mr. Speaker, I was made aware of the following quote (and if you will allow me to read it): "It's pretty amazing that our society has reached a point where the effort necessary to extract oil from the ground, ship it to a refinery, turn it into plastic, shape it appropriately, truck it to a store, buy it, and bring it home is considered to be less effort than what it takes to just wash the spoon when you're done with it."

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will agree that together we can make the effort to eliminate single-use plastics, to play our part in reducing climate change, to stopping marine litter and improving human health. We look forward to moving forward with this initiative for the betterment of our environment and our people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Furbert, would you like to present your Statement at this time?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, Minister. Go right ahead.

ABOLITION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased this morning to update this Honourable House on the changes in the delivery of human resource services and more specifically the discontinuance of Head 26, the [Department of Human Resources](#), effective April 1, 2021. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will recall the establishment of the Department of Employee and Organisational Development in April 2019 and the intention to abolish the Department of Human Resources and amalgamate the eight satellite offices under one department.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members are reminded that as a first step the Compensation and Benefits Section, formerly of the Accountant General's Department and the Management Consulting Section, formerly of the Cabinet Office was moved to the new department. The planned amalgamation of the Department of Human Resources and other satellite offices will alter the current decentralised human resource service delivery model which has grown organically over the years and no longer effectively meets the needs of the government. Mr. Speaker, during the past year, the Chief Employee and Organisational Development Officer and her transition team have been engaged in the detailed planning and implementation required to eliminate the duplication and streamline the delivery of all human resource services.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the provisions of the Conditions of Employment and Code of Conduct, approval has been granted for the transfer of staff from several departments to the new Department of Employee and Organisational Development. Approximately 30 staff will be affected in this phase of the transition.

Mr. Speaker, it is not expected that all staff will physically relocate in the immediate short term, though some will. Each Ministry will be assigned an HR Business Partner. It is anticipated that some HR Business Partners will co-locate with the Ministry to which they are assigned. The business partner will be the Ministry's primary advisor on the alignment of human capital, with the delivery of programmes and services in accordance with the priorities set out in the Ministry and its associated departments' business plans. This represents a more deliberate staffing approach than is currently the case.

Mr. Speaker, a talent management strategy will be completed, and the HR Information Management System will be leveraged to address the HR database, digitised records management, employee and management self-service, and over time full automation of HR administrative services with enhanced con-

trols, and compliance with the data privacy requirements.

Mr. Speaker, the department will take a whole-system approach to the delivery of human resources and organisational development services. It is expected that the Government will commence a change in management process that establishes service delivery standards and measures success. Phase one of a new automated performance management system, specifically online performance appraisals for BPSU employees, is at the early stages of implementation, and work has commenced on phase two that will see the system applied across all job categories within the government as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, HR services are delivered in accordance with statutory provisions as set out in the Public Service Commission Regulations 2001 and the Public Service (Delegation of Powers) Regulations 2001, as well as statutory provisions contained in other legislation such as Contributory Pensions Act 1970, Payroll Tax Act 1995, Payroll Tax Rates Act 1995, and Public Service Superannuation Act 1981, to name a few. A review of the regulations has commenced, and recommendations for consequential amendments to facilitate the amalgamation are at the consultation stage.

Mr. Speaker, as stated, effective April 1, 2021, all of the government's human resource services will be centralised under the Department of Employee and Organisational Development. The Department is headed by Mrs. Carlita O'Brien, Chief Employee and Organisational Development Officer. The department looks forward to servicing internal stakeholders on all human resource matters and the general public on recruitment matters. Its mission is *To optimise talent and transform the organisation*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Health.

Minister Wilson, would you like to present your Statement at this time?

COVID-19 VACCINE —A PROGRESS REPORT FOR BERMUDA

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to present today to this Honourable House a progress report on the rollout of the [COVID-19 vaccination](#) programme in Bermuda. As we are all aware, COVID-19 continues as a public health emergency for Bermuda and the rest of the world. In response to this deadly pandemic, research and trials of new vaccines were accelerated through 2020 and continue at a fast pace into 2021. Worldwide, as of the 4th of March, there are 42 vaccines [that have] formally entered Phase 1 of devel-

opment where they are tested for safety and dosage and to confirm they will stimulate the immune system. A total of 27 vaccines have expanded into Phase 2 safety trials where the vaccine is tested on hundreds of people in varying groups to see if the vaccine acts differently in the differing groups. This phase further tests vaccine safety. Twenty-one vaccines are entered in Phase 3 of development, which comprises the large-scale efficacy tests. In this phase many thousands of people are vaccinated to determine if the vaccine protects against the coronavirus. These trials are large enough to reveal even relatively rare side effects as well.

After going through all three phases, vaccine makers can apply for authorisation for use. To date, six vaccines have been authorised for early or limited use (this is what we refer to as “emergency use”), and six have been approved for full use by different authorities around the world.

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer, in conjunction with the Bermuda Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, provides guidance on the implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine in Bermuda. Bermuda’s vaccine programme is aligned with the advice, authorisations and approvals issued by the [US] Food and Drug Administration, Health Canada, the European Medicines Agency, Public Health England and the World Health Organization. Currently, Bermuda is executing its vaccine programme using the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, one that is probably at the forefront in terms of being authorised for use in the greatest number of countries.

Mr. Speaker, as initially reported to this House in December last year, Bermuda has a disproportionate number of elderly and vulnerable residents due to chronic conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes. We do not have a young population, so the need for the vaccine here is even greater than in some other countries. Using census data, the Ministry produced an allocation plan to ensure that the most vulnerable receive the vaccine first, along with the health care professionals who are on the front lines and who care for these vulnerable persons. So Phase 1A targeted people who are 80 years of age or older, rest homes and long-term care facility residents, health care workers and workers providing essential services such as border control, police, firemen and those in the corrections service.

Phase 1B targeted people who are 65 years of age or more, as well as persons who are extremely vulnerable such as those undergoing chemotherapy and those with lupus, severe asthma and severe COPD. Currently, Mr. Speaker, we are targeting the population group in Phase 2, which is people who are more than 50 years old and medically vulnerable people with conditions such as heart disease, chronic kidney or liver disease, and diabetes. We are also developing solutions to reach certain identified groups—for

example, people who are less mobile, residents living with disabilities and unsheltered persons.

The final phase, Mr. Speaker, will be everyone, which is Phase 3. It is critical that as many people as possible get vaccinated. Some believe that actually getting COVID-19 will provide a natural immunity and will consider this sufficient; *it is not*. Experts, Mr. Speaker, do not know how long this natural immunity lasts, and the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. The COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an antibody response without having to experience more than mild side effects such as a headache. It will also help you to protect the loved ones around you and the community generally by creating a “dead end” for virus transmission. Furthermore, immunity as a result of vaccination has been shown to be superior to immunity from natural infection, as it is stronger.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of progress to date, we administered 20,705 vaccinations between the 11th of January when it started and February the 27th, the most recent reporting period. This number increases to 23,939 if you include the first three days of the current reporting period, namely, March the 1st to the 3rd. Bermuda’s goal of herd immunity will be achieved when 70 per cent of our population (which is 64,054) has been immunised. Up to and including the 3rd of March, 23 per cent of the population has been vaccinated with one dose and 13 per cent of the population has been immunised with two doses. If you take into account just the percentage of the population which is eligible for the vaccine—for example, persons over the age of 16—we have vaccinated 27 per cent of the eligible population and immunised 16 per cent of that population. And, Mr. Speaker, this is very good news.

Mr. Speaker, while the vaccine rollout has not been without its challenges, I am very pleased to report that the Ministry’s vaccine allocation strategy was the correct plan of action. Vaccinations by age group show that the targeted approach has been successful, with seniors (all of those 65 or older) having been vaccinated at approximately 50 per cent of those. Specifically, of those aged 80 years or more, our most vulnerable population group, 55 per cent have had the vaccine administered, 41 per cent have had one shot and 14 per cent are fully immunised, having had two shots. Similarly, in the age group of 65 to 79 years, 31 per cent have been vaccinated and 17 per cent are fully immunised.

The Ministry’s community outreach team will be working to reach those seniors with barriers, and the Ministry’s partnership with Age Concern is a great first step. We recognise many in this age group of 65-plus do not have access to the technology and/or the computer literacy needed to complete the registration form, and we are working to overcome this barrier and get more of our most vulnerable vaccinated.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's ability to achieve herd immunity depends on two factors—a community's willingness to be vaccinated and a steady supply of COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccines are effective; they work. Data being reported from around the world shows that countries (like Bermuda) that have implemented aggressive vaccination programmes are now seeing decreases, and in some countries dramatic decreases, in the numbers of persons infected with the coronavirus and the numbers hospitalised.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has two sources for procuring vaccines against COVID-19. The primary source at the moment is through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which is being facilitated by Government House and by direct talks between the Chief Medical Officer and Public Health England. So far, Bermuda has received 28,750 doses of the Pfizer vaccine from the UK, and a third shipment of 10,500 was meant to have arrived last evening on the BA flight, which would give us a total of 39,250.

Mr. Speaker, the second vaccine source is through Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance Geneva, which is administering the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (or the COVAX Facility). Bermuda has joined the COVAX Facility and has purchased approximately 26,400 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the timeframe for receipt of these vaccines through the COVAX Facility is not yet settled. We expect to receive 25 per cent of the doses in the first quarter of this year, with the remaining 75 per cent not being received until later in the second quarter of the year.

Mr. Speaker, we base our projections for vaccine use on the confirmed and committed doses we have in hand or will receive, such as the ones I referred to [that were to have arrived] last evening. As such, Mr. Speaker, we only count the 39,250 doses of the Pfizer vaccine when we state that Bermuda's *last first dose* date will be in mid-March based on current supplies.

The COVID-19 vaccination, Mr. Speaker, is voluntary. But it is already clear that the travel industry is aggressively assessing how immunity can provide it with new life. As I have previously reported in this House, the International Air Transport Association is working on a travel pass to enable the safe sharing of COVID-19 test results and vaccination certificates across borders. This is one of many app developers. To manage expectations here in Bermuda, it needs to be clearly reiterated that the desired result of these first phases of vaccination is not to end the pandemic but to protect our health care workers and the most vulnerable in our community, who are the elderly, and to prevent our health care system from being overwhelmed. We acknowledge and agree that this pandemic can only end when all people in all countries of the world are vaccinated. And this is our reality.

Mr. Speaker, the important vaccination rollout work is not being done by the Ministry alone. In addition to the Health Ministry's staff—who work between testing and contact tracing and contact case management, often in addition to their day jobs as community nurses—we have welcomed the necessary assistance of the Bermuda Hospitals Board and its staff, general practitioners, advanced EMTs, dentists, vets and retired nurses. As Minister, and on behalf of the Ministry, I cannot thank these professionals enough. Their dedication to the Island's well-being is truly stellar. Mr. Speaker, nowhere was this more evident than this past Wednesday when an excess of vaccine doses needed to be used immediately. In response to our call to avoid wastage, hundreds of residents responded by waiting patiently in the rain for their first dose, and the health professionals and administrative staff worked 12 to 14 hours that day to get the job done. And I applaud and thank them all for their incredible hard work.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, wearing masks, physical distancing, good hand hygiene and downloading the WeHealth app are all important in our fight against the coronavirus. But these measures are not enough. Vaccines will work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. We urge everyone to get vaccinated when it is your turn. The combination of getting vaccinated and following the Health Ministry's guidelines on how best to protect yourself and others will offer all of us the best protection from COVID-19. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Works.

Minister Burch, would you like to present your Statement at this time?

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

GOVERNMENT STIMULUS PROGRAMME UPDATE

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

It was December the 17th, 2020, when the Executive Director of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, Mrs. Erica Smith, and I launched the [Short Term Stimulus Programme](#) to a maximum value of BD\$13,385,000 and invited small to medium-sized contractors to participate. Mr. Speaker, the programme was launched as it was recognised that there is an urgent need to provide stimulus to the local economy in order to retain and boost employment numbers in the wake of the economic downturn sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the Ministry of Public Works compiled a list of shovel-

ready projects that are executable within three months. These projects are mostly infrastructure improvements and will not add further burden to government operational expenses.

The project's selection principles are to maximise the employment of the private sector while providing much-needed refreshing of neglected infrastructure. On December 18, 2020, the Ministry released a Request for Suppliers Qualifications (RFSQ) across multiple disciplines to generate a prequalification list of approved contractors/companies that can participate in the programme. This approach is in line with Pre-Qualification Procedure and Approved Contractor Lists of the Code of Practice for Project Management and Procurement. The prequalification criteria will include a scoring of technical competence, local employment benefit and a schedule of unit rates. Suitable companies will then be added to an approved contractor list.

Mr. Speaker, with the development of the list the Ministry would then use the restricted procedure (section 16 of the Code) to quickly obtain three or more quotations from the various suppliers, grouped by suitability and vocation, to select a contractor for each project. Where works are specialised or contractors' availability is limited, either through companies already obtaining a project from the programme or natural scarcity, a single-source contract will be negotiated based upon the unit rates. The work to be done under this contract and in accordance with these specifications consists of furnishing of equipment, material, supervision, labour, technical knowledge and skills necessary to satisfactorily and safely complete the job as outlined in the agreement.

To ensure allocation of the stimulus funding across all of the participating businesses, the Ministry will maintain a register of approved contractor lists and awarded contracts to ensure that no one company monopolises the project list. Once a company obtains a project, they will be rotated to the bottom of the list to allow other companies an opportunity for work. The guiding principle is to prioritise all companies that provide the most employment benefit per dollar spent and spread the work among Bermudian owned and operated businesses.

Mr. Speaker, the plan is to utilise medium to small contractors for the work that will be done at dock and building refurbishments, new construction, canal clearance, roadside fencing, and health and safety improvements. A Consultant Project Manager, Mr. Robert Richardson, has been assigned by the Ministry to this project to coordinate the efforts of all of those involved, as well as to liaise with the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, we have received a total of 98 full submissions by the RFSQ deadline of February the 15th. Responses to this are currently being evaluated. To date 18 companies have been approved and are prequalified to work with the Government. We are

working to have at least 50 companies prequalified to work by Monday, the 8th of March. Once all evaluations have been completed, we will notify companies of their prequalified status. (Quite a few submissions were submitted with missing mandatory documents. This requires the Evaluation Team to follow up and request those documents, which is prolonging the process somewhat.)

Of note is that the prequalification process takes time, but this will enable us to issue RFQs [requests for quotes] and award contracts to the prequalified companies at a much faster rate than having each contract approved individually. A total of 200 companies were contacted via email and provided with reminders to submit their response by the 15th of February. In addition to this, we notified the Construction Association of Bermuda, the Institute of Bermuda Architects and the Bermuda Association of Professional Engineers. The Bermuda Economic Development Corporation assisted a total of 74 contractors with completing their submission packages for the RFSQ.

Mr. Speaker, as the RFSQ phase is now over, companies will start to receive request for quotes for various stimulus projects next week. The Darrell's Wharf repair project and the Flatt's Bridge Handrail project have been sent out for RFQs this week with intentions of awarding the contract and commencing onsite in the coming weeks. Additional RFQs will be sent out next week, the week of March 8th. Although there are 43 individual projects under the stimulus programme, we are separating them into multiple scopes so that we provide as much work as possible across those companies that qualify.

We are very pleased at the response to the stimulus programme and are working as fast as we can to get contracts awarded. As we progress through this process, I shall keep the House informed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The next Statement this morning is for Youth, Culture and Sport. Minister Tinee Furbert is the spokesman in the House for the Minister of Youth, Culture and Sport.

So, Minister Furbert, would you like to present your Statement this morning?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors that it is falling under.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to submit to this Honourable House the Annual Report of the [Human Rights Commission](#) [the Commission] for the year ending 31 December 2019. Mr. Speaker,

the Commission has a statutory remit to protect and promote human rights under the Human Rights Act 1981. The Commission's mandate is to both educate and promote the principles of non-discrimination and equality and to investigate and endeavour to settle allegations of discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, the Human Rights Commission is required to

- encourage an understanding of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution and the principle that all members of the community are of equal dignity, have equal rights and have an obligation to respect the dignity and rights of each other;
- promote an understanding of acceptance of and compliance with the Human Rights Act 1981;
- conduct research and develop initiatives designed to eliminate discriminatory practices;
- encourage and coordinate activities which seek to forward the principle that every member of the community is of equal dignity and has equal rights; and
- promote the conciliation and settlement of any complaints or grievances arising out of acts of unlawful discrimination and, where in its opinion such good offices are inappropriate, institute prosecution for contraventions of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Human Rights Commission provides assistance to those who believe that they have experienced discrimination or who have any questions related to their rights and responsibilities under the Human Rights Act. The Commission is both a public watchdog for human rights compliance and a resource to foster and promote human rights principles by working with stakeholders across the Island, including government, community organisations, schools, businesses and individuals.

Mr. Speaker, the Commission works to further its objective of eradicating discrimination through the following means:

- helping to address any and all queries related to rights in Bermuda;
- assisting with complaints of discrimination under the Human Rights Act 1981;
- providing dispute resolution services through mediation and conciliation to help settle complaints of discrimination;
- policy review and guidance with all stakeholders in support of human rights obligations;
- engaging in collaborative presentations, research and educational programming;
- consultations to support the evolution of legislation, just practices and policies in support of human rights compliance;
- educational presentations, workshops and training tailored to meet stakeholder needs in

support of their human rights education and compliance commitments;

- advice and consultation with Government on proposed legislative amendments to ensure consistency with international standards;
- administering of human rights tribunals;
- providing guidance to government, organisations, businesses and educational institutions on the development and implementation of a human-rights-based approach to legislation, policies, programmes and complaint-handling mechanisms to ensure compliance with the Act and international human rights agreements.

Mr. Speaker, included in the annual report you will note that during the 2019 calendar year the Commission received 128 complaints with the majority of complaints citing claims of discriminatory difference in treatment on the grounds of disability (34 per cent), race (11 per cent), place of origin (11 per cent) and ethnic or national origins (11 per cent). Of those complaints the majority cited claims of discrimination within the protected area of employment at 40 per cent. Claims of discrimination within the protected area of goods, facilities and services amounted to 17 per cent of intakes, while complaints of discriminatory workplace harassment amounted to 15 per cent of intakes. Workplace related sexual harassment claims accounted for 18 per cent of intakes.

Persons with Bermudian status represented 84 [per cent] of the total number of complainants in 2019, reflecting a trend in an increasing number of complaint filings by persons with Bermudian status since 2016. The increased reliance by Bermudians appears to coincide with the transfer of the Commission from the Bermuda Government's Department of Human Affairs [to a non-ministry office]. This transfer further aligned the Commission with the Paris Principles, a set of international standards adopted by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions to assess the extent to which national human rights institutions operate without the influence of any political, economic or reputational agendas of states.

As Bermuda's National Human Rights Institution, the Commission recognises it has a crucial role for ensuring the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights for all. The introduction of legal counsel in 2019 represented a tremendous and long-sought milestone, signalling the strengthened capacity in support of fulfilling its statutory duties. The installation marked the first in-house counsel for the Commission providing legal advice related to human rights complaints and procedures, tribunal litigation, management and administration.

The Commission participated in the 2019 United Nation's International Day of Persons with Disabilities commemoration. The executive officer provided the keynote [speech] addressing the 2019 theme, which was "The Future is Accessible." This

bold assertion inspired the executive officer's testimony chronicling the reality of Bermuda's inhospitable landscape for persons with disabilities. The Commission's message emphasised the need for inclusive national action, starting first with asking, *Do we want an accessible Bermuda? If so, what is going to change? What are we prepared to do differently in all spheres of life to truly make Bermuda accessible and inclusive for all who are differently abled?*

The Commission partnered with the University of Oxford for its Racialization and Publicness in Africa and the African Diaspora 2019 conference. An international call for papers resulted in the acceptance of a full panel of Bermudian academics and researchers. Bermuda's highly lauded panel was entitled "Racialisation in (post) colonial Bermuda: Past and Present" and featured Bermudians Dr. Dana Selassie, Dr. Rosemary Hall, LeYoni Junos, H. Alicia Kirby and Dr. Kristy Warren. The conference reinforced the necessity of understanding the impact of racial legacies and the value of supporting Bermuda's researchers and scholars in promoting Bermuda's history to aid in building a healthy and equitable community today.

On August 9, 2018, under this Government, approval was given for legal counsel recruitment, and on the 11th of February 2019 the post of Legal Counsel was filled by Mr. Arion Mapp. The introduction of legal counsel in 2019 represented a tremendous milestone for the Commission and has accelerated the pace of the intended changes that the Commission seeks to advocate for, moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I would to thank the commissioners for the important work they do under the leadership of Chairman Mr. Vaughn Caines, and the staff of the Commission under the leadership of the Executive Officer, Ms. Lisa Reid, for their dedication and hard work during the year.

Mr. Speaker, the tabling of this report is pursuant to the requirements of the Human Rights Act of 1981 and specifically section 30A that requires (1) the Commission not later than six months after the end of each calendar year to make a report to the Minister on the activities of the Commission; and (2) that the Minister shall as soon as may be after receiving the Commission's annual report lay it before both Houses of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I must apologise for the delay in the tabling of the report, which was only sent to me on the 5th of February of 2021, some seven months late. The 2020 annual report is being completed now, and I am advised that it will be sent to me within the statutory deadline.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with the Executive Officer about the challenges faced in 2019 and have been informed of the Commission undertaking a full independent review of the Act, its operational practices and its accountability measures. The Commission has set out on the commencement of an accreditation process with the Global Alliance of National

Human Rights Institutions, to be achieved by the end of 2022.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 30A of the Human Rights Act 1981, I am pleased to have laid before this Honourable House the Human Rights Commission's Annual report for the year ending December 31, 2019. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The final Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Education.

Minister, would you like to present your Statement this morning?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead, sir.

TABLING OF A BILL ENTITLED EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT 2021

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's economy continues to be dominated by international business and tourism. Additionally, we know that over the years the trades have also undergirded steady growth in the economy. There are a variety of career paths in these sectors, and our responsibility as a Government, as educators and as a community is to equip our children with the tools to choose these careers that drive and sustain this economy. Honourable Members and the public will note that the Bill to be tabled today is specific in setting out some of the areas of instruction which our children will receive.

Mr. Speaker, the cornerstone of this aspect of education reform will be to provide for the first-time instruction for our children that directly correlates to the very careers that drive the economy in our country. We are determined that our children will not be spectators to the success of others but will have a fighting chance to join top-level tertiary institutions and technical and vocational schools where they will arrive already familiar with the careers and studies in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, before coming into power this Government made an earnest promise to Bermuda and her people. This was to "reform public education by phasing out middle schools and introducing signature schools at the secondary level . . ." Also, in the 2020 Speech [from] the Throne the Government indicated that it would advance a Bill to give effect to the necessary changes to the public school system. While these changes will eventually see our system move from a 3-tier to a 2-tier system, the ultimate objectives go far beyond the structural changes that we need. We will dramatically improve and transform the quality of education and lifetime opportunities for each and every young person in Bermuda.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is my greatest privilege as Minister of Education to [table the Education Amendment Act 2021](#) later today. The Bill brings to this House for the consideration of its Members the first legislative step in delivering the Government's promise to phase out middle schools, introduce signature schools and move from a 3-tier to a 2-tier public education system. In advance of the future debate on the Bill, there are three main points that I would like to emphasise for the Legislature.

Point 1. This Government is serious about transforming public school education. This is demonstrated not by our commitments, but by the delivery of those commitments—delivery with clarity, quality, fidelity and perseverance.

Point 2. We are serious about education because we value young people and Bermuda. As a country, we have failed our young people and have done so for generations. This failure precedes the advent of middle schools and is as old as the provision of education on this Island. It was not and it *is* not good enough to provide quality education to some, but not to all—this is inequity. It was not good enough to label some schools as elite and some [students] as bright. It was not good enough to make decisions that would send students on a path of no return based on results of a test taken at 11 years of age, or to say that a child *can only do this* or *only do that* based on our misperceptions of their abilities and potential. It was not good enough to undermine the success of students and schools who beat all expectations of them. And it was not good enough to pretend that there was ever a thing such as “separate but equal,” because we have never had true equity across education in Bermuda. Never!

Point 3. The changes we are making are absolutely what we need in Bermuda for our young people, their families, our economy and our entire society. We know that the world continues to change, but the pace and complexity of that change are only accelerating, and education has not kept up. Our parents and grandparents likely got a job at a young age and kept that job or stayed in a particular industry for their entire career. Many of us may have changed jobs a few times, and some of us have made major career changes. But this has not been the norm. Young people are not going to have the one or two jobs that our parents had or the few jobs that we had. They will have multiple jobs over their lifetimes not only by choice, but by necessity.

Mr. Speaker, it is our obligation as a Government to prepare our young people for the jobs of today and tomorrow. This requires us to teach and develop the body of skills and knowledge that are transferrable across occupations, going into the future. We will not only develop knowledge, but real-world applicability of knowledge and skills. We will not just focus on employment, but employability. And we will do this for each and every senior school student.

Therefore, beginning in September 2022 we will introduce the first two signature schools. Each senior school will have one or more *signatures*, referred to in the Bill as “signature learning programmes.” The selection, design and future delivery of signatures will be based on global social, economic and environmental trends that are shaping the workforce internationally and right here in Bermuda. These signatures will reflect career pathways for students and will be based on sectors of the economy with potential growth and sustainability, and clusters of skills essential to developing graduates with competencies that are and will be in demand in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, we have already identified in the Bill sectors of the economy upon which certain signatures will be based. These are tourism, finance, insurance and the trades—pillars of our economy and community. These signatures reflect our past and present. And more critically, as evidenced by research and analysis, they are our future. Examples of signatures that are skills-based include STEAM and entrepreneurialism. It is important to emphasise and make clear that while signatures are career focused, this focus includes foundational skills such as creativity, communications, collaboration, problem-solving and critical thinking, digital fluency and social emotional learning. This is not only about creating employability, but it recognises that the skills and attributes of the graduates whom we want to develop are the same as [those skills and attributes of] the kinds of young people and citizens we want to thrive and shape Bermuda's future.

Mr. Speaker, although we have already determined four signatures, we will engage and consult our community in modern, progressive and meaningful ways before decisions are made on additional signatures. Engagement has already occurred with the Department of Workforce Development, the Learning First Design Teams and others. It will continue through this process and into the future. And in time signatures will change and evolve as Bermuda and the world changes and evolves.

In addition to introducing signature schools and signature education, the Bill also begins the phasing out of middle schools. It does this by moving M3 level to S1 through a simple change in the age ranges for middle and senior schools. This change will be effective for the introduction of signature schools in September 2022.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give reassurance to Members of this House, students and parents that there will be a choice of signatures. I have already mentioned many times before that education reform will be conducted in phases and that we will inform, communicate, listen and consider as we make the necessary changes for our education system. We understand the value and the importance of executing a sound transition process for staff and students as these changes are implemented. Therefore, a transi-

tion plan will be developed and communicated well in advance of these changes.

Mr. Speaker, today is a momentous day for Bermuda. As a collective body of representatives for the people of Bermuda, we are delivering not only on our promise to reform public education, but we are providing a springboard for the collective aspirations for *all* young people in Bermuda. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to be relentless in our focus and efforts to ensure that we not only talk of change, but we deliver change as a moral, economic and social imperative for the future of our young people and the future of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

That Statement brings us to a close of the Statement period this morning.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: As a reminder, we have 60 minutes for Question Period, starting now.

First, we have a series of written questions that we deferred from previous sittings. And the first written question this morning is in the name of MP Dunkley to the Minister of Health. And these require a written reply. There are three questions.

Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Those answers have been supplied to the Clerk, but I would like to remind Honourable Members pursuant to Standing Order 17(1)(a) that the Minister is requested to answer any written questions relating to any subject or department within the responsibility of that particular Minister. So these would have been supplied with respect to the knowledge that I have as the Minister of Health under our Ministry—[Standing Order] 17(1)(a).

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you.

The Speaker: MP, have you received your copies?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker, good morning. Good morning, colleagues.

I note the [answers](#) are on the parliamentary website.

Yes, sir.

QUESTIONS: ALL COVID-19 RELATED CONTRACTS UNDERTAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House about all COVID-19 related contracts undertaken by the Government for the provision of goods, services or consultancy, listing them individually with reference to the contractor's name, the cost of the contract and the product or service provided?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House as to which of the COVID-related contracts referred above were sole-sourced or publicly tendered?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Will the Honourable Minister please provide this Honourable House with a listing of the compensation details for all COVID PCR Testing and Vaccinations agents?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The next question this morning, [a] written question, is from the Opposition Leader to the Minister of Finance. And all three of these questions require an oral response.

Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question?

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

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Just as a note . . . I am sorry. The Minister of Finance has advised that his technical officers have not been able to complete the answers to the questions [as] of yet. And he has asked that it be deferred to the next sitting.

The Speaker: I would have appreciated being informed of that sooner.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: If he would have made it known.

And if the answers are not available, I will ask the Opposition Leader to allow us to have them deferred until the next sitting.

Premier, the next sitting is on Monday. Can we expect them on Monday, or will they need to be delayed a little [longer]?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am uncertain. I am just relaying the message on behalf of the Minister of Finance, who I think is probably now online. So he might be able to confirm. But I did receive the message this morning, and I am relaying it now.

The Speaker: Minister, are you available? Minister Dickinson? Minister?

We are going to assume that the answers will be available for Monday.

Thank you.

[Inaudible interjection]

**QUESTIONS: CONSOLIDATED FUND
ACCOUNTS MARCH 2018–MARCH 2020**

[Deferred]

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Will the Honourable Premier please confirm to this Honourable House the value of the total accounts receivables due to the Government of Bermuda's Consolidated Fund as at March 31, 2018, March 31, 2019 and March 31, 2020?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Will the Honourable Minister please provide this Honourable House an aged receivable schedule for the three years in question?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Will the Honourable Minister please confirm to this Honourable House the value and details of receivables written off the Government's books for the last three years?

The Speaker: The next question this morning is to Minister Ming from Honourable MP Jackson. And again all three of these questions are for oral response.

MP Jackson, would you like to put your questions?

**QUESTION 1: ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT
PLANS FOR INCARCERATED SEX OFFENDERS**

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Yes, please; and good morning to the Minister of National Security.

Will the Honourable Minister please provide this Honourable House a description of the assessment and treatment plans actively conducted on incarcerated sex offenders?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Renee Ming: There are different forms of assessments depending on need. The first is purely a pre-sentence psychological risk assessment often ordered by the court by way of an S-3 29-E. Typically the risk for sexual violence protocol will be conducted. Primarily this assessment highlights the presence of risk factors that likely maintain sexual violence conduct. It also helps identify intervention, risk-management strategies, as well as the individual's psychological needs.

Another type is the rehabilitation assessment. This assessment is robust and examines sexual offence responsibility, sexual behaviour, sexual attitudes, sexual interest, sexual preferences, sexual risk management, critical and rule-breaking behaviour, criminal and rule-breaking attitudes, stages of change, emotion management, cooperation with treatment and cooperation with supervision. The rehabilitation assessment also considers provisions of the Criminal Code Act 1907 and especially the [Criminal Code (Sex Offender Management) Amendment Act 2018].

Upon completion of treatment, a post-programme therapy assessment and therapy progress report is produced. When considered necessary, a post-programme psychological risk assessment may be completed prior to consideration for parole or transfer to lower security. Depending on need relating to other clinical issues, a person may be assessed for cognitive behaviour therapy or trauma therapy if additional clinical intervention is required.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am wondering if the Minister would kindly let us know how many of these assessments were carried out in 2020?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Renee Ming: I do not have that [information] right now. We are due to receive the 2020 Parole Board report by March 31st of this year. So those figures and stats will be available as well.

The Speaker: Further supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Well, maybe I can ask it this way then. How often are these assessments delivered? And I am trying to find the practical side of it. So it is one thing to have a description of these assessments. I am just trying to figure out how they are actually deployed.

So one would be, How many have had the assessments? The other would be how often they are actually delivered.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Renee Ming: So, I am little confused. Can you just clarify? Are you asking . . . I did not get what the actual question was in that.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am trying to find out whether these assessments are actually carried out or if that was just a description of the assessments that we have.

Hon. Renee Ming: Okay. Actually, I read that. It says that where considered necessary, the reports may be carried out prior to consideration for parole or transfer to a lower security.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: All right. I will accept the “may be carried out” with the suggestion that you have mentioned that you could provide the numbers of assessments that have been carried on in 2020 at the March 31st report from the Parole Board.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No more supplementaries for that one.

The Speaker: Would you like to put your second question now?

QUESTION 2: ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT PLANS FOR INCARCERATED SEX OFFENDERS

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Honourable Minister please provide this Honourable House details on the mandatory courses and programmes convicted sex offenders have to complete before release?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Surely, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Corrections currently runs the Life Minus Violence—Harmful Sexual Behaviour programme on both a group and individual therapy basis. It is a cognitive-skills-based programme that examines a wide range of sexual behaviour and offending, with a primary aim to reduce sexual violence reoffending. The content addresses contact and noncontact sexual offences, electronic Internet sexual offending, child sexual violence, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, and many others.

A sex offender will be expected to complete their case plan completely prior to release. The exception would be if persons needed a type of intervention which the Department of Corrections are not equipped to offer, such as interventions for persons with severe mental illness, traumatic brain injury, extreme educational deficits or disabilities.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, I have one. When it comes to the mandatory provision of programmes, does any of that involve medicating offenders, incarcerated members? I am just curious.

Hon. Renee Ming: I would not have the answer to that question now. I can endeavour to get it for you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No supplementary on the second question.

The Speaker: Would you like to put your third question now?

QUESTION 3: ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT PLANS FOR INCARCERATED SEX OFFENDERS

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Honourable Minister please provide the Honourable House the Parole Board criteria for granting early release to sex offenders?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Renee Ming: Mr. Speaker, the Parole Board is a [INAUDIBLE], meaning for each potential parolee the board receives or requests certain information from various government entities to assist and guide the final board decision, which is reached collectively and collaboratively.

Some of the reports used are Parole Application Report, form EB-4; parole conduct reports; 166 report; pre-release report required by the provisions of Prison Rules 1980, which is completed by the case manager; psychological and psychiatric reports with the parolee consent; document confirming employment for a minimum of three months; document confirming address where the potential parolee will be residing, which is vetted for suitability by the Department of Court Services; correspondence from the parolee; record of conviction; orders from the court regarding sentencing; any report the Parole Board calls for, whether oral or in writing, that can assist the board in making a reasoned decision.

The aforementioned list is not an exhaustive list. Each parole application is reviewed comprehensively as well as holistically.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No supplementary on that one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP. That brings a close to your series of questions.

The next written question this morning is from MP Dunkley to the Minister of Health.

MP Dunkley, would you like to put your question? And all three of those questions require oral response.

QUESTION 1: COVID-19 VACCINE BOOKINGS

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The first question to the Honourable Minister of Health: On February 19th, the Ministry of Health acknowledged that 34 people received their second COVID-19 vaccination too early when vaccine recipients made their own appointments. Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House what day or days did the incorrect booking of vaccine appointments by these 34 people occur?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister, yes.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: One person had their first appointment on the 11th of January, and their second appointment was the 27th of January.

Nine persons had their first appointment on the 14th of January, with their second appointment being the 1st of February.

Seven persons had their first appointment on the 15th of January, with their second appointment being the 1st of February.

Sixteen persons had their first appointment on the 15th of January, with their second appointment being the 2nd of February.

And one person had their first appointment on the 23rd of January, with their second appointment being the 6th of February.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Is there a supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: When were these errors uncovered?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that information at my disposal right now with respect to the date. However, that is a matter of public record because I did give a statement on it concerning that particular incident. And the date I do recall was listed in that public statement. But I do not have that in front of me right now, but it is a matter of public record.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Who facilitated these appointments?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, the persons who facilitated those appointments were those 34 persons.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. For clarity then, how were those appointments made?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, those persons would have been given their . . . they would have called the vaccine hotline and requested an appointment at such-and-such a date. So for example, they would have requested that they receive an appointment on the 27th of January. And the hotline would have facilitated that particular request.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Would you like to put your second question?

QUESTION 2: COVID-19 VACCINE BOOKINGS

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House to date how many individuals have failed to show for a confirmed COVID-19 vaccine appointment?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, the total number of individuals who failed to show for the appointments were 1,454.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, supplementary.

To the Honourable Minister, how were the vaccines set aside for these 1,454 used?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We facilitate two avenues. We have a (quote/unquote) “standby list,” so persons who are in Phase 1 or 2 who are able to get to the respective vaccination centres in record time, so to speak, who are in close proximity to either, are contacted. And we also facilitate anticipating persons with no-shows. We book extra so that we have effectively overbooked in anticipation that there will be circumstances that will arise where persons cannot show.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Third question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Put your third question.

QUESTION 3: COVID-19 VACCINES DISCARDED

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House if any COVID-19 vaccines have been discarded due to not being used or held at the wrong storage temperature?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, vaccines have been discarded due to not being used. That is with respect to the first part of the question. And then the second [part of the] question, vaccines have not been discarded due to being held at a wrong storage temperature.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: How many was the total number of vaccines that have been discarded due to not being used?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that specific number. But what I can say, I think [INAUDIBLE] assist the Honourable Member. Bermuda has less than 5 per cent that have been discarded either because of the broken vials, [which] is the common reason. Reconstitution issues also have come. However, internationally when it comes to immunisation and vaccines internationally, the standard for wastage is 4.8 per cent; Bermuda is at 4.6 per cent.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, have there been any vaccines that have not been used for that day and then discarded?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the specifics. But what I do have is, overall, since we have commenced the vaccine (where we were at on the 11th of January) there has been 4.6 per cent wastage with respect to vaccines. Some of that would have been because of, as I said the most common issue is there are reconstitution issues or a broken vial or observations of some type of fragments or so forth in the vial. Internationally the standard for waste is 4.8 per cent, and Bermuda is under that.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I would appreciate it if she could get back to me for the exact answer for the question.

The Speaker: Do you have a supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: I think I have used all of my supplementaries on this, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary.

The Speaker: Okay.

A supplementary from MP Jackson.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, good morning. I was just wondering, given the urgency of getting as many people vaccinated as possible, whether there is any consideration to sending out, sort of last-minute digital social media messages to attract people to come to the various vaccine locations toward the end of the day, unscheduled?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

She would probably appreciate that it is critically important that we utilise the appointment schedule because once a vial has been opened, there is a finite period of time in which it must be used.

And we are attempting not to have any wastage, which is why we do two things: (1) We operate a standby list for persons, again who are in Phases 1 and 2 who can get to vaccination centres as quickly as possible. (2) We generally overbook in anticipation because things happen. People cannot make it for a variety of reasons. And then we overbook so that those persons can be filled in.

The Speaker: Supplementary, anyone?
None?

That brings us to an end of the replies to written questions. We now go on to questions on the Statements which were given this morning. We have roughly 41 minutes left. Of the Statements given this morning, we have six questions from Members.

The first is from the Opposition Leader to the Premier in reference to his Statement this morning on the Economic Recovery Plan.

Mr. Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

QUESTION 1: THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN—IMPLEMENTATION

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: I note that the Economic Recovery Plan has devised and focuses on 30 key initiatives. Can the Premier provide details of the top five priorities of the 30 key initiatives?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, as is stated inside of my Statement, the Minister will table the full plan on the 16th of March at our House sitting.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary, Opposition Leader?

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Well, he did not really answer my question, Mr. Speaker. I asked for what his top five priorities were in regard to the key initiatives.

[Pause]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I will have to repeat the answer which I gave to the Honourable Member, Honourable Opposition Leader.

The Minister of Finance shall be, as detailed in my Statement, shall be making a Statement and the tabling for the Honourable Members of the House and members of the public the information which will detail all 30 initiatives.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Okay. Obviously, I am not getting an answer.
I will move on to my next question.

The Speaker: Next question.

QUESTION 2: THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN—IMPLEMENTATION

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: And that question is in regard to the Economic Recovery Project Management Office. Has there been a budget allotment for this office, given that it has a prominent role in our development going forward?

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: And how much has been allotted for this office?

The Speaker: Supplementary? Yes.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: And when does he expect to have the office opened?

Hon. E. David Burt: The allotment will be contained in this year's budget, which was laid. I think the Honourable Member will find out from the Cabinet Office line items. I am certain that it is for \$1 million as the provisional sum and which has been allocated, as the intention is to have it up and running for the commencement of the fiscal year.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: And how many employees do you envision working in that office?

Hon. E. David Burt: The terms of which have been laid out, which I had stated inside of my Statement, cover the core competencies, Mr. Speaker. And so the number of persons will be determined by the persons who can be found to ensure that they meet the core competencies. But it would be anticipated to be, I would say, between three and five.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have no further question.

The Speaker: No further questions? Okay. Thank you.

The next question this morning in reference to a Statement is for the Deputy Premier. And that question is from the Honourable Member Jackson.

Honourable Member, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: REPORTING PROGRESS ON THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My first question is that I am interested in finding out whether the Minister will be tabling the paper

on the regulation of the single-use plastics in Bermuda?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister. Deputy Premier.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes, Mr. Speaker. (I am just trying to get my camera on.)

More information will be brought to the House once the policy is officially approved by Cabinet and is appropriately vetted by the Government. And then it will be brought to the House.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: No. But I do have another question.

The Speaker: Yes. Put your second question.

QUESTION 2: REPORTING PROGRESS ON THE ELIMINATION OF SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you.

On page 3, Minister, there was a mention of the commitment to eliminate single-use plastics by 2022. I am just curious whether there is going to be a hard-cut elimination deadline or whether we are going to reduce first with then a view to eliminate?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister, go ahead.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I believe I outlined the phases clearly, Mr. Speaker, as to what we are doing, on pages 4 throughout. The first phase—and I will go right to the Statement if the Member can refer. The first phase would involve beginning public information. And then we then will move to eliminate certain types of plastics after appropriate consultation. So it will be a process of education, then have the elimination with all phases, and also consultation. Education, consultation and then elimination. That is the process we are following.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. I have a supplementary.

The Speaker: Yes. Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Referring to sort of the number two, that second phase then, the prohibiting of sale, [will we] be doing that gradually, certain items at a time?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. So, it will not be across the board all of their stock will be eliminated? But that it might just be straws and cutlery, and then move to the next?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: That is exactly what my Statement says.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Okay. And thank you, MP, for your questions.

We now move on to the next Statement that has questions this morning. And that is from the Minister for the Cabinet Office, from MP Jackson.

MP Jackson, you have questions once again.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, a busy morning for me, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead and put your question.

QUESTION 1: ABOLITION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: These are just short questions.

Good morning, Minister. I just have a question regarding the positions, the actual jobs within Human Resources. Will there be any elimination of roles in this consolidation?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Unfortunately, MP Jackson, I do not have the chart in front of me. But I can get that information to you. I do not see any elimination of jobs right now. But we can take a look at that.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Okay. Thank you.
I have another question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Or second question?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: It is a second question.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

QUESTION 2: ABOLITION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: I am just curious about the location. So one, I do not know whether—has a permanent new location been established?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Discussions are taking place. We have not yet chosen a permanent location and place.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: And again I am not sure. I would suspect some of these human resource departments are located right within existing departments for government. But if they are in any of these sort of separate satellite locations, will there be a consolidation? Are there buildings that will be vacated in order to rehouse in one central location?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Government is always looking [to improve] efficiency. And over time we will take a look at those things.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Any further questions?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Not right now. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.

Minister, that is the end of the questions for you.

The next Statement this morning which has questions is for the Minister of Health.

Minister of Health, MP Dunkley would like to put questions to you.

MP.

QUESTION 1: COVID-19 VACCINE—A PROGRESS REPORT FOR BERMUDA

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Health: Minister, in your Statement on page 8, you gave an outline of the number of vaccines that have arrived in Bermuda. And in short, through the UK there are 39,250 through the COVAX Facility. The first purchase was for 26,400. So that leaves 65,600 in vaccines which will vaccinate about 50 per cent of our population. Are there any plans in place to access the remaining 20 per cent that is required for herd immunity?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, just let me clarify something for the Honourable Member. With respect to the COVAX Facility, yes, we have purchased 26,400. But we have not secured them yet. They have not arrived. We are anticipating 25 [per cent] to 35 per cent of those to arrive at the first quarter. And then at

second quarter, the balance. But at this point a date has not been provided. So all we do know for certain is what has arrived on Island, which is the 39,250.

We are looking to see whether or not there are other avenues. You will recall that the United Kingdom did indicate to us that they would be supplying that to us, to all the OTCs the same proportion as to what they received of Pfizer for their population. So we will continue our discussions with the United Kingdom through Public Health England to see if we can secure further resources. We are hoping through this process that we will be able to get COVAX very soon as well. And we will continue to explore other procurement measures to ensure as best as we can to reach herd immunity and have sufficient supply.

We are absolutely confident, and we have previously indicated, Mr. Speaker, that for the number of persons of Bermuda who want a vaccine, they will be able to acquire it.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: The Honourable Minister did say that the vaccine has been purchased from the COVAX Facility. What was the cost of the purchase of the 26,400 doses?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

That matter is on public record. In fact, I think it was the Honourable Member who asked me that question previously when I spoke about it. I want to say around 260. I do not know exactly off the top of my head. But that question has been previously asked. I can get that. I believe it is like 260, Mr. Speaker, \$260,000, excuse me.

The Speaker: Okay. If it has been asked before, it would be in the House record.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: That is correct.

The Speaker: Further supplementary?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Further supplementary or new question?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, further supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

I do not recall that answer, but I will research it as well.

Has there been any purchase cost for the 39,215 vaccines from the UK?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Likewise, Mr. Speaker, I have responded to that question. But I thank the Honourable Member for the edification of the public. There has been no cost to Bermuda with respect to the provision of the Pfizer [vaccines] from the United Kingdom. Bermuda has received those free of charge, no cost associated.

The Speaker: Thank you.
New question?

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: New question, Mr. Speaker. Yes, thank you.

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 2: COVID-19 VACCINE —A PROGRESS REPORT FOR BERMUDA

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: On page 10 of the Statement, the Honourable Minister in a paragraph says, "Nowhere was this more evident than this past Wednesday, when an excess of vaccine doses needed to be used immediately." Mr. Speaker, my question to the Honourable Minister is, What caused the excess of vaccinations to be used immediately? And how much was the excess?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, the issue concerning the excess, I believe there were 35 vials. And as I have said previously, Mr. Speaker, once a vial has been taken from the sub-zero temperatures, it has to be used within five days. And there was a miscalculation with respect to how many vials were required for this week. And when it was determined on Wednesday morning that certain vials had already been removed from the freezer and were already on refrigeration and had to be used [within] five days, we recognised that the end of those 35 vials or those five days was going to be on Wednesday.

So, what did we do? We had lemons, and we made lemonade. We just sent out a mass—we contacted people. Persons came and showed up, and it just showed the fact that both the Bermuda Hospitals Board, as well as the Bermuda College and the vaccinators at both of those stations stepped up to the plate and worked enormously hard so that we could ensure that those 35 vials did not go to waste.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes. Put your supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when are the vials removed from cold storage? At the beginning of the week or at the beginning of the day for usage?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I do not have those particulars. I believe it is at the beginning of the week, but I will have to get that information. I do not have that in front of me.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Supplementary from MP Pearman. Yes, put your supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you.

Honourable Minister, given that you are running a waitlist, if I understood you correctly, why would one go through a sort of email blast rather than go to people who are already on the existing waitlist?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: That is a very good question that the Honourable Member asked. We had 35 vials. Each vial has between five and six doses. We did not want to have any wastage at the end of the day. So there were quite a number of persons whom the 35 vials could have inoculated.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary? No.
New question, MP Dunkley?

QUESTION 3: COVID-19 VACCINE —A PROGRESS REPORT FOR BERMUDA

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, Mr. Speaker, a new question.

Wednesday was the first day a plea was issued. Is it safe to assume that it was because of the large number that might not have been used at the end of the day? This is the first day we had a large number such as this?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: That is correct.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

The Speaker: Thank you.

And that brings us to a close of questions for the Minister of Health. The next Statement that has questions this morning is for the Minister of Works.

Minister of Works, you have a question from MP Cannonier.

MP, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: GOVERNMENT STIMULUS PROGRAMME UPDATE

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On page 1, the Minister mentions, I will just quote it: "As a result, the Ministry of Public Works compiled a list of shovel-ready projects that are executable within three months." And then on page 3 at the end he mentions, "Although there are 43 individual projects under the stimulus programme, we are separating them into multiple scopes . . ." My question then is, Is the intent to award all 43 of these different projects within the three months that he specified on the first page?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. The answer is yes, or sooner.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: No. Second question.

The Speaker: Second question, yes.

QUESTION 2: GOVERNMENT STIMULUS PROGRAMME UPDATE

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Are the estimated values of these 43 projects close to the value of the \$13 million that he has stated in this joint project that [they] are putting to spend?

The Speaker: Minister.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Mr. Speaker, the \$13,385,000 is the total of the 43 projects' estimate.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: No. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister, that brings the questions for you to a close.

The next Statement this morning that has questions is for the Minister Tinee Furbert. And that is from MP Pearman.

MP, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Honourable Minister, thank you for your presentation today tabling the Annual Report of the Human Rights Commission. My question is on the third page of your Statement where you mention the number of complaints, 128 complaints received in the relevant period. And you identified the various grounds of complaints by percentage, disability being 34 per cent. Given that the International Women's Day is on Monday, could the Honourable Minister clarify the percentage of complaints based on gender? Because it was not covered in your Statement.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Honourable Member. I am just going to look in the report because I believe it is in the report, MP Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: It may be at 18, page 18.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: So, the intake by gender is page 17.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: [It shows] 66 per cent female, 31 per cent male and 2 per cent gender not stated.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. I just take you over to page 18.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Can you repeat the question?

Mr. Scott Pearman: There is a chart on the distribution of intakes by ground of discrimination. It is figure 6, Distribution of intakes by ground of discrimination.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes, I see. I am trying to understand your question.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. I am just trying to get to—I mean we know the percentage from your Statement. Disability is 34 per cent, race 11 per cent. And gender was not covered. And it does seem from this box here that gender is 8 per cent?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: So, yes. Gender is 8 per cent. But it does not specify male or female. It just speaks to sex.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. Supplementary, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Do your supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: So, Honourable Minister, after disability, if one includes gender and indeed pregnancy at 6 per cent, gender seems to be the number-two for complaints after disability. So disability would be 34 per cent. And if one adds gender, sex and pregnancy together, that would appear to be 14 per cent of complaints. So, 14 per cent of all complaints have something to do with gender or pregnancy, and 34 per cent have to do with disability. Is that your understanding?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes. That is correct.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second supplementary.

In terms of the largest grounds of complaint, the disability complaints at 34 per cent, how do you propose and how does the Human Rights Commission propose to tackle the fact that disability is so overwhelmingly large compared to race or gender?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will have to get that answer for MP Pearman. But there does speak to . . . there is a section in the report that speaks to (let me just find it, sorry). I believe it is page 20, Member.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Where it speaks to the investigations by grounds of discrimination.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: And it speaks to . . . like you said, [that] race and sex were identified as a ground of discrimination in six matters, those based on pregnancy and also place of origin and disability represented in three of the cases, which I believe had something to do with employment. So it was discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, as well as an allegation of a failure to accommodate a disability.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, may I raise a point of order?

The Speaker: I know what you are going to raise, I am pretty sure. I am just trying to get a clarification myself. Before you go there, let me just address what I think you are going to.

The questions should have been related to the Statement itself and not to the actual report. And when your line of questioning is basically referring to stuff that necessarily is not in the Statement when you refer to pages 18 and 20, things of that nature, you are speaking specifically to the report itself. The report was tabled today, and the fact that it was tabled means it can be taken up at a later date for a discussion if a Member so desires.

So, I would ask that you direct your questions to the Statement itself. But if your concern is actually the report, then at some point you can make a motion if you wish to actually debate the report.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the clarification.

However, the Statement at page 3 identifies that 34 per cent of the claims were on the ground of disability, by far and away the largest, triple that of race, more than four times that of gender. So the supplementary question to the Honourable Minister is, What plans if any are in place to combat this—

The Speaker: As long as you are addressing your question to what is in the Statement, there is no problem.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am.

The Speaker: When you start referring to the report itself, that is beyond what this section of the agenda allows today.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker, and directed. And I believe that I am addressing the Statement as put at page 3, the second bullet point.

The Speaker: Okay. If you refer to page 3, you are fine, any from pages 1 to 7, you are fine. When you start referring to pages 18 and 20, you are going beyond.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I got it. I got it, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the direction. And I will stay in the lane of the Statement.

But the question is still valid. Given that disability is 34 per cent, which is above and beyond, more than triple race, more than four times gender, what plan if any does the Honourable Minister have in place in tandem with the HRC [Human Rights Commission] to combat that? That is the question.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I can answer that question.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, the Commission will be issuing guidelines in regard to the support of reasonable accommodation in the workplace. So, there are guidelines being worked on for reasonable accommodation in the workplace. That will be presented to persons in different workplaces.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: I think I have had my supplementaries. If I may move on to my second question, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes.
Second question.

QUESTION 2: HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
My second question is at page 5 of the Statement, the penultimate paragraph. The Honourable Minister identifies that she has been “informed of the Commission undertaking a full independent review of the Act” May I just clarify with the Honourable Minister? So, it is the Commission that is going to be undertaking the review of the Act rather than the Government? Is that correct?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That is correct.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Scott Pearman: Does the Honourable Minister have an idea of the timeframe of that review and when we might see any consequences of that review?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. Can MP Pearman please repeat the question? Sorry, I couldn't hear.

The Speaker: He is trying to find out if there is a timeline to that Commission as to the report and any idea on when the timeline would be for that.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is my question.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: So I do not have a timeline, Mr. Speaker, in regards to that. The only timeline is the accreditation, which was mentioned in the Statement, which was in regard to the process with the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions to be achieved by the end of 2022.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you.

The Speaker: Further supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: No, no further supplementary, not from me anyway. Thank you, Honourable Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No further supplementaries from any Member? That brings us to a close of the question and answer period.

And we will now move on to the other items on the Order Paper.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any Member wish to speak?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am having trouble starting my video, my sincere apologies.

Mr. Speaker, I would like today to extend my sincere and heartfelt condolences to the family of the late Dr. Faith Burgess Clarke, who passed away yesterday. Dr. Faith Burgess Clarke was in her 93rd year, born of course in the Hamilton Parish, as some Members would refer to as God's country. She was the daughter of the late Charles and Sarah Agatha Richardson Burgess, the wife of the late Bradford Clarke of the Clarke Seto Shop family. Ms. Clarke was the mother of six—Kyle Clarke, well known for annuals, seniors, Christmas events; Charles Clarke, who is a manager at the Transport Control Department, also a former candidate for the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Ms. Cherie Whitter, the Deputy Head of the Public Service, and someone who I know has served many Members in this Chamber in one capacity or another, Philip Clarke; and Craig Clarke, who is a former Chairman of the Prison Officers Association.

Without question—

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Mr. Premier, will you associate me, please?

Hon. E. David Burt: I will associate the entire House, MP Foggo.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Okay. Thank you, thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely.

An Hon. Member: Mr. Premier!

Hon. E. David Burt: I will associate the entire House. Dr. Faith Burgess Clarke was certainly a pioneer practitioner, chiropractor. And she was Bermuda's first Black chiropractor in the work. And I want ask the House to send a letter of condolences to her family.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to send condolences to the family of Ms. Cecily Louise Seaman, who passed away after 100 good years on this earth. She was a constituent of mine and affectionately referred to as *Neighbourhood Watch*, as her house was right at the entrance to West Park Lane, and nothing could come or go without Ms. Seaman taking notes of what was taking place. My thoughts and prayers are certainly with her daughters, Dawn and Shirlene, and her grandchildren, Stacey, Kyla, Micha and Justin. And I would certainly like to associate MP Simmons-Wade with condolences that are sent, as I know MP Simmons-Wade was at her service.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to associate myself—

The Speaker: You have about a half a minute left. Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: I would like to associate myself with condolences that were given by the Honourable Member Kim Swan on February 19th to the family of Vernal Burns, to certainly his wife, Peggy, and children David, Zeena, Joanne and Dawn, and to their entire family, who are also my family. I just want to ensure that we were laying in this House the thoughts and prayers toward the family during this time of mourning.

And, Mr. Speaker, if I do have time, I would like to ask the House to send a letter of congratulations to Mr. Allan Trew on his well-deserved retirement from 42 years of dedicated service to the Fairmont Hotels and the Hamilton Princess at Beachfront. There is no question that he has been an ambassador for Bermuda, an ever-present force within the tourism and hospitality industry.

And I want to thank him for his immense contributions to hospitality in Bermuda as he ends his career.

An Hon. Member: Associate the entire House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: And I would like to absolutely associate the entire House for the congratulatory remarks on his retirement for Mr. Allan Trew.

Do I have more time, Mr. Speaker, or am I up?

The Speaker: No. I think the clock is done.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will reserve until Monday.

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

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sounds like Mr. MP Tyrrell?

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: MP Tyrrell, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Good morning, all.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to have congratulations to sent out from this House to two young outstanding persons I am very familiar with. The first one is Mr. Dequan Trott, who attends the CedarBridge Academy. He is the son of Dion and Thelma Trott. Dequan was recently appointed the school's Head Boy. Some may already know Dequan as Bermuda's Village Town Crier. He is a young man of many talents; I see greater things in his future.

Mr. Speaker, the second outstanding young person I wish to ask that congratulations be sent to—but first let me declare my interest—is Cimeon Tyrrell, who attends the Berkeley Institute. She is the daughter of Craig and Simmonnette Tyrrell. Cimeon has consistently gained principal honours and again also in the first and second quarter of this school year. Cimeon is also a talented dancer with United Dance Productions.

Mr. Speaker, I mention these two outstanding young persons to assure Bermuda that our future is in good hands. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

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

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Deputy Speaker, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr.: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to be associated with the remarks concerning Ms. Faith Burgess Clarke on her passing.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to send condolences to the family of Ms. Jeannie Greaves Caisey, who passed away last week. Ms. Caisey, a staunch member of the St. John AME Church, was a very jovial and loving person. She certainly will be sorely missed by her husband Gilbert Caisey—and the entire family, her sister Janet, Janet and Winters Burgess, and the rest of the family.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to send condolences to the family of Ms. Sylvia Davis. She passed last week also, a constituent of Winton Hill in Hamilton Parish. She will be sorely missed by her children and the entire family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

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

Hon. Renee Ming: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sounds like Minister Ming. Minister, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Renee Ming: Thank you.

Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I would like to extend condolences right now to the family of Mr. Yusaff Pitt from St. George's, a well-known football player, a Corporation of St. George's worker and [he was] generally just well known in our community. He has been overseas for the last two years, but he will be buried in Bermuda tomorrow.

And also to the family of Beatrice Hayward, also from St. George's, just letting her daughter Sandra and her son Stevie, as we call him, know that they are in our thoughts and prayers at this time. Please associate MP Foggo with those comments as well.

And next one is a congratulatory, Mr. Speaker. I am congratulating Philip Anderson, Jr. Yes, he is a relative of mine. He became a certified Rolex watchmaker last week, finally passed all his [exams], stuck to the wicket and the runs have come. And we are proud of the achievement that he has found. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You are using the cricket term there, Member.

Would any other Member like to make a contribution at this time?

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sounds like MP Jackson. You have the floor.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to send condolences to the Wilkie family on the passing of their mother, Joan Wilkie. So there are children, Annabella and Bruce Wilkie. And I remember Joan, and she was in her mid-90s the last time that we spoke. And she was adamant that one of our major hurricanes that we had, there were quite a few roof shingles, Bermuda stone roof shingles had been blown off of many houses. And so we were all trying to find supplies.

And there had been a thought out there in the community that we would import [something] like Bermuda slate. And I can remember Mrs. Wilkie calling me up, saying that she really wanted to have Bermuda slate. She would do anything, pay more for some local stone. And so I have always remembered that conversation and that time. And she did get the local stone, which was a good-news story. But we did share some happy conversations. And I certainly send my heartfelt condolences to her children Annabella and Bruce Wilkie and Bruce's wife, Diane.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Some Hon. Members: Mr. Speaker. Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Opposition Leader, I hear your voice. You have your three minutes.

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the new Acting Financial Secretary, Ms. Cheryl-Ann Lister. I think she is well qualified for the post. I found out about it last night. And I have to admit that I was very pleased that she has the role because I know that she is well qualified and will do a sterling job in that position. And I feel proud for her and her achievements. And I have no doubt that she will serve us well.

I would like to also associate my comments to Allan Trew. He and I went to school together in Canada, and he started his tourism [career] in Canada. And he has been a true tourism ambassador and has served this country well and deserves a happy retirement.

I would like to associate myself with the sad remarks in regard to Jean Greaves Caisey. I have known Jean all of my life. I remember as a young boy she was in and out of my grandparents' home. And she was always loving and jovial. And one could never, ever forget her broad smile.

I would like to also associate myself with [the remarks regarding] Mrs. Clarke. I am sure that the family are going through a challenging time, and I just want them to know that they are not going through it alone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Tinee Furbert.

The Speaker: MP Furbert, yes. Minister Furbert, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not take all three minutes. But I do want to get the House to send condolences to the family of Mr. Glen Outerbridge, who is actually being funeralised today. And his mother just recently was funeralised. She was deceased in December. But just wanting to send condolences out to the family of the Outerbridges. It has been a tough time for them here lately. And we want them to know that our thoughts and prayers are with them. I went to school with his son, Tajmal.

They have a pretty big family, with [siblings] Gerald, Hubert, Shane, Donna and Quinn. So we are just sending our condolences out to the Outerbridge family, because Glen is surely going to be a miss, particularly in the Hamilton Parish and Bailey's Bay area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Mr. Famous. How are you today, MP?

Mr. Christopher Famous: Good day, Mr. Speaker, I am speaking from the West side of the House of Assembly.

The Speaker: Well, that means it will be clear for you. You have your three minutes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes. I am going to need it.

Mr. Speaker, today I want to give tribute to a great woman, a lady who lived to be 101 years old. She was a staunch PLP supporter. And at age 100 years old, she was able to walk to the polling station . . . well, she [was driven there] and then walked in to the polling station –to vote for her candidate who is now MP Vance Campbell. She was a lady who was

not only a staunch PLP supporter, but a staunch St. George's supporter. A lady who if you crossed her the wrong way, you would get cut down in many ways verbally, but in a jovial way. A lady who up to last year always stopped me and made sure my shoes were polished before I came to . . . well, while we were at virtual Parliament—before we had virtual and worked in Parliament—

The Speaker: I was going to ask you about that one, yes. Before we had virtual.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes. She never let me out of the house if my shoes were not shiny. I speak of a lady who took care of the Leader of our country when he was a young man in his playpen.

The Speaker: And a handful, eh?

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes. And when she saw that he, you know, bobbled a little bit, she used to have some colourful language for him.

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: She was a staunch listener of your weekly show called the House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker. And the lady I am speaking of is someone called Ms. Phyllis Wade. Anyone who knew her knew she was the life of the party right up to the last moment. And on behalf of the people of Devonshire where she spent the last 25 years of her life, we just want to give tribute to her, and we will miss her and her ways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: MP Campbell. Is that MP Campbell?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You have your three minutes.

Mr. Vance Campbell: I would just like to associate myself with the comments of MP Famous. Ms. Wade, when I canvassed her prior to the election, she gave me great motivation. She asked me, *You're a PLP candidate, Mr. Campbell?* She held up my picture, and she kissed it. And that gave me great motivation to press on for the remainder of that day and the time leading up to the election. So I definitely want to associate myself with the comments of MP Famous.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Campbell.

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

Any other Member?

No other Member. We will bring this portion of the Orders to a close and move on to the next item.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

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

The Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Speaker: There is one Bill to be introduced this morning, and that is in the name of the Minister of Education.

Minister.

FIRST READING

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT 2021

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so that it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting: Education Amendment Act 2021.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: The first Order is the Reply to the Budget, and I am going to ask with the indulgence of the House, in that it is now 12:15, we would have broken for lunch at 12:30. I am going to ask that we add on an extra 15 minutes and break at 12:15, return at 2:00 so that the Reply to the Budget can be given and then we will go straight into the debate.

Mr. Premier, would you like to move us to lunch?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House do now adjourn until 2:00 pm.

The Speaker: Members, the House now stands adjourned until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:15 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:00 pm

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members. It is now 2:00 pm. We can resume the afternoon session.

We have now been through sort of the preliminary business of the day and we are going to start the Orders of the Day with the consideration of the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditures for the year 2021/22, together with the Budget Statement in support thereof.

The Minister presented the budget last week, and we will start today with the Reply from the Shadow Minister, the Opposition Leader, the Honourable Cole Simons. And then, once he has completed, we will start the open economic debate on the budget.

Members, let me just do a little housekeeping. Because the Ministers' presentation of the budget was carried live on CITV and on Facebook, the same will be done again this time for the Shadow Minister.

We ask all Members to ensure that their microphones are off and that there is an open microphone only for the Shadow Minister when he does his presentation because any little sound will be picked up on the CITV, Facebook, and we need to make sure that we can control all unnecessary background noises.

As soon as the Minister opens up that will take us into debate, and the Shadow Minister's presentation.

MOTION

APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2019/20

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2021/22 be approved.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Shadow Minister, Opposition Leader, are you ready to deliver your Reply to the Budget today?

You have the floor, sir. All of our microphones will be muted during your presentation.

THE OPPOSITION'S REPLY TO THE BUDGET STATEMENT 2021/22

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, 2020 will forever be remembered as the year that the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, and without warning, caused it to go into a free fall. It also helped to reset the dial for new global protocols.

We began the year with the presumption of living our lives in the normal manner; when suddenly, the world was abruptly plunged into a global pandemic. We were mandated to shelter in place, work remotely in teams, zoom into meetings, study and worship online, purchase groceries online or on designated shopping days, and spend more time with our families. Throughout riots and demonstrations of civil unrest around the globe, our new reality now includes social distancing, washing our hands with increasing regularity and compulsory wearing of masks in public places.

Mr. Speaker, on the economic front, the societal disruption in Bermuda has been grave. Let's face it. We were just not prepared for this type of catastrophic event. It was a shock to our economy. It was a stress test that revealed that Bermuda's fiscal management under the Progressive Labour Party Government, was seriously lacking.

While Bermuda has a great history of managing our way through disasters like hurricanes, the pandemic proved to be more than overwhelming. We do not have to look far to find that many of our sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, aunts, and uncles have lost, or are losing, their jobs. And we cannot stand idly by. We must do whatever we can, to support these families, both economically and socially. On this 21 square mile island, we are literally our brother's keeper.

Mr. Speaker, 100-year-old business institutions have closed. Restaurants and popular retail stores have shut their doors. And major sporting events were cancelled. Our tourism and travel industries are decimated, resulting in the closure of some hotels, guest houses, and the very dramatic rise in unemployment across all sectors. This bleak economic picture will continue until we have COVID-19 under control. The One Bermuda Alliance believes that a healthy population is needed to support the development of a healthy economy. In addition, a robust na-

tional recovery plan must be crafted to guide Bermuda into an economic renaissance.

Mr. Speaker, we also believe that this economic shock will provide opportunities for bold new initiatives, requiring us to revisit tried and proven programmes, which deserve our immediate attention without political bias. We must examine new ways to work together towards a common end as, collectively, we chart our way through the path of economic recovery and rehabilitation. Bermuda is small and agile enough to do it.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda needs an economic recovery plan which is more than aspirational. The current budget presents details on the principles and aspiration of a plan, but unfortunately, it has not presented measurable milestones to define Bermuda's road map to economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, we must rebuild a vibrant economy, an economy where jobs are created with a focus on equity, diversity, fair trade, and real opportunities for Bermudians. We must find investors to support small businesses and our local economy, and we all must buy Bermuda.

This rebuilding process should be supported by a realistic blueprint, or an economic recovery plan, a recovery plan that is workable and addresses Bermuda's fiscal framework, and infrastructure investment strategies. We must develop a bold prospectus for the country which will be attractive to potential investors. One that will build trust and a real bond with our business community, through the deployment of taxes and business support; through the prioritisation and delivery of green investments; through strategic investments in tourism and hospitality, the arts and creative sectors; seniors' care; the philanthropic sector, and let's not forget, the critical support of our students.

As a result of COVID-19, changes have taken place in the workplace. We must identify new skills training for the labour market, apprenticeships and job guarantee programmes, all of which will promote an economic framework that will value and support all of Bermuda's assets.

Mr. Speaker, for 2021 and beyond, there is a view that there will be a better sense of normalcy by the end of the year. It is thought that this will be realised through the fields of medicine and health sciences. As we are nearing the one-year anniversary since of the pandemic began, we can now see that globally, there have been improvements in the management of the risks associated with the virus and its effects. As global citizens, we learned to better manage and live with COVID-19, much like the flu and the AIDS virus, which unfortunately, have not been eliminated.

There is now a sense of optimism, that people should be able to go about their daily lives with the post COVID-19 constraints, and that our economies should be poised to experience a reboot, to more self-sustaining levels.

This view was recently endorsed by The [Right] Hon. Matt Hancock, the U.K. [Secretary of State for] Health [and Social Care]. According to the BBC, Mr. Hancock commented that, with the adoption of vaccines and treatments, by the end of the year, it could mean that COVID-19 will be an illness that we live with “like we do the flu.”

He went on to say that he hoped that new drugs would be introduced by the end of 2021, which could make COVID-19 a “treatable disease” and that the drugs, and vaccines represent “our way out to freedom” and, further, that new treatments and new antibody treatments are needed for a small number who may not be protected by vaccines.

Mr. Speaker, living with COVID-19 safely would also depend on the vaccines to:

- reduce the numbers admitted to hospital;
- reduce the number of deaths; and
- reduce the transmission of the Virus.

According to the International Monetary Fund (“IMF”) [World Economic Outlook], dated October 2020: ‘A Long and Difficult Ascent’, “The global economy is climbing out from the depths to which it had plummeted during the . . . Lockdown in April.” However, with the pandemic continuing to spread, many countries have slowed their reopening, and some are reinstating partial lockdowns to protect their vulnerable populations.

GLOBAL GROWTH OUTLOOK AND RISKS

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: According to the IMF, “Global growth was projected to be 4.4 percent in 2020,” which is a less severe contraction than was forecast in June 2020. This revision reflects a better-than expected second quarter GDP result, “mostly in advanced economies, where activity began to improve sooner than expected, after lockdowns were scaled back in May and June, as well as indicators of a stronger recovery in the third quarter.

Global growth is projected at [5.2] per cent in 2021, a little lower than in the June 2020 WEO [*World Economic Outlook*] Update, rejecting the more moderate projected downturn for 2020 and consistent with expectations of persistent social distancing. Following the contraction in 2020 and recovery in 2021, the level of global GDP in 2021 is expected to be a modest 0.6 per cent above that of 2019.

The growth projections imply [that there are] wide negative output gaps and elevated unemployment rates this year [and well into] 202[2], across both advanced and emerging market economies.”

IMPACT OF THE U.S. ECONOMY

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, a leading economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics stated that, like many advanced G20 countries, there have been

measurable advances in the management, containment, and acceptance of COVID-19 as a way of life, as evidenced by the US economy, which is now showing the green shoots of recovery.

There is also real evidence to indicate that cases of COVID-19 are declining, and hospitalisations are slowing down at a steady rate. These reductions are reportedly due to either prior infections, increased vaccinations, and the increased efforts to achieve herd immunity. As a result, there is a real sense amongst many economists that when it comes to COVID-19, the US is in the beginning stages of a sustained and permanent retreat, and that its economy is beginning to slowly reopen.

It is further thought that the US Congress may pass a relief bill worth approximately \$1.7 trillion dollars by the end of March 2021. This economic safety net will result in an extension of the country’s enhanced unemployment benefits and provide a moratorium for evictions and foreclosures until September 2021. The US media has also indicated that there will be payments of \$1,400 to most households.

Mr. Speaker, with this type of economic support and fiscal stimulus, economists agree that normal life in the US will resume for the most part by the middle of this year. It is expected that as COVID-19 infections subside, and restrictions are lifted, consumer confidence will increase along with the corresponding increase in consumer spending, especially within the various service sectors.

They went on to indicate, that by March 2021, US households will have accumulated savings balances of some \$2 trillion dollars, which is almost 10 per cent of the GDP since February 2020. This is due largely to the savings generated by the enforced cutbacks on spending on discretionary services, and stimulus payments to households. Pent-up demand for leisure, recreation, entertainment, and travel-related services are also forecast to reach unprecedented levels.

Economists further believe that the US dollar is at one of its lowest levels from a trading perspective, and that a US economic rebound is inevitable, and capital will head back to the US as COVID-19 fades. We believe that this positive outlook will provide invaluable benefits to Bermuda as the US is our largest trading partner.

THE EU CHALLENGES

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, in the 2013 report by the European Parliament’s Directorate General for Internal Policies, entitled “European initiatives on eliminating tax havens and offshore financial transactions and the impact of these constructions on the Union’s own resources and budget,” they reviewed the impact of tax havens, secrecy jurisdictions, and similar structures on the EU. The report concludes that the availability of these structures constrains the

EU budget and undermines the fiscal recovery of EU member States. They distort markets by conferring advantages on large companies that engage in transfer pricing.

The report notes that “the shadow economy in the [EU] is estimated to amount to some [€]2 trillion, and that tax evasion is estimated to be around €1 trillion annually.” It further notes that “recent reports suggest that tens of billions of euros are held offshore, are unreported, and untaxed.”

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recently commented that “Council of Europe member States lose billions every year due to tax avoidance, tax evasion and tax fraud that are facilitated by the offshore financial systems, including tax havens and secrecy jurisdictions. This massive tax cheating by wealthy individuals and enterprises not only penalises ordinary tax-payers, public finances and social spending, but also threatens good governance, macroeconomic stability and social cohesion.”

The report takes the view that “Offshore financial centres are widely perceived to have contributed to the financial crisis that emerged in 2007. The holding of vast funds in secretive offshore centres enables financial institutions to hide vital information from governments, regulators, ratings agencies, and the public. This means that they escape proper regulation and public scrutiny. This enables them to take greater risks than would be possible with full transparency, and governments, regulators, ratings agencies, and investors lack the level of information required to make informed decisions. In turn, this leads to financial instability, with taxpayers having to cover the cost of rectifying the resulting problems.”

They also believe that the use of tax havens for transfer pricing and tax evasion has a negative impact on EU revenues by reducing the gross national income (“GNI”) of member States. Moreover, lower tax revenues are likely to have a negative impact on the willingness of member States to increase or maintain their contributions to the EU. “Tax havens facilitate the activities of tax evaders and criminal organisations. Combating these activities consumes resources that could otherwise be used for productive investments. The ability to engage in transfer pricing gives large corporations a significant advantage over smaller companies, which undermines the EU efforts to develop the small and medium enterprise sectors and may constrain employment creation.”

Mr. Speaker, in light of the above, Bermuda is unfairly deemed to be on the EU’s blacklist. Consequently, despite our continued engagement with the Commission and the Code of Conduct Group and its constructive and cordial relationships with its relevant officials, in principle, nothing really has changed for Bermuda since 2013.

We continue to have an uphill battle when conducting business in the EU especially after Brexit. The fact, Mr. Speaker, is that Bermuda has no heav-

yweight friends or influencers who can successfully lobby on our behalf at the national and international level.

If the EU takes the view that tax havens have a negative impact on EU revenues by reducing gross national income of its member States, Bermuda will be looked upon with suspicion, and will be challenged to conduct real business in the EU. They will continue to place hurdles in our economic lanes, given their perception of tax havens and their impact on the EU States. In fact, as recently as last month, European Union politicians were calling for any jurisdiction with a zero per cent tax rate on corporate profits, including Bermuda, to be included on the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions. What makes this even more challenging, as our Finance Minister has indicated, is that the body that makes the list has given no indication of changes in the listing criteria.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda should form a strategic alliance with members listed on the EU’s blacklist, they should form an alliance with influential lobbyists, NGO’s and other influencers that work within the European Parliament and its States. In so doing, this alliance could leverage its collective economic power, global influence and contributions to the international financial markets.

BERMUDA’S 2021/22 ECONOMY AND BUDGET

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, many Bermuda residents see this budget as very aspirational, and one that lacks detail. It provides very little hope and is likely the most nonspecific budget statement ever presented. It is as though the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was viewed as a get-out-of-jail-free card to dismiss the economic challenges facing Bermuda that were in existence, prior to the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the budget statement is to give the public two specific things: 1) A report and analysis of the Government’s finances for the past fiscal year within the context of the overarching external conditions and Government objectives and 2) to provide the Government’s plans for the country for the next fiscal year, and how those plans will affect Government’s revenues, expenditures and balance sheet.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has failed to deliver either one of these objectives in any kind of robust or detailed fashion. Instead, he has merely listed off a number of issues facing the country without any specific plan as to how to meet those challenges. There is virtually no analysis or context, other than COVID-19, of Government’s financial performance.

What has been produced is a list of principles, but even this was poorly executed because the list is only mixture of principles and objectives, for example:

- combating COVID-19 is an objective
- reducing the cost of living is an objective

- fairness and equity are principles
- fiscal prudence is a principle

Mr. Speaker, The COVID-19 pandemic transcends national borders through aviation, ground transportation and shipping. Its social and economic impact is the same. As we have all seen, as the COVID-19 numbers spike, the health of our population becomes more challenged. As populations isolate, and quarantines increase, economic confidence declines. Business sales decline, unemployment increases, furloughs increase, homes are lost, loans become unserviceable, and the contraction of various businesses and economies continues. This is the story around the world.

From a health perspective, Bermuda's recovery is admirable, and the Bermuda Government should be commended for the work they have done, and the work they continue to do. In fact, the Pan-American Health Organization and the US Centers for Disease Control, at one point, raised the Island's country status from clusters of COVID-19 cases to "sporadic cases," in recognition of the success that our country has achieved in containing the pandemic.

In light of this, all Bermudians must continue to make their personal contribution if we are to minimise the health devastation left in the wake of COVID-19. These mitigation measures include social distancing, self-isolation, quarantining when warranted, using personal protective equipment, and adhering to the standards prescribed by the World Health Organization, POCA, the US Centers for Disease Control and other agencies. As a well-known Fiscal Responsibility Panel economist said, if you have a healthy and productive population, you will also have a more productive economy.

Mr. Speaker, despite the above, the fact still remains, that Bermuda's economy continues to contract, given that our 2020 Gross Domestic Product is projected to fall [between] 7 per cent to 9 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, what the reduction in GDP means for Bermuda is more job [losses] for Bermudians, especially small businesses, which play a vital role in Bermuda's economic engine;

In the Retail Sector, businesses such as beauty salons, fitness related facilities and businesses within the hospitality sector will continue to bear the brunt of job losses. Apparel stores, and service stations will also continue to decline. These businesses face the threat of closure due to the added COVID-19 restrictions placed on them. They will likely not be able to pay their overhead costs, rents, and other expenses due to the dramatic decline in revenues.

Low wage earners who clean, prepare, and serve food within the private and public sectors are also significantly impacted. They will experience the most job redundancies and will be hit with increasing unemployment. For those who keep their jobs, they likely will not have a wage increase for years or are faced with reduced working hours.

Tourism was catastrophically affected by COVID-19. Our cruise ship industry has all but vanished with the related revenues down approximately 90 per cent for 2020.

The Construction Industry will continue to suffer, as Bermuda's construction projects fell by 41.3 per cent for the first six months of the fiscal year 2020/21, and there is no relief on the horizon.

Despite this status, economically Bermuda must place its economy on a path of higher productivity and growth, while ensuring that benefits are shared evenly, and that our debt is manageable. This is not an easy task, as other countries find it difficult to have trade-offs between implementing measures to support economic expansion, and avoiding a further build-up of debt.

There are those who believe that investments in health, education, and high-return infrastructure projects, will also help move the economy forward to a green economy. Research spending can facilitate innovation and technology production, which are the primary drivers of long-term productivity growth. Others believe that we cannot spend or grow our economy without extending our workforce or population.

Mr. Speaker, we should also cooperate with other countries and regulators on the design of international corporate taxation to respond to the challenges of the digital economy.

With the continued uncharted path of the pandemic, Bermuda must ensure that our healthcare [systems] can continue to cope with its demands. This means that we should continue to secure adequate resources, prioritise healthcare spending as needed, including testing; contact tracing; personal protective equipment; life-saving equipment, such as ventilators; and facilities, such as emergency rooms, intensive care units, and isolation wards.

Considering the above, Bermuda must continue the fight to contain the pandemic and [this] can be implemented by adopting measures to lower its transmission and set the stage for an eventual economic recovery due to mobility constraints. We should also limit the damage by supporting earnings losses for affected people and firms. Retraining and reskilling of Bermudians should continue to the extent that it is feasible, so that workers can look for jobs in other sectors.

As this transition may take some time, displaced workers will need extended income support as they retrain and search for jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that as we reopen, our Government must support the recovery by gradually removing targeted support, facilitating the reallocation of workers and resources to sectors less affected by social distancing, and providing stimulus where needed, and to the extent possible. Some fiscal resources freed from targeted support should be re-deployed to public investment, including in renewable energy, improving the efficiency of power transmis-

sion, and retrofitting buildings to reduce their carbon footprint. Moreover, as lifelines are unwound, social spending should be expanded to protect the most vulnerable, and where gaps exist in the safety net, authorities could enhance paid family and sick leave, expand eligibility for unemployment benefits, and strengthen healthcare benefit coverage as needed.

CREATING A NIMBLE GOVERNMENT

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, as stated in the SAGE Commission Report, when comparing the size of Bermuda's Government with other jurisdictions, and when tracking its growth during the last 20 years, the SAGE Commission believed that Bermuda's Government is disproportionately larger than it needs to be to conduct its business and to deliver necessary services to taxpayers.

Currently, there are 36 Members of the House of Assembly, 11 Senators, 12 Ministries, 72 Departments, 13 Quasi Non-Governmental Organisations (quangos), 16 related entities and approximately 5,070 employees. Additionally, a multi-layered management structure and excessive decentralisation has led to unnecessary red tape, poor communication, and delayed decision-making.

Bermuda also has a disproportionate number of paid legislators when compared to many other countries.

As our elected and appointed representatives address the Island's economic challenges, the SAGE Commission believed that Bermuda had an opportunity to demonstrate their belief that the sacrifice needed to regain Bermuda's financial footing must be shared by all.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that while the SAGE Report was written seven years ago, its recommendations are as workable today as they were when the report was first written. For example, the Commission recommended that the cost of running the Bermuda Legislature should be reduced by 15 per cent.

In the first instance, the Commission recommended that the House of Assembly should be reduced from 36 to 30 seats. Secondly, they recommended that the size of the Cabinet should be reduced to a maximum of 8 Ministers, including the Premier. These reductions represent savings in salary and benefits. The Premier can carry out the reduction in the size of the Cabinet now.

Until both recommendations are implemented, the SAGE Commission recommended that the Ministers and Members of the Legislature take an immediate reduction in salary, equal to the reduction in salary and wages of the Civil and Public Service.

As these cost savings do not equal the targeted 15 per cent, the Commission recommended that the remaining areas of the Legislature's budget should be reduced to make up the difference, and/or make

further reductions in the salary of the Ministers and Members of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, let us be clear, while some of these recommendations have been actioned, we believe that these recommendations can serve to demonstrate to the Bermuda community, that our Parliamentarians are serious about addressing the chronic debt crisis and moreover, and that leadership should lead by example, starting at the top.

The Commission further recommended the following reductions (and one increase) to the organisational structure of the Bermuda Government:

- Ministries: from 12 to a maximum of 8;
- Departments: from 72 to 52;
- Quangos: from 13 to 12; and
- Organisations where government has administrative responsibility: from 9 to 8.

RELIANCE ON THE ONE BERMUDA ALLIANCE CAPITAL PROJECTS HELPS TO BOOST THE CURRENT ECONOMY

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, over the past three years, there has been a reliance on several OBA projects to materially boost Bermuda's GDP and create jobs. Unfortunately, we have not seen any meaningful action to manifest the promises made by the PLP. The reality is that the promises made by the PLP have been broken.

In its 2020 election platform, the PLP pledged to "Target a return to a balanced budget within three (3) fiscal years when tourism has fully recovered following the Pandemic." They made repeated promises to balance the pre-pandemic budget and have failed. In fact, as recently as February 3 of this year in a television broadcast, the Minister of Finance indicated that he hoped to have a balanced budget by 2023. How exactly will this happen? Where is the detailed Plan? Why should we believe them this time?

Indeed, with the ongoing effects of COVID-19, and with no detailed plan to resurrect our economy, it appears that Bermuda is destined to further increase the size of our national debt, which is well on its way to almost \$4 billion dollars. A debt of that size will undoubtedly cripple our ability to put money where it is most needed, which is into social support networks, into stopping violence, and into improving the healthcare and the well-being of all Bermudians. Especially as debt servicing is costing us \$127.8 million per year.

Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance stands by its economic policies. We know that it suits the naysayers to play down our achievements, but our efforts were nothing short of an economic miracle! On our watch:

- world-class events came to the Island, new hotels and a new airport created wealth and new jobs for Bermudians; and

- the OBA attracted one billion dollars of inward investment to Bermuda.

While those were some of the OBA's accomplishments to make it to the headlines, the OBA did so much more.

Mr. Speaker, we created the independent Bermuda Tourism Authority ("BTA"), and under its leadership, Bermuda had seen record tourism arrivals. Now that it has been politicised, will we see the same level of success?

Recognising the need to bring more tourists to Bermuda during the shoulder season, we worked with the BTA to bring events such as the World Triathlon Series to the Island.

We negotiated a deal to bring 12 cruise ships to the Olde Towne of St. George's, from 2017 to 2022. Under the agreement with Norwegian Cruise Lines ("NCL"), NCL agreed to bring two new catamaran ferries to the Island for a run from Dockyard to the East End, along with a yearly investment of \$150,000 by NCL to sponsor tourism enhancement projects.

Mr. Speaker, on the OBA's watch, we created the Bermuda Business Development Agency ("BDA"), to help bring new businesses to Bermuda, and long before the PLP, we were exploring the opportunities of outer space when we began discussions with NASA over a more permanent facility on Cooper's Island. Further, we granted a 15-year exclusive contract to develop Bermuda's satellite slot.

Aware of the need for sustainability and to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, it was the OBA who started the process of getting a Solar Photovoltaic Project on the "Finger" at the LF Wade International Airport.

The small electric rental cars that we now see on Bermuda's roads today were a result of legislation that the OBA passed, allowing rental minicars in Bermuda for the first time in our history. As a result, there are now at least four car rental businesses, providing safer transportation for visitors and jobs for Bermudians.

[CAROLINE] BAY

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, Morgan's Point has taken a prominent place in this Budget Statement and, consequently, I will share some history with the people of Bermuda on this matter.

Morgan's Point was a poisoned chalice almost from the start. How so? The ground was poisoned by the US Navy and the contract that was signed by the previous PLP Government with Morgan's Point Ltd. was poisoned by the obligation to clean up the entire site to a "Residential 1" standard, at Government's and the Bermuda taxpayers' cost.

As the project progressed, the developers threatened to sue the then Government for \$100 million dollars if they did not comply with the development agreement.

Mr. Speaker, after long and difficult negotiations, Government agreed to clean up the sections of the site where clean-up was possible and retain for itself the areas where it was impossible. We did that at a cost of about \$33 million dollars. Notwithstanding all of this, it was still a "Brownfield [Site]", and as such, investment funding would not be forthcoming without Government's guarantee.

To lay the infrastructure for the long-term future of our tourism industry, create opportunities for local businesses and jobs for Bermudians, the decision was made to guarantee certain loans for the project. Unfortunately, the project failed. Nevertheless, despite the negative result of this case, Government guarantees are generally required from overseas financiers to finance major projects in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, the question is, What now?

The Government has had plenty of time to formulate a plan for the future for Morgan's Point. What is the plan? We were hoping this would be articulated in this Budget Statement. I have to say that it is disappointing not to see the plan in this statement.

While I am on the topic of Carolina [*sic*] Bay, what happened with the Morgan's Point liquidation? What did the Government actually receive for the \$165 million dollars expended for the adoption of the loans? Again, the Minister of Finance has been very thrifty with these details.

2019/20 BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, to contrast the OBA's accomplishments, under the PLP leadership Bermuda has seen the lowest business confidence levels ever. New and increased taxes have significantly impacted small Bermudian businesses, who can least afford it, and we have seen the implosion of retail businesses as well as the loss of hundreds of jobs in a sector, which was described by one Minister as 'insignificant.' It is important to note that none of these casualties were as a result of COVID-19.

Agonisingly, we have seen Bermuda's debt rise by one billion dollars in 12 months, which is absolutely incredible.

Mr. Speaker, there has [also] been very little progress on gaming, and an untendered deal for an arbitration centre, for which no financial details have been provided.

GAMING

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, there has been no mention of gaming in the 2021/22 Budget Statement. In the past two or three years, the topic of gaming has been very popular, as it is an amenity which can support our ever-evolving tourism industry.

We note in the budget, that there is a 125 per cent increase in the Cabinet Office where the Government's gaming infrastructure is managed. Is this

extra \$21.69 million dollar allocation for the gaming industry?

Mr. Speaker, the Gaming Commission has issued two provisional licences to two world-class resorts, and these resorts are unable to move forward with their gaming offering because the proper legislative and operational framework is not in place. Moreover, the banking component of the structure has not been resolved, even though we are making progress in this space. Mr. Speaker, I have been advised that the delay in gaming lies at the feet of the Premier, and that the banking matter can be resolved if the Premier does what he is supposed to do.

Mr. Speaker, there are those who have vast experience in the gaming industry who believe that gaming should be removed from the Premier and Cabinet Office portfolio and transferred to the Ministry of Finance. Senior international bankers also have indicated that they are not aware of any advanced nation where gaming is under the control of, or under the purview of a country's head of state, i.e.; Premier, Prime Minister or President.

In addition, there are stakeholders who believe that the overarching Gaming Commission legislation must be amended so that the Commission is independent of Government influence and interference. These should include the removal of the requirement that a Government representative sits on the Board of the Commission. In fact, it was noted that the Gaming Commission should have the same type of independence and autonomy as the Bermuda Monetary Authority.

As most in our country are aware, the current Government has indicated that operationally, Bermuda will be progressing with a cashless gaming solution. What does a cashless gaming solution mean? Are we talking about credit cards only? Are we talking about cryptocurrencies, like Bitcoin, Ethereum, or Tether through blockchain solutions? Transparency is required as potential operators who are prepared to invest in this industry are not clear on Government's cashless gaming direction. This matter must be resolved soon, especially as a new hotel will be launched before this summer. Considering the above, we must get it right, as Government has a responsibility to fulfil its obligations as prescribed under the various hotel development agreements which are in place in our tourism industry.

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Bermuda's International Business sector has continued to tick over well despite COVID-19, and the debacle in travel. It has been said that from chaos comes opportunities, and all this chaos is having a major turn in the right direction for the global property and casualty insurance underwriting market.

For the first time in 15 years, underwriting rates are hardening and rising. There is a significant tailwind for our ABIR members. There was a similar market which incentivised many international insurance and reinsurance company giants to flock to Bermuda years ago. As mentioned at the recent Budget Breakfast by the director of policy of ABIR, their members contributed some \$830,000,000 to renew Bermuda's economy by way of contributions to such areas as construction, travel, entertainment, and housing, and other contributions. In addition, they showcase the thought that of the 1,756 total number of employees, 72 per cent are Bermudian.

Mr. Speaker, new capital is coming into our market. Many of Bermuda's major carriers have already raised \$12 billion dollars in new capital according to the Chairman and CEO of Arch Worldwide Reinsurance group. Most of this capital went to existing companies, and approximately \$2 billion dollars went into new companies. With this infusion in existing and new companies, Bermuda will see the multiplier effect. However, while much needed capital is coming to the Island, the new landscape will not be similar to previous landscapes.

Companies are now outsourcing many of their back office functions to jurisdictions outside of Bermuda. IT servers have been relocated overseas. Employees are working remotely from Canada, the UK, the USA, and Europe. More and more administrative work is being outsourced to more competitive jurisdictions, and business analytic models are being purchased off the shelves, thereby robbing our people of job opportunities and employment.

Considering the above Mr. Speaker, our job as Parliamentarians is to encourage such companies to fill those positions locally. This can be accomplished by making the immigration process more accommodating, and by removing some of the bureaucratic red tape which stymies a productive and welcoming business environment. We cannot afford to lose this momentum, as it is the only tailwind that we currently have.

Mr. Speaker, we must encourage Government to get out of the way and allow Bermuda to grow. In 2018, Bermuda hosted an event that has been referred to as the "Davos of Ocean Science." It is time now that we consider hosting a similar Ocean Risk Summit an event for climate change risk. In so doing, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda can reposition herself to also be the centre of excellence for an international climate change risk market.

DIGITAL COMMERCE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, quite a lot is also being said about tangible opportunities in the digital commerce arena in Bermuda, and the One Bermuda Alliance supports this discussion.

With Bermuda's legislative, regulatory and telecommunications frameworks and digital communications infrastructure, we stand ready to capitalise on this emerging and growing industry. We expect the provision of robust training and internship programmes, and the creation of new jobs for Bermudians.

In addition, from a taxation perspective, the digital sector will benefit from the traditional tax schemes currently in place in Bermuda, such as company taxes, payroll taxes and land taxes. The Government should consider further examination of a negotiated value added tax for the privilege of booking their local and global Internet business earnings from Bermuda. This approach is not new, and the industry is familiar with it.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in the absence of a new international rule book, several member governments are planning their own digital service taxes. They are taking this action because of growing public pressure on multinationals, like Google, Facebook, and Amazon, to pay their share under international tax rules after the COVID-19 strained national budgets.

BASE RATES

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, the Government's recent Throne Speech indicated that the Legislature will be invited to consider Bills to reform banking laws and regulations, and to establish a Bermuda base interest rate.

It goes on to say, that the reform of banking laws will increase competition in this sector, introduce new classes of banks to boost the economy, and harmonise the bank base rate, while at the same time working with the banks to reduce the interest rates charged on mortgages.

Mr. Speaker, here I will declare my interest. I am a banker. Mr. Speaker, before the Government embarks on this journey, may I suggest this Government build consensus with the Bermuda Banking Association, and that it also secures the blessings and support of all its members. I am saying this because of the unintended consequences.

The reality is that there are two large international banks on this Island, which likely provides approximately 65 per cent to 70 per cent of Bermuda's loans and mortgages. If they are not on board with Government's proposals, and if the prescribed base rate impacts their earnings and return on assets, then these same banks will stealthily exercise their option, and will quietly and drastically reduce their mortgage and loan portfolio footprint in Bermuda. They can re-deploy their assets, and the availability of loans and mortgages to their branches, or subsidiaries in other jurisdictions.

In simple terms, if we do not get this right, the availability of mortgages and loans to Bermudians will

decrease exponentially, and the banks' assets will be used to support the rapid growth of their mortgage and loan footprints in other jurisdictions such as Cayman, the Bahamas, BVI, Jersey and Guernsey, the US, and the UK. Mr. Speaker, I reiterate, we must be aware of the unintended consequences, as this move may come back to bite us.

IMMIGRATION

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Immigration reform has been a thorny and very emotional issue for successive governments of Bermuda and her people. It has been a political football and, with the aid of successive PLP Governments, this issue has also stoked civil unrest.

But despite the above, the Progressive Labour Party has begun to make progress in this space. Their Government is just beginning to recognise that Bermuda's workforce and population must expand. Mr. Speaker, the PLP Government is finally accepting the fact that a good Immigration policy is a good economic policy.

Two weeks ago, the Minister of Immigration introduced the Economic Investment Certificate and the Residential Certificate Policy which enables investors to apply for the right to live in Bermuda indefinitely on the condition that they invest a minimum of \$2.5 million dollars into the economic well-being of Bermuda which will add value to our economy. Mr. Speaker, Bermuda also has approved applications for 400 digital nomads, who are all welcome, but how many have actually moved to Bermuda under this residential program?

For years, the One Bermuda Alliance tried to revise the current Immigration Act, but we could not do so because of the civil unrest in our community, and today the Progressive Labour Party is finally seeing the light. A good immigration policy is a good economic policy.

We are seeing the promotion of several reforms that the One Bermuda Alliance recommended, especially with mixed status families, as well as the idea of commercial immigration, which was initially presented by the former OBA Immigration Minister, the Honourable Michael Fahy, JP, MP.

Quite frankly Mr. Speaker, we also know that a full review of the Immigration Act of 1956 is a must. It is draconian, dated, and well over sixty years old. Its original purposes and features are no longer relevant to the Bermuda we enjoy today. It just does not support our 21st century economy with all its nuances and challenges.

Considering the above, our current Government must grab the proverbial nettle, stop the political sophistry, and embark upon an immigration review which will help to expand Bermuda's workforce, and in turn will form the foundation for Bermuda's economic growth. It will also create a pathway to residency and

citizenship, while at the same time protect the interests of Bermudians and Bermudian jobs.

Based on Ruchir Sharma's *The Ten Rules of Successful Nations*, increasing the population has accounted for roughly half of economic growth and that if the population is shrinking, it is close to impossible to generate strong economic growth. As the European Commission stated in 2005, "Never in history has there been economic growth without population growth."

Mr. Speaker, for the edification [of] our community, let me explain why the expansion of our workforce is so crucial.

- Debt, debt service and deficit: More working people in Bermuda means greater payroll tax collection and more local consumption which increases customs duty. A greater residential population creates a multiplier effect on our two biggest buckets of tax.
- Healthcare costs: Guest workers are generally younger and healthier than our average resident. Increasing the number of guest workers massively improves the sustainability of our healthcare system.
- Ageing population: Increasing working age population with all else staying the same, directly reduces our maintenance ratio. Total healthcare costs and ageing population are closely intertwined.
- Global compliance requirements: Many companies are going to have to do more to justify their presence in Bermuda under the new tax regimes. We are competing with other jurisdictions on this front and must present a welcoming attitude.
- Narrow economy: More working age people on Island decreases the tax load per person.

Mr. Speaker, keeping it real, our economy, social wellness and security are inextricably linked with immigration, more so than nearly any other jurisdiction. We are a service economy with no physical exports and only two pillar industries, one of which produces much of our foreign exchange, employment, and tax revenues, i.e., international business. It is time. This immigration review must start. And it must start now! Immigration reform just makes good business sense.

PENSION FUNDS FOR INVESTMENT

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, once again the Minister of Finance is silent when it comes to the unfunded liability for our Public Service Superannuation Fund, the Government Health Insurance Fund and the Members of the Legislature and the Ministerial Fund. For the record, it stands at approximately \$1.47 billion dollars, based on the latest Auditor General's Report.

Will our Government employees have a pension that they can draw on when they retire in the years to come?

Mr. Speaker, this question is not unreasonable given that the total liability due to our pension plan participants, and government's note holders, now stands at \$4.7 billion dollars.

Mr. Speaker, if we are going to be truly transparent, we should note that our government funded some of their stimulus programmes on the back of pension funds, the pension holiday, which only kicked the can further down the road. Here it should also be noted that Superannuation Fund shortfalls are of course, funded through the Consolidated Fund and will need to be addressed at some point.

ADDITIONAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT SPENDING

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: The Throne Speech indicates that, under normal circumstances, governments the world over, increase their capital expenditure to stimulate the economy and create work projects to help to get its citizens back to work, after natural disasters or dramatic economic downturns. But these are not normal times with the Government's debt ceiling at \$3.5 billion and no surplus budget possibilities in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance created an environment that incentivised foreign investment such as the St. Regis and the Azura Bermuda hotels. We engineered innovative public/private schemes such as the airport and promoted international events, such as America's Cup which alone brought \$350 million dollars to our economy and stimulated jobs and commerce, representing a sizeable return on the public purse spending.

This present Government has not demonstrated that type of ingenuity and prowess. Is capital development spending needed now to upgrade our infrastructure and stimulate a stagnant economy? The answer is Yes.

Does this Government have the ability to make this happen while adequately addressing its debt and, at the same time, not going into further debt and maintaining its present service levels while trimming the fat of government spending? Past performance by this administration and the contents of its most recent Throne Speech does not convince us that it can.

Mr. Speaker, while on the topic of Capital Developments, it should be noted that the One Bermuda Alliance recognises the need for infrastructure development. When we were the Government, we implemented a number of large infrastructure projects, some successful, and some were not. One that was not successful was the Fortress Bermuda Infrastructure Fund. This was the brainchild of Brian Duperreault, and the Hon. E. T. Bob Richards. The idea was

to create a “for profit” investment fund to improve the infrastructure in Bermuda, funded by the reinsurance industry that has assets of two-thirds of a trillion dollars (yes a trillion dollars) invested outside Bermuda. A number of ABIR companies bought into the idea and Fortress Investments of New York were to be hired to manage it. It was supposed to be about \$250 million in size. In the final analysis, in March 2017, the proposal realised firm commitments for only \$66 million, and Fortress wanted \$1 million per year in fees. We consequently declined the offer.

However, after the 2017 election, one of the first things Premier Burt and the PLP Government did was to sign that same deal. As far as we know, Government has paid Fortress \$5 million dollars for this infrastructure fund. Where do we stand today? What value has the country received for the \$5 million dollar payment to Fortress?

UPDATE TAXATION SYSTEM

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech proposed that the Tax Reform Commission of 2018 should update its recommendations “in light of the new economic realities created by the Pandemic.” Mr. Speaker, our question to this Government is, Have they read the 2019 report? And if they have read the report, what have they done thus far to implement those recommendations?

We submit that there are recommendations found in that report that are fair and equitable and do not place an undue burden on the lower paid workers of this country, and which do a lot to effectively broaden the tax base without stifling the economy. But like the SAGE report, the Fiscal Responsibility Panel’s (“FRP”) report, and other similar reports, this Government apparently has no appetite for them, nor have they put into practice recommendations made by these commissioners.

REVISED TAX STRUCTURE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: The Financial Responsibility Panel recommends that the country should brace itself for a revised tax structure. The Panel feels that the current structure is unsustainable in addressing Bermuda’s current economy. In real terms, this may mean more taxes for the people of Bermuda, given that they believe that a reasonable tax revenue, as a percentage of GDP, should be around 19 per cent to 20 per cent. That would be an increase of approximately \$190 million dollars over three years.

In addition, it should be noted that with the imminent embodiment of the Tax Reform Committee, a more fair and equitable tax structure is being examined, which could result in an increase in all of our current personal tax liabilities. Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that we need enough taxes to run govern-

ment and no more. Without taxes we cannot effectively run government.

GOVERNMENT’S ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLES

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, it should also be noted that this current budget has not addressed the government’s \$100,000,000 accounts receivable portfolio realised from across all government ministries. Neither did they present any management strategies, write-off strategies, or recovery strategies. In today’s environment, this Government should not and cannot entertain any suggestion of implementing overdue tax amnesties, or tax forgiveness for delinquent taxpayers who meet certain eligibility requirements. This is a slap in the face to those taxpayers who have been diligent, made sacrifices and found the wherewithal to pay their bills when they became due. Some who may not have had the money to pay their bills, entered arranged payment plans to ensure that they met their commitments. In some instances, if a company needed work permits, such permits were withheld until delinquent accounts were made current.

To forgive those who just did not bother to pay or to enter payment plans will establish a precedent whereby responsible companies will hold on to their money with the view to waiting out their time to get a write-off.

BERMUDA’S NATIONAL DEBT

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Bermuda’s national debt continues to rise unabated. As I mentioned earlier this year, Bermuda can expect that our national debt will hover around \$4 billion dollars during the next fiscal year. The Minister of Finance is rightfully concerned. Indeed, we all should be very concerned. He indicated that the government’s budget deficit is expected to be an “unsustainable” \$245 million for the year 2021 after the COVID-19 pandemic, with slashed revenues and soaring expenditures.

If we continue this glide path, we will see another increase in Bermuda’s debt ceiling. The Fiscal Responsibility Panel (“FRP”) said in their 2020 report that “an adverse, but . . . far from inconceivable scenario” would see Government debt on an unsustainable trajectory, leading to a credit rating downgrade and higher interest rates on new debt, the risk of “large emergency tax increase and spending cuts”, and the possibility of capital flight and a foreign exchange crisis.

The FRP also indicated that, given the fiscal position, and the limited progress of the Government acting on either of their earlier recommendations, they are concerned that Bermuda will have little fiscal or macroeconomic policy bandwidth to address any crystallisation of these risks. Over the longer term, their key concern is still domestic, i.e., the Island’s shrinking workforce and ageing population. This challenge

will put ever-increasing pressure on both taxes and spending.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Fiscal Responsibility Panel, the issue is not whether action is needed, or even what actions are needed. There is already a high degree of consensus in both their reports and those of other independent bodies, and, indeed, within government, that action is needed. This action includes immigration reform, tax reforms, and changes to the structure of healthcare and pensions, which are all necessary.

DEBT SERVICE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker: Bermuda's annual debt service is completely out of control. This money is paid to our local and international bondholders.

For the year ending March 31, 2021, this annual expense will total approximately \$127 million or approximately 11.4 per cent of the estimated expenditures. This expense is the third largest government expense after the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health. It is almost larger than the Ministries of Youth, Sports and Community Affairs, Social Development and Seniors, Home Affairs and Transport combined. And Mr. Speaker, most of this money leaves Bermuda. It does not circulate in our economy for further use by our people.

THE SINKING FUND

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, the current budget statement indicates that the Minister of Finance plans to finance his deficit from the Sinking Fund. The *Royal Gazette* stated, "the Sinking Fund, devised by the late David Saul [is] for a rainy day, just like this one."

Mr. Speaker, for clarity, Bermuda should note that the Sinking Fund was set up specifically to provide for the retirement of debt. In fact, the annual contribution was earmarked annually at 2.5 per cent of the outstanding debt for the expiring fiscal year.

What will be the Progressive Labour Party Government's policy going forward? Will the Sinking Fund contributions be made in times of plenty when we have current account surpluses? Will the suspension of our contributions to the Sinking Fund be permanently on the table, or will the suspension be temporary? How are we going to establish a reserve to retire the growing debt which Bermuda faces as a result of Progressive Labour Party Government?

Mr. Speaker, it should also be noted that the One Bermuda Alliance amended this policy slightly, so that when we could raise large cheap borrowings, we would place the excess in the Sinking Fund, and take it out as needed. It was not intended to mix the money set aside for debt repayment with excess borrowed

money for operations. But that, Mr. Speaker is exactly what is taking place.

INCOME TAX

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, income tax recently became a topical issue in Bermuda, especially when it comes to addressing economic inequality.

As my friend and former political colleague, and former Minister of Finance the Hon. E. T. Bob Richards indicated, and I quote, "The United States and Britain have had a system of income tax for more than 100 years, yet income inequality is still a significant issue there. In a recent study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which has 37 member countries, the US was the fourth highest in terms of income inequality. Britain was fifth highest.

"In the US, the top 1 per cent earns 38 per cent of the entire country's income. The income gap has widened over the past 50 years. A Pew Research study showed that in 1968, the top 20 per cent earned 43 per cent of the nation's income, while in 2018 the top 20 per cent earned 52 per cent of the nation's income. Across the Atlantic, it is said that there are more billionaires in Britain per capita than any other developed country in the world. Billionaire Warren Buffett once said that his secretary paid a higher percentage of taxes on her income than he did. So much for income taxes promoting income equality. That premise, in the real world, is patently false."

Mr. Speaker, legislating income tax is easy; collecting income taxes is another matter. The structure of Bermuda's private sector creates peculiar challenges in collecting income taxes. Take dividends for example. If I own 100 shares of Butterfield Bank, the dividend will be paid to me and there would be a clear audit trail if I failed to declare it as income. But most local businesses are privately held, family-owned enterprises. In such cases it would be easy, in a myriad of ways, to extract a return on your capital without paying a dividend.

The cost of collecting such passive income will be enormous. In a large country, that cost can be spread over millions of taxpayers, but not in Bermuda. We would have to swell the civil service just to attempt to collect such taxes. But wealthy people have the resources to hire tax professionals to mitigate their tax burden, while average and poor people do not. In Bermuda, a balance must be struck between levying taxes and the cost of collecting taxes, and the cost of doing business in Bermuda and the cost of living in Bermuda.

Mr. Richards' enlightening remarks speak volumes on the implementation of income taxes to correct inequities. To summarise, Bermuda should measure twice and cut once, as income tax is not the panacea for addressing economic inequality in Bermuda.

YEARLY DEFICIT IN MILLIONS

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, I can recall back in 2012 when the OBA became Government and had to borrow money to pay for the ongoing expenses to run the government. Money had to be borrowed as there was a massive inherited debt, while the stimulus programme took effect. Government spending was reduced gradually in an effort to avoid mass redundancies of civil servants. The OBA determined that the debt ceiling was required to clean up the mess and set a \$2.5 billion cap.

The OBA inherited a machine running an operational deficit of \$101 million and an overall deficit of \$299 million in 2012/13. The OBA handed over a Government running an operational surplus of \$166 million and an overall deficit of only \$8 million (excluding the Sinking Fund contribution) in 2017/18. The debt was being significantly addressed.

Mr. Speaker, for those Honourable Members wishing to make political points with the debt, it is worth noting that during the last fiscal years of PLP Government (2008/09 to 2012/13), the debt grew by 320 per cent, from \$335 million to \$1.408 billion. From the start of the times of plenty in 2001/02 until the year of the election in 2012/13, the debt had grown by 1,045 per cent, or eleven times over!

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me, if I did not acknowledge the comments recently made by Bermuda's Auditor General about Bermuda's national debt. She underscored her concern by stating that, as in her previous reports, the Government continues to make decisions without knowing the combined financial position of all the organisations that make up the government's reporting entity.

She further added that there are no effective, comprehensive long-term plans for reducing the annual and accumulated deficits or the associated debt, the unfunded liabilities of its major pension plans, or the size of taxpayer indebtedness, all of which continue to grow unsustainably.

Mr. Speaker, this continued behaviour must stop, and fiscal prudence should and must be addressed if we are going to bring our national debt in check. It is time to introduce fiscal responsibility legislation which places a ceiling on the annual expenditure growth. Do we also have in place an added feature which places a ceiling on our debt to GDP ratio?

This should not be dismissed, as our debt is close to 60 per cent of our GDP and each Bermudian worker is carrying \$133,000 of the government's debt.

HEALTHCARE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance believes that all Bermudians should have access to affordable, high quality healthcare. Through true and transparent consultation, the OBA recommends that Government work with all sectors

involved in the delivery and financing of healthcare in Bermuda to reduce the cost of healthcare, tackle chronic illness, and ensure equal access to care.

Every Bermudian has the right to health insurance coverage that is evidence-based and managed by independent professionals and not by the Government. The legislation surrounding healthcare is fragmented and we recommend that the laws are brought up to date and unified to reduce the confusion surrounding our healthcare regulations.

The supplemental benefit for mental health needs to be regulated and protected to ensure that insureds are being covered at the same level as medical benefits.

All of our people need more access to information about their healthcare policies, to have clear transparency regarding the specifics of their coverage. We also recommend that the PLP Government implement a "Unique Patient Identifier" ("UPI") for everyone in Bermuda. This will ensure that everyone has coverage, reduce duplication of services, and drive down the cost of healthcare for all. It will assist in services being streamlined and produce a true number of those who are uninsured or underinsured to assist in developing solutions to reduce this sub-set of the population.

But, Mr. Speaker, we must do more to tackle the root causes of poor health. So the One Bermuda Alliance recommends a National Physical Fitness Programme to encourage well-being, sound health, exercise, and healthy diets, from primary school throughout life. We would also recommend the introduction of a programme that specifically targets non-communicable diseases, underpinned with food cost reductions for healthy living.

AGEING POPULATION AND ITS IMPACT ON BERMUDA

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, according to Bermuda's Department of Statistics, Bermuda Population Projections 2016-2026, as baby boomers age over the coming years, more persons will be reaching retirement age than in the past. Due to declining fertility rates, it may be difficult for employers to secure enough qualified young Bermudians to fill these vacant positions. Also, as indicated by the increasing old-age dependency ratio, there will be a greater proportion of elderly dependents who may need to be supported by the working population.

One possible option to address this, would be to increase the mandatory retirement age of 65 in some industries or to eliminate it altogether as an earlier retirement age diminishes the labour pool. Aside from substantial immigration, another way to increase the labour supply immediately will be to bring more of the elderly into the workforce.

In the future, the needs of the elderly will likely shift public policy and the provision of services. Find-

ing affordable care providers for seniors could become more challenging than finding childcare providers. More or larger retirement facilities, senior citizen day care programmes and in-home care services will also be required. As a result, Bermuda's "greying" population will mean added challenges in upcoming years.

Again, Mr. Speaker, to remedy this challenge, we need to expand our workforce. We need more local jobs so that we are able to collect the revenue to fund our pensions and care for our seniors.

RESOURCES NEEDED FOR CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, the Population Projection Report also states that of all residents, 7.2 per cent were 75 years and older in 2016. By 2026, this proportion is anticipated to increase to 10.8 per cent.

The increase in the proportion of older seniors will likely increase the demand for purpose built residential facilities with trained staff. This is inevitable as with increasing age seniors are more likely to have chronic health challenges that may require the assistance of another person, or permanent care in an institution.

Mr. Speaker, according to the 2010 Census, 77 per cent of seniors had a long-term health condition compared with 35 per cent of persons under the age of 65. Also, 14 per cent of seniors had a disabling long-term health condition in comparison to 4 per cent of the population under 65 years of age. The 2014 Health Survey of Adults in Bermuda indicated that seniors were more likely to have hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS OUTPACES INFLATION

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: In 2004, each Bermuda household spent [on average] \$7,000 a year on healthcare, a 156 per cent increase from the amount spent in 1993. This represents a greater increase in healthcare expenditure than the 32 per cent rate of inflation during this period. The amount each household spent on healthcare was roughly \$10,300 on average in 2013, a 47 per cent increase from 2004. This was also a greater increase than the 30 per cent rate of inflation during this period. In 2013, households headed by seniors spent \$10,919 per year on healthcare, up from \$6,000 in 2004. Seventy-six per cent of that expenditure was comprised of health insurance.

The Report indicates that Bermuda's health system share of Gross Domestic Product is the third highest out of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ("OECD") countries. This

is of concern as "although this may reflect prioritization of health in an economy, it can also highlight the need for improvement in health system efficiency."

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, as we review government finances and the state of our economy, it is shameful that this Government does not have the latest employment statistics for 2020. Mr. Speaker, you may recall that the latest report was issued in September 2020 by the Cabinet Office, under the leadership of the Hon. Wayne Furbert, JP, MP, and that the report referenced the week of August 25 to August 31, 2019.

The annual Employment Survey is a census of all businesses on the Island and serves the purpose of providing a broad count of all filled jobs in the Bermuda labour market. That said, our economic review indicated that 1,935 jobs were lost in 2020, which is a 5.6 per cent reduction.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's young people have been hit particularly hard by the labour market fallout from the Coronavirus, with workers aged under 24 accounting for nearly half of the total fall in employment during the economic crisis. At the same time, there is strong evidence that more people are chasing fewer jobs, so our young people are struggling to enter the employment market.

Significantly, young people account for 46 per cent of the overall fall in employment during the pandemic, even though they only account for just one in nine of the workforce. What strategies and programmes will this Government establish to address this job loss glide path? Is it time to provide more resources to foster and support entrepreneurial opportunities? A senior economist at Bermuda College said, we need to support more young people who are working in the gig economy, which would be a significant part of the engine to drive our economy.

LOCAL RETAIL SALES

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, when looking at the sales index figure, it became very clear that consumer demand was stronger than ever. The demand straddled across all business sectors. When looking at the latest sales index figures, it became very clear, that consumer demand was stronger than ever as was evidenced in all sectors. This, we believe, was directly attributed to the Coronavirus lockdown, and the dramatic decline in nonessential overseas travel by our residents.

People had more discretionary income and shopped locally. They spent much less on travel and vacations overseas, and more was spent in Bermuda. We shopped locally; we made minor renovations to our homes; we purchased new furniture and vehicles,

and stocked up on essential like groceries, toiletries, and beverages.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Government Statistics Department, sales volume increased 7.9 per cent, after adjusting for the retail sales rate of inflation which was measured at 0.8 per cent in October. The overall volume of retail sales increased 7.9 per cent when compared to October 2019. This confirmed that the growth was attributed mostly to increased spending on Island by residents. In value terms, retail sales rose 8.8 per cent to an estimated \$99.5 million.

Six of the seven retail sectors recorded higher sales volumes with motor vehicle [sales] recording the largest volume increase of 21.2 per cent. Building materials were up by 5.15 [per cent]. Service stations were up by [0.1] per cent. Apparel stores were down by 11.9 per cent. Food was up by 7.2 per cent, and liquor sales were up by 17.7 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, according to Minister Wayne Furbert, while the restrictions on travel had a significantly limiting impact on local retail activity, they actually substantially boosted selected overseas declarations, which are defined as declarations via courier, by residents via the airport, by households via sea, and via the Bermuda Post Office. The value of the total of those categories is seen as continuously increasing for the fifth consecutive month since May 2020. Compared to August 2020, [selected] overseas declarations in September had reported an increase of 6.6 per cent.

TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, according to a tourism economist and specialist, Adam Sacks, Bermuda's tourism industry will recover nearly fully from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by 2023. He stated that tourism in Bermuda will operate at 20 per cent of 2019 levels in 2020, it will improve to 67 per cent this year, and reach 79 per cent in 2022, and 94 per cent three years from now.

He said: "Part of the strategy is survival in the three-year period to get to that point." Mr Sacks said he expects the first half of 2021 to be "very difficult," but said the second half of the year will see an improvement. He said that tourism accounted for 19 per cent of the Island's gross domestic product, or nearly one-fifth of Bermuda's economic output, adding that 23 per cent of all jobs are directly or indirectly supported by the visitor economy.

He further stated that Bermuda has reinvented itself, and approached the market in innovative ways, and has done it while staying true to who we are. He added that the loss of 80 per cent of the tourism economy this year was "a massive call to action to do all that you can from a policy and strategic standpoint to restore a central pillar of the Bermuda economy."

Considering the above, Bermuda has shown steady improvement since the airport reopened on July 1, hitting 16.1 per cent of 2019 visitor volume earlier this month. We still have a way to go, but this will be challenging because of the recent spike in the Coronavirus in the East Coast of the US, which is our core market. We should also support the industry by increasing the number of seats and flights available to visitors, and we also should continue to position ourselves as one of the international COVID-19 safe havens.

Mr. Sacks went on to indicate that the time is right, as a survey in the US showed that only 50 per cent of American householders felt safe travelling outside their community. This was reflected in figures that showed that air travel by Americans was at one-third of previous levels, and it is likely to increase in the coming months as studies show that air travel is relatively safe compared to other activities. While 11 million Americans remain out of work, he said high-income earners were least affected by job losses. "Those people [and those high earners] are our customers."

Mr. Speaker, despite this outlook, this Government expects a paltry passenger tax of \$4.5 million. The same principle applies to the transport infrastructure tax, which was allocated a negligible \$2 million. This speaks to Government's dismal outlook for 2021/22. Are they not listening to the professionals in the industry?

Mr. Speaker, another feature which jumped out in the Budget Statement was the \$10 million guarantee to the Bermudiana Beach Hotel to support the second phase of its development. This is a philosophical turnaround for the Minister of Finance who thrashed the One Bermuda Alliance for its hotel guarantee programme.

EDUCATION AND BERMUDA COLLEGE

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance has long stated that the way forward for education is to have it overseen by an independent education authority, so we are delighted that the PLP finally sees the value that an education authority can bring to the delivery of education in Bermuda and student performance and outcomes.

An education authority is not the cure, Mr. Speaker, but it is the first and necessary step towards establishing a system that provides the foundation for our young people to succeed.

We also recommend the establishment of a Continuing Professional Development Centre for our teachers, to enhance teaching skills and maintain high standards with continuous training and support. It is also crucial that both teachers and students receive the support they need, Mr. Speaker, so the One Bermuda Alliance urges the Government to supplement schools with teams of Foundational Counsellors, to

support our children and instil the skills needed for life, from early developmental learning to guidance in later years, when our children transition from education to working life.

Government should protect Bermuda College from the financial impact of the crisis so that it can maintain and enhance its critical role within our community and take decisive steps to align their teaching and learning provision to meet business and employer needs.

Mr. Speaker, in 2017 the Progressive Labour Party released its General Election platform. In it, it pledged to “reform public education by phasing out middle schools and introducing signature schools at the secondary level, with a focus on the learning styles and interests of our children, including academic, technical and the trades, business, sports, arts, and special needs education.”

Instead, now the focus is on primary schools. The Government is expected to close nine of the present 18 primary schools and replace them with parish primary schools; one in each parish except Pembroke, which will have two. Under the plan, a new primary school would be built in Devonshire, with two existing primary schools to be converted into an alternative signature school and a replacement for the Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy.

This proposal to close half of Bermuda’s primary schools was not mentioned in the 2017 election campaign. That is understandable; as it might not have been even thought of, but surely it should have been mentioned in the October 2020 PLP election platform when the Government sent Bermuda’s voters back to the polls.

Mr. Speaker, it is sad to state, but this Budget Statement, ironically, has said very little about this educational structuring and the reconfiguration and redevelopment of our school campuses. In fact, there was an \$8 million allocation reduction for the Department of Education. We look forward to an explanation for this.

SPORTS

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Again, Mr. Speaker, there was no mention of sports in this budget report and the further development of our young people. In fact, it was noted that the Ministry of Youth, Cultural Affairs and Sports Headquarters had a 38 per cent reduction in allocation. Is this department not valued?

We all know that education and sports provide discipline, self-respect, responsibility and growth to our young people. They are our future, and nothing was addressed in the budget to concentrate on the development of our young people. Yet, this Government spent resources on the development of the cannabis industry, with very little said by the Minister in support of our youth.

THE ARTS AND CREATIVE SECTOR

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Given the significant contribution of the arts, culture, and creative industries to Bermuda’s economy, and to our social fabric, the Government should take steps to protect this sector and look for ways to increase public and private investment in the arts in Bermuda.

THE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance believes that the Government should take action to protect the capacity and financial sustainability of the Third Sector, in recognition of its important role in building and support of Bermuda’s social fabric. We should examine the scope for longer-term funding arrangements for social services which support our families, seniors, and the development of young people. There should be new initiatives to incentivise private investments in this sector.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to once again acknowledge the sterling contributions of the late Anthony Manders, former Financial Secretary at the Government of Bermuda. He was a force to be reckoned with, and would have been an integral part of this budget process. His untimely death earlier this year is still having an impact on all who knew and respected him.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance asserts that there is a way forward, but there is much work to be accomplished. From a health perspective, it starts with each one of us who call Bermuda, home. We must continue to adhere to the COVID-19 protocols to ensure that not only are we safe as individuals, but the knock-on effect will also be a safer community which bolsters our economy as tourists return, businesses reopen, jobs are filled, and investors will return to our shores.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has proven time and time again, that we can weather the storm if we work together. The One Bermuda Alliance fervently believes that if Bermuda is to move forward from the darkness of the pandemic into the rays of hope which are just ahead of us, the issues outlined in this submission must be addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Opposition Leader.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Deputy Premier, we recognise you, and you have the floor.

DEBATE ON THE BUDGET STATEMENT AND REPLY TO THE BUDGET

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, I am happy to have an opportunity to participate in this Budget Debate for the 2021/22 Budget Year. Without a doubt, this is a budget that comes on the edge of a historic, monumental period for Bermuda, a far different period than we have every faced as a country.

Certainly, it is on everyone's mind as to how the future will be shaped by the Government and its own priorities and the wider community, families, and residents and those who consider Bermuda home. So this budget means much to many. It is not just about the Government's expenditure; it is about the direction of the country.

So, we entered into this economic debate today with all of that as part of what we are here to discuss. But I must say, Mr. Speaker, and I will not spend too much time reflecting on the close to two-hour presentation we just had in great detail. But clearly, having had exposure to this presentation, I understand the meaning of contrasts, and what that word means in definition. I understand the difference between a Model T Ford and a Tesla. I understand the difference between the Wright brothers' plane that took off in Kitty Hawk and a Triple Seven Boeing.

I understand the difference between a sailing boat and an ocean liner, or a modern cruise ship. I know the difference between building a grass hut and a modern skyscraper. There is great contrast that we see between the Reply that was given today and the Statement that was given last week.

I will kind of stop right there on those contrasts, Mr. Speaker, because I expect that my colleagues who will follow, members of the Government team, will give their own take on not only what has been presented to us, but also what our Government plans to do for the future.

But I think it is important in the period that I have . . . and how much time do I have, Mr. Speaker, to do my presentation?

The Speaker: Member, as the second speaker . . .

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I just wanted to confirm . . .

The Speaker: The opening speaker had his time. You have 30 minutes.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Is it 30?

The Speaker: Yes sir.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Okay, I just wanted to confirm the rules, Mr. Speaker, so I can be sure.

The Speaker: No problem.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: I will just try to paint a picture for our listening public in particular, because I do not believe I am . . . it is very clear what our opponents feel, Mr. Speaker. We have been belaboured for two hours with their Reply and their position. But I would like to talk a little bit about the wider context in which we are existing, and the world that we all have had to experience and what the impact has been over the past year, and nearly a year [since] the World Health Organization declared that we had an emergency. That was March 11, 2020, and that emergency was related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the deepest global recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Global GDP, according to IMF projections contracted somewhere in the area of 4 per cent, or 4.4 per cent. It was forecast that it had been the broadest collapse of per capita income since 1870, Mr. Speaker—I do not know if that is appreciated. According to World Bank and global statistics, it is expected by the end of even this year that real GDP per capita, particularly in the south, sub-Saharan Africa, will likely regress to the same level it was in 2007. Those are the projections.

But let me just articulate more on the world that we have had to deal with, and what is happening as a result of the pandemic. Extreme poverty is now on the rise. This had been going in the positive direction since 1998. Tens of millions of people are falling back into poverty due to the pandemic. And this is the global picture I am painting, Mr. Speaker. And it is expected that the nearly 100-plus million people that will go back into poverty will also increase by nearly 50 million by the end of 2021. And the last increase of that is expected in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

So, these are the types of impacts that have happened over the last year that are now impacting the world around us, Mr. Speaker.

Unemployment is increasing drastically globally. And, certainly, we are challenged with that here in Bermuda. And the continued contractions will particularly hurt people who work in other countries in the informal sector, Mr. Speaker. Nearly 80 per cent of the estimated 2 billion workers in the informal economy have been significantly impacted and at risk with reduced opportunities to work, [fewer] work hours. Particularly women, Mr. Speaker, who make up a significant amount of the global workforce as part of that informal economy supporting their families, are perhaps the group that is going to have the most severe impact as a result of what happened through 2020 and this pandemic.

That is [part] of the global picture, Mr. Speaker, that is faced around us. And we know the story here and we have seen it in other countries, even in the so-called industrialised and developed world, where many of our frontline workers in the health care

sector, in the retail sector and in all those sectors that were out there [working] (as the rest of us were in lockdown) still providing services to the communities that they are a part of—nurses, doctors, other health care professionals, people in grocery stores and providing other public services. Many of them were and are women and have had to face the brunt of the pandemic and have been, unfortunately, the casualties of it as well.

So, the world through 2020 and even into this year is challenged. And that was a world that even pre-COVID-19 was experiencing issues with the economic growth being very sluggish. And many countries already challenged are now facing additional challenges, Mr. Speaker.

International financial institutions have been required to lend and commit tens of billions of dollars to support many low- and middle-income countries because of the COVID-19 response. And what we have seen, certainly, here in Bermuda and in other places, Mr. Speaker, is a need for our governments to essentially take some of the taxpayer resources that they accumulate through the collection of taxes and fees and other avenues . . . they literally have had to put that back into the economy as they took it out to, obviously, fund certain other wider services. It had to be put back into the economy or even committed to supporting health care to protect the citizens from the ravages of COVID-19, but also support other social services because people were out of work because of the economic shutdowns which, globally, had to be faced, and certainly here, we ourselves, with the tourism economy and essential employment of many of our own residents, Mr. Speaker.

I have seen one statistic that suggests that much of the job growth that was experienced in recent years . . . a high percentage of that was hospitality workers. That, obviously, has been literally wiped out. And it is unfortunate that those persons who were taking advantage of great opportunities here, now may be struggling to have employment. But that is everywhere because most of the economies globally, Mr. Speaker, that were dependent on providing services and attracting services or were involved with hospitality and tourism have all experienced the same ravages.

Approximately 9 per cent of the financing that has been supplied—nearly \$100 billion or so—in our financing globally (in US dollar terms) has gone to low-income countries. So, many of the poorest countries have needed the greatest amount of support because, unless they can get access to vaccines which, certainly, themselves (in many cases) have a price to properly support and protect their citizens, they are going to potentially have to deal with the ravages of COVID-19 longer than some of the countries not, you know, just like Bermuda, who have been able to access these resources much sooner. And we must give

credit to our own Government for its efforts in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on our citizenry.

We all heard, in the very early days, Mr. Speaker, the model projections that had hundreds of people here dying if we did nothing. But the Government stood up, prepared and executed an effort to protect our citizens.

Having painted some of the global picture, Mr. Speaker, around us . . . that continues to be what we face, because until the globe gets a handle on the health crisis, the economic one will be more sluggish in its recovery. Even as we see some optimism on the horizon, that optimism should not be taken for granted. Vigilance is still crucial for all of us with this global situation.

But let me just talk about Bermuda a little bit now, Mr. Speaker, with the time that I have left. After March of last year, the Government had to act. And I can remember, certainly, as a Member of the Government sitting around the table with colleagues (whether they be in Cabinet or not), watching what was happening around the globe, we all knew that action had to be taken. We certainly did not know what would be the gravity of the situation that we would face. We did not know that we would be months and months and months fighting this pandemic. I thought, perhaps [like] we all thought, that perhaps a few months, three or four months, would be enough and we would be out of it and we would move on back to what we normally do. But that is not what happened.

But the Government had to act. And as has been eloquently recorded in the Budget Statement presented by the Minister of Finance last week, Mr. Speaker, we acted. What did Bermuda face, Mr. Speaker? Ten months ago, as was stated in the first page of the Introduction, our Island was, for the first time in modern history, shut down. I do not believe historically there has been any time similar to that in the history. World War I, World War II, any previous conflicts that have faced this place, that is the settlement known as Bermuda, we never saw the country literally have to shut everything down.

Quarantines . . . no shops, no restaurants, everybody staying at home, no sports; quarantines . . . we all had to go to the grocery shop via our names or numbers at—well, names and limited numbers—that is what we faced. Many people had to transition from working in offices to working in their homes. And that, in itself, became a monumental transition and the task for companies and businesses that could to convert essentially to virtual employment. Aspects of the economy were still running, but other aspects just totally shut down. And once that decision was made, Mr. Speaker, within a very short period of time the Government had to do certain things.

I can remember even the discussions with the business community at the time, Mr. Speaker. It may be argued that new relationships have been formed

as a result of the experience of the last year. I can certainly say myself, as a Minister, as a result of the requirements that were put on me by the Premier and my colleagues during the pandemic, I had to engage with the business community in ways that I had never done before. But that fostered a certain level of understanding, trust and transparency in our engagement that helped the Island. And we all were willing to take those chances.

But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you this, they looked to the Government for the leadership that was required. When they spoke to the Government at the time, they were looking for us to provide the clarity and the direction for the country to take—this Progressive Labour Party Government led by the Honourable David Burt, supported by now 30 others, plus another 5, capable Members in both Houses of the Legislature. They came to us to ensure that the country could get through it. We did not know what we would face; but that was a requirement.

So, one of the things that was done was, within days a programme to keep people fed and surviving with benefit for those businesses . . . because when it was clear that the country had to be shutdown, what did the Government do? And I state this because I am not so sure that if others were in this position, Mr. Speaker, they would have done what we had to do, particularly when you hear, sort of, suggestions that the spending [seemed] to have been irresponsible, or the borrowing had been irresponsible. Well, what do you think that money was for? It was to keep people alive. It did not go into anybody's pocket. It went to keep people from starving. It went to keep people surviving, to pay their bills, to exist, until such time as the conditions would change. And there are people still benefitting from those choices. So, yes, certain aspects of the priorities of Government had to be shifted. But they were shifted to benefit and keep the country alive.

Two thousand people, Mr. Speaker, received \$1.8 million worth of benefit in the first week after it was established. Ultimately, \$56 million went to over 10,000 workers. Those are workers who literally were forced to not work. So, the \$127 million that was put aside by the Government through engaging with the financial markets and its own resources was to do that, not to put the country in an irresponsible fiscal position. The country had to be under lockdown, so this is what had to be done.

And all indications are, Mr. Speaker, that many people were satisfied with the response. There is a very appropriate quote by the Finance Minister in this Statement as to . . . and it can be associated with Voltaire, that the perfect must not be the enemy of the good, because perfection was not necessarily the objective. [The objective] was to be effective, to be swift, and to bring about a result of saving lives.

So, those are some of the things that had to be done. That has resulted in the position of where we

are now. And we should be satisfied and proud that the Finance Minister, with the support of the Government and all the Members of the Progressive Labour Party Government behind him has—yes, in a challenged circumstance, not ideal—shaped a budget that has sought to position us in a disciplined way to manage the way forward so that once beyond this period, Mr. Speaker, we will be better positioned to develop opportunity to take advantage of the world around us that we hope will be relieved of the challenge of COVID-19, where people will be travelling here, where international business and commerce will be much more easily flowing, where airlines will continue and increase their lift to Bermuda, and cruise ships will return as well to take advantage of the offerings of our beautiful Island. That will all return at some point.

But in the meantime, as a Government we have to shape the community in a way that will ensure that the future has more opportunity than the past. And we can look to the past for reference, but not try and duplicate it. Because we need to build a different Bermuda going forward that . . . and frankly, in my humble view, Mr. Speaker, that erases some of the errors of the past. And some of that is encapsulated and the direction is encapsulated with the references to the Economic Recovery Plan that was spoken about and referenced by the Honourable Finance Minister as a way forward, but also by the Premier earlier today.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important that everybody in Bermuda realise that this is one of those times where we all have to get into the boat and understand that we have got to row it together. We have to each take an oar and be in sync, irrespective of our position in society. And that is where the whole thing about equity and eliminating inequality is very important in Bermuda. Because, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, as we have seen in recent years, and certainly the pandemic revealed this, inequalities that have stifled the proper development of our people in this country still pervade us. And those inequities and those inequalities in opportunity and access and even capital still pervade the experience of many Bermudians.

And there are some people who still believe that people can come to Bermuda and take advantage of opportunities much more quickly and much more efficiently than those who are here and have Bermuda as the only home that they have. So, how do we address that? We have to develop a new direction economically, Mr. Speaker. And that direction is not only a part of the Economic Recovery Plan that has been referenced in the Statement from the Finance Minister, but also in so many of the other initiatives that the Government has endeavoured to enter into. Yes, education reform will take time, but it is a part of achieving that goal, creating a system that is nimble, that is responsive to the world around us, and prepares our young people to embrace not only the Bermuda op-

portunity, but the global opportunity. That is what we have to develop there.

We have to look about diversifying our economy. Yes, tourism and aspects of international business have served us well in our development over the past 50, 60 years. But the world is different now and some of the reasons and rationales of those particular industries and their presence in Bermuda have to be changed. And we have to develop ourselves into a different brand, particularly around the hospitality sector, but we also have to attract new business in the international sector. So, our diversification of international business here will be important. Embracing technology even more will be important and making that a mainstay of our education and our development and our skill sets as a country will be important.

Showing Bermuda to be not just an orthodox member of the, sort of, I guess, Western democratic business sort of group that is between London and New York and Ottawa or Toronto and Brussels, but actually showing that we are open to the world, that we are attracting innovations in energy, we are attracting innovations in technology, we are attracting people with interesting skills, and also unique skills, who can come here and work with our own resident population to help them to develop skills that can be global in their opportunity. That is the sort of realm that we have to develop here.

And even as we talk about immigration reform, Mr. Speaker, you know, I often get very tired of hearing that there is this emphasis on just bringing more bodies to the Island because that is not enough. That is not actually . . . that is a very simplistic view of immigration. And yes, we have a 1956 Act which there seems to be at least a consensus with our opponents on this one that it has to be changed. [On] what we actually do and how we change it, perhaps, there is some dispute. But, as I recall, the Opposition sat around the same table in support of developing comprehensive immigration reform with the Government. So, certainly, on many of the items that are the chief prescriptions for immigration change should be embraced openly and we should be able to hold hands on. But as we continuously hear, there seem to be . . . the Opposition does not want to, kind of, walk in step with the same proposals that they spent the last three years around the table with us working on. But, hey, I understand, maybe it is just politics. But comprehensive immigration reform has actually been the chief commitment around that issue of the current—

The Speaker: You have just under two minutes left, Deputy.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: Gracious me, Mr. Speaker! Time just flies.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Walter H. Roban: With that, I think I can say as I said from the very beginning, we are faced with a very historic, monumental opportunity in our history to reshape this economy, to reshape Bermuda, to embrace the opportunity to be a leader in climate, to be a leader in technology, to be a leader in innovation, to be a leader in addressing inequality by diversifying our economy, and to making solid steps that are going to reshape Bermuda in a way that 10, 20 years from now the decisions that were made . . . there will be a consensus that they were the right ones, irrespective of where you sit in the political divide.

So, I look forward to working with every Bermudian on that journey, Mr. Speaker, because it is important. It is about the survival of our community as we face the pandemic, but it is also shaping a bright and optimistic future that we all can be a part of, irrespective of where we sit from income, where we live, or what we see are our dreams for the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

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

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good afternoon. That sounds like MP Dunkley.

MP Dunkley, you have your 30 minutes.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: Yes, good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I get into my presentation today let me start off where the Deputy Premier ended where he said we have a monumental opportunity to reshape our economy. He is correct. He is 100 per cent correct. But we have no choice, Mr. Speaker, and we must not waste that opportunity or squander that opportunity in anything we do. We have no choice, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition Leader early this afternoon as we came back from lunch, I thought, delivered a very comprehensive and a very balanced Reply to the Budget. He offered a detailed analysis all the way through his presentation. He offered critique where it was necessary, and he provided many suggestions that will help the Government carry on in their journey to bring Bermuda back to a better position. And the Member who just spoke before me said, Mr. Speaker, that he found the two statements contrasting. Well, yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker, because the Opposition Leader's Reply was detailed, it was thorough, and it was plain talk that everyone could understand and it covered all the important items. It was an address that gave us a good direction of where we needed to go and how we need to get there.

Mr. Speaker, the Government's Budget which was delivered last week, I believe lacked focus on some of the key areas facing Bermuda—international business, tourism. These are our biggest job creators and they are proven industries that can be successful. There was very little mention of gaming as the Opposition Leader talked about. The budget sadly lacked a direction of where we are going to go with much-needed health care reform.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I believe it provided very little hope for those Bermudians who are without a job at the present time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, economies all throughout the world are propped up by borrowing. For larger countries that is an easier task to work through. Smaller countries, like Bermuda, have to be very careful around where we go as far as the borrowing takes place. We have said all along, and I recall saying during the Budget Debate last year when there was talk about the coronavirus, which had not impacted us to its full extent yet, but it became very clear as we went through the number of days of the Committees of Supply that the COVID-19 pandemic was going to hit us very strongly. I recall talking about the need to borrow responsibly to help our people, and we are in that position right now.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see that the Finance Minister, in regard to government fiscal policy, has been restrained in the appropriate way that there have been no new taxes. And for me, knowing the Finance Minister and watching him perform his job over the past couple of years, it was expected, based on the very fragile state of our economic condition at this time. Every area, except international business, has struggled greatly over the last year. It would not have been responsible to raise taxes, it would not have been responsible to spend freely, other than spending to help us get rid of COVID-19 and deal with those challenges.

As we move forward, Government must continue to operate its sails in a very tight fashion while we help those who are struggling in our community. We must continue to support those people who struggle in our community because, as Members have said, we are nowhere near out of the woods.

Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the Economic Recovery Plan which Government has laid out, and which the Premier took an opportunity to speak to today in a Ministerial Statement. If you would allow me to refer to the Budget Book where it talks about that, I think this Economic Recovery Plan is weak—simply weak, Mr. Speaker. While the guiding principles are good, and those are listed on page 12 and page 13: COVID-19 as a priority is the first one; reduce the cost of living is the second; there must be fairness and equity is the third; financial viability is the fourth; fiscal prudence the fifth; and sixth, time limits. While those guiding principles are sound, if you look at the plan

itself, Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to gain a great deal of hope from the plan.

The seven sections that are listed in the Budget Book, Mr. Speaker: First, Economic diversification. Well, obviously, diversification always makes sense when there is an opportunity to deal with it. And so, that, while it is part of the plan, we need to see more meat on the bone of what that economic diversification really means because FinTech has not proven to provide the jobs for that many Bermudians at the present time. And economic diversification, quite often, Mr. Speaker, takes some time to build, to ferment, to actually grow. What we need now, Mr. Speaker, is action to put those unemployed people back to work.

The second part [is regarding] initiatives of the financial markets. The Government said they will focus on affordable access to capital for businesses and consumers. Well, Mr. Speaker, because of what is taking place in the world rates are probably the lowest they have been in anyone's memory. So, we have a perfect example right here to deal with getting capital at good rates and putting it to work, Mr. Speaker. But there must be a plan to make that work.

Infrastructure investment, Mr. Speaker. We support that 100 per cent. But what is listed in the Budget Book certainly does not put enough meat on the bones. Because the construction of a shoreside fishing facility, Mr. Speaker, while it sounds good, what do the dozens of local fishermen think about this and have they been consulted in this? And what is that shoreside fishing facility actually going to do? What jobs is it going to create? It reminds me, Mr. Speaker, of the vertical farming that Minister Furbert has talked about and it seems to have slipped past the radar.

Number four is expanding the resident population. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Immigration at the current time, Minister Hayward, and the former Minister (from another place) Fahy . . . in their immigration policy, Mr. Speaker, you could almost call them twins. Because the policy that we have seen from the PLP, although it is going to be very slow in being implemented, seems like a carbon copy of what the OBA was trying to put forward, Mr. Speaker. But one glaring change is that Minister Hayward says, *Well, I hold the keys to the door*. Mr. Speaker, we need to get rid of that red tape and we need to get rid of somebody holding the keys to the door to use as they decide to use them. We have talked about immigration long enough. We talked about boosting our resident population to contribute to our community. We have talked about the jobs that they can help bring for Bermudians long enough. Now, we need to see the rubber meet the road.

Five, six and seven, Mr. Speaker, are also weak in my view.

Mr. Speaker, and then the paragraph about the Government knows a good plan poorly executed can be worse than no plan at all, and they [are] dedi-

cated to creating a Project Management Team. This jumped right off the pages at me, Mr. Speaker, because while all the wording is good and it sounds like a noble idea, I think anyone will have a concern until they know how it is going to be set up, who is going to run it, and what their actual guiding principles are going to be. We need to cut the red tape. We need to make sure that there is no bureaucracy. Because those people who have been struggling for the last year cannot afford to struggle for much longer.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I have given an overview of the weak economic plan by the Government, let me just focus for a moment on the economy. We know if we turn to page 22 and page 23 in the Budget Book, you will see that on page 23 that 2,924 jobs were lost last year, a reduction of 8.5 per cent. Those jobs take into consideration the 989 jobs that were lost because of lay-offs. We know from the Opposition Leader's Reply that GDP is estimated to shrink between 7 per cent and 9 per cent. We know that the IB sector held out very well during the sharp global economic downturn. We know that their employees managed to work from home here in Bermuda and all throughout the world, Mr. Speaker. And no one would dare argue that Bermuda is not the best place to work from home.

Mr. Speaker, we know that in 2020 insurance start-ups bolstered our employment slightly because of pandemic-related capital that had sprung into the market. These are opportunities that we need to take advantage of, Mr. Speaker. And I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to international business. It is not often that we thank our people, or not often enough we thank the people who help us in many ways, but we should thank international business because, Mr. Speaker, the pandemic proved they can be anywhere in the world. And now is an opportunity for us to bring more of them back to our Island.

Mr. Speaker, from the job numbers you can see that tourism and hospitality crashed. The numbers are actually quite scary (and I will get to those in a minute). As the Opposition Leader said, retail has rebounded, due in large part because people could not travel or could only travel minimally, and they were shopping at home. New building permit applications declined 14 per cent in 2020; planning applications also declined 11 per cent in 2020; and the value of new projects in the first two quarters, as the Opposition Leader said, plummeted by 45 per cent. None of this is good news considering the fact that the airport is open and that construction is finished and that St. Regis is due to open in a few short months.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda is no different than almost every other country in the world, except China. The epicentre of the start of COVID-19, China is predicted to be the only major economy to post positive growth in 2020, Mr. Speaker. All other countries were shaken greatly. Small countries like Bermuda were shaken more. So, the Bermudian economy, Mr.

Speaker, was on life support in 2020 and Government acted prudently to triage us through that life support.

But let us look at those job numbers, Mr. Speaker, because I think those job numbers highlight exactly some of the challenges we faced and where we have turned in a short period of time. I have already said that in 2,924 jobs were lost in the last year. International business remained flat. Surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, public administration was up 82 jobs. There were a couple of other categories that saw a slight increase, such as, electrical, water supply and waste management; professional, scientific and technical activities; and administration and social services were relatively flat.

But if you look at the rest of the market, Mr. Speaker, it tells you a very different story. Manufacturing was down 78 jobs, or 20 per cent. Agriculture and fishing were down 9 jobs, or 5 per cent. Construction and quarrying were down 82 jobs, or 4 per cent. Wholesale and retail were down 264 jobs, or 7 per cent, transportation and storage down 104 jobs, or 7 per cent. Hospitality (which consists of accommodation and food service activities) was down a whopping 1,784 jobs, or 38 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Information and communications were down 11 per cent, 77 jobs. Financial insurance activities were down 69 jobs, or 4 per cent. Real estate was also down, as was health and social work care down 17 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, these are indeed startling numbers. And we should not forget that while a number of jobs were lost in our economy, on the back of the PLP Government's saying 441 jobs were created in the prior year (and there was some contention about that number), we must not forget, Mr. Speaker, that there were many people who were forced to work reduced hours through the year. So, the struggle, Mr. Speaker, is very real, but this budget does very little to address it.

Those 2,924 people that were unemployed in this last year alone, what are they going to do for the next year? Because, while we are more optimistic about where we are going to go and how we are going to get there, COVID-19 has shown that it is very unpredictable and it always rears its ugly head when we least want it to, Mr. Speaker. How are those 2,924 people going to get a job to pay bills, to buy groceries, to live some sort of comforting life, Mr. Speaker? Job losses will certainly continue throughout this year as people continue to struggle and businesses continue to struggle. So, the benefits that Government rightly gave in the past year need to be considered as we move forward, because the uptick in employment growth is certainly not going to be there, Mr. Speaker. Certainly not in the first half of this year.

And Mr. Speaker, just before I get off this job table, an interesting analysis of it is if you look at the top five employment categories on the Island. The number five employment category this year and last year as well is in human health and social work, with

2,405 jobs, which is down considerably from the year before [by] 484 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, the number four job category in 2020 was hospitality. It slipped from number one, Mr. Speaker. With the fall of 1,784 jobs hospitality went from the major employer in Bermuda to the fourth highest employment category.

Mr. Speaker, the number three employment category was wholesale and resale trade, which slipped from number two the year before.

The second highest employment category was international business, which grew from number three, Mr. Speaker. That is good news in a bad scenario.

The largest employment occupation in Bermuda, Mr. Speaker, rising from fourth to number one, is public administration. The biggest employer in Bermuda is public administration. And this must send us a clear message, as the Opposition Leader has talked about in his brief today. While it is probably needed in the short term for some of these people to jump in and help with COVID-19, public administration, as the largest employer in Bermuda, does not bode well for a healthy economy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest issue that we had in the last year was obviously COVID-19. And the Opposition Leader addressed it as did the Member who spoke before me. Interestingly enough, in this debate last year, we knew COVID-19 was coming because many people talked about it. In fact, on the day of the economic debate, the Minister of Health, Minister Wilson, gave a statement on COVID-19. So, I congratulate the Government for being on the ball in relation to preparing us for COVID-19.

It has been a long year. COVID has dominated. The Opposition, Mr. Speaker, has been generally supportive of all the measures. Yes, we have been critical along the way about some of the challenges we had with rest homes, some of the challenges we had with the claim by the Government that the testing was aggressive when, in fact, it was not in the beginning, Mr. Speaker. It has been our job as the Opposition to be critical when it was appropriate. But during the pandemic we have been very cautious to make sure that we have supported the Government because people need to rally together.

We all needed to grip those oars in the boat, because we knew, Mr. Speaker, that there were no easy decisions to make. There were no easy decisions about closing down the airport. There were no easy decisions about a lockdown or [to] shelter in place. There have been no easy decisions, Mr. Speaker. But thanks to all of us working together, thanks to the support of people wanting to be involved in giving advice, we have made it through.

And thanks, Mr. Speaker, to the UK for helping us, for putting us in this position where right now, here today, on March 5, 2021. We are probably in a better position than every other small economy

around the world in dealing with COVID-19. And why do I say that, Mr. Speaker? I say that for the simple fact that we managed to get up and running with testing. And the UK provided us with thousands of test kits and whatever else was required to make it happen where we have been very aggressive with testing. In November when we had a peak that got out of control in December, we could test and we could contact trace and we could follow up where people work.

The UK has also been very helpful to us as we geared up with the vaccines. You know, the free vaccines that have [come to] our shores and people are now starting to overcome some of the hesitancy, I hope, that allows us to be in a better position to deal with it. But it has been a long year. It has been a tiring year. And the pandemic continues to move on. People are tired of the restrictions. Many people are out of work. But we must soldier on, Mr. Speaker, and that means we must follow regulations and restrictions.

And I specifically put this in my comments today, Mr. Speaker, because there are a few amongst us who will break those well-intentioned rules, the very few who have spoiled the difficult path of a better tomorrow that we tried to take through COVID-19. First, we had the incident at Blù [Bar and Grill], then we had the uptick through November and December, and now we have had an uptick because of some private parties over the past few days, Mr. Speaker.

This is totally unacceptable. These types of actions are totally unacceptable, and people are frustrated. People have called me, contacted me, and expressed their frustration about it. We have laws in place. We have restrictions. And those people must be held accountable for their actions. They must appear in court because they have endangered our community and they have set back progress.

This has made it all the more difficult, Mr. Speaker, for us to get through the pandemic and we do not need it to happen again. This curfew implementation just two nights ago, after only being lifted a short period of time ago, is as a result of pure negligence or wanton disregard by a few, which goes against the grain of the many, Mr. Speaker. And as this pandemic is not going to disappear quickly, we need to make sure all of us are accountable for our actions.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we go through the pandemic—and the future does look a bit brighter than it looked at this time last year—certainly, no one knows how in the coming months it will play out with COVID-19. We have our theories. We have science to help us out. But what we do know is that certain measures work. As the Opposition Leader put in his brief, masking, distancing, and sanitising.

Mr. Speaker, we do know that vaccines work. The evidence is there. And I urge all people to sign up and to get a vaccine because only together will we get out of this through some type of herd immunity.

Mr. Speaker, our way forward is simple, but it is hard at the same time. It is simple because we know what we have to do. It is hard because it is taking a long time and our life is restricted because of it. And I want to take the opportunity at this time, Mr. Speaker, to thank all of those who have been on the front line over the past year in helping to deal with COVID-19. Our first reflection goes to all the health care workers who have been doing it for a year. But there are many people who are behind the scenes that we do not see, so we might not know. There are service personnel. There are all those people who have worked hard in our grocery stores, for example, during the shelter-in-place period. All of those people have done a tremendous job under tremendous strain. In the beginning, I am sure, a lot of it was managed because of the adrenaline rush they got because we knew we had a real challenge. So every day you woke up, you went to work, you did the best you could, you took your safety in concern, because the fear of the unknown was great and you had that adrenaline rush, in a bad way.

But now, Mr. Speaker, the daily grind has kicked in where we are doing the same thing over and over and over again and those workers have to be getting fatigued. And so, we say thank you to them for everything they have done to help us get to this point. But we are not out of the woods yet.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to all of us [that] the quickest way out is by staying the course of what we know that works, what we know that works with COVID-19, because if we do not, our collective pain will stay there, will continue longer than necessary. We will not know the impact of COVID-19 for decades, Mr. Speaker—the impact on our community, the impact on us as people, the impact on our mental health, and certainly the economic impact. But what we do know is that we can work through this together because there are many Bermudians who are struggling.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the PLP has talked repeatedly in the past about Two Bermudas. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is very clear to me that the Two Bermudas the PLP alluded to now are more of a reality than ever before. And I am not saying that to be derogatory or to be overly critical. But what COVID-19 has done is created a real divide in Bermuda between those who have money they can fall back on and live and those who have nothing to live from and are at the mercy of others to help them, Mr. Speaker.

And so, while there has been talk about Two Bermudas, we need to make sure that we foster an environment where we lift people back up on their feet. I referred to international business earlier in my conversation, Mr. Speaker, and we need to make sure that with international business not only do we talk about diversification, but we need to go to them and make sure that they understand that there is opportunity to grow in Bermuda. We need to ask them what

those opportunities are for them, how we get more people on the Island to do the jobs, bring more expertise onto the Island, stop sending jobs off the Island, bring them back here and create more jobs on the Island, more jobs for Bermudians, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we need to make sure that not only does Government see fit to attract people who can invest \$2.5 million, but there is more in the game than just that. It is not good just to attract somebody with a lot of money if they are not going to contribute to our economy with the creation of opportunities for Bermuda, opportunities for Bermudians to get jobs, Mr. Speaker.

One of the greatest disappointments of this budget, Mr. Speaker, is the lack of talk about tourism. We have seen tourism jobs—the biggest downfall in one year—1,784 jobs lost in one year, Mr. Speaker. Those jobs will not come back if we wait for them to come back. We have a perfect opportunity to grow tourism because we are in a better position than most other small countries and we should plan for that growth, not just talk about it. Most of those people who work in hospitality can get back to work in hospitality quicker than they can be retrained to get in any new industry and that is what we need to do, Mr. Speaker.

This budget is short on prospects of opportunity for jobs for those people out of work. And I am most surprised that the PLP is not addressing that because that is the base that they say they like to talk to, Mr. Speaker. So, rather than seeing growth in public administration, we need to see growth in the private sector where people have an opportunity to get involved, and that growth helps all of us in our community.

And Mr. Speaker, the last thing I would like to speak to (I believe I have just got about two minutes left in my time)—

The Speaker: That is correct.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: —is the real shortage of any information about where we are going in health care in the budget. And I am sure when we get to the debate in Committee of Supply there will be more discussion about it.

But Mr. Speaker, before COVID-19, the changes that were mooted by the Government in regard to health care were the talk of the Island. Now, obviously, COVID-19 has changed the focus and a lot of that conversation has gone away. But there are small lines in there about the changes that are coming, Mr. Speaker. We live in a country where our health care is very expensive. It is simply unsustainable for all of us, Mr. Speaker. If we do not get these changes right, if we do not make these changes work for all of us, it will be a disaster and we will see more people leaving the country. That is the simple reality of it all, Mr. Speaker.

So, while Government says they have consulted, they need to do a better job, because I am not sure of what the Government definition of a consultation means, Mr. Speaker, as we have seen with a Bill in another place and some concerns about that. We need to get all people involved in the consultation so we get the changes in health care right because COVID-19 has proven many people can work anywhere in the world they want—they can work on their phone anywhere in the world as long as they have got a phone and Internet service. We do not want to see people leaving this country because we get health care changes wrong. We cannot afford it. People cannot afford to pay the premium, so we need to have real sincere consultation moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, with that I would like to thank you for your time and, once again, I would like to commend the Opposition Leader for a very well-thought-out, detailed, presentation.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any Honourable Member wish to make a contribution at this time?

Any other Member?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Can you see me?

The Speaker: Minister Furbert?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: How are you?

The Speaker: Yes, you have your 30 minutes, sir.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Good.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me say good afternoon to you, and good afternoon to all.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. I have been listening to the Opposition, and it is important that I point out a few things that came to my attention.

First of all, the Opposition Leader spoke about reducing the number of MPs. And I wondered, the PLP will be quite aware of this, there was a Progressive Labour Party Government that we had in the early 2000s . . . sorry, 1997/98, talking about allotting 30 MPs in Bermuda. It was the United Bermuda Party, at the time, which did not want 30 MPs. The reason why was very clear, Mr. Speaker. They felt that they would lose most of the seats to the Progressive Labour Party. So, once you started dividing up the country into 30, an even number, then the power base that the

United Bermuda Party relied on would kind of disappear.

Mr. Speaker, also, the creation of . . . Mr. Speaker, I am going to have to leave a minute; I just feel faint right now. Did you hear me, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Minister?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Just allow me two minutes; I just feel kind of faint right now.

I will pass over to my colleague, the next person.

The Speaker: Would you like . . . Members, we are going to ask, if you do not mind yielding, and letting another Member take the floor and Minister, when your health restores later, after that Member's speech, you can come back.

Is there any other Member who would like to speak at this time?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Minister Rabain.

The Speaker: Yes, Minister. You can have your 30 minutes and then the Minister Furbert, if he is feeling better, can return. Okay?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, I am feeling a little under the weather as well, but—

The Speaker: Well, you do not have to take the whole 30 minutes. You certainly do not have to take it all.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I do wish for his speedy recovery.

But I would say that I probably was not surprised at the presentation that we had today. It is indicative of the type of presentations that we have had from the One Bermuda Alliance ever since they became the Opposition. To say that we just listened to an hour and forty-five minutes of what I would consider just "gotcha" moments littered through, you know, some occasional good suggestions, is probably the summary of what I would say of this Budget Reply.

But I am thinking, you know, the budget, when it started, it talked about our Budget [Statement] from our Minister not having any real concrete plans and then we just listened to the former Premier Dunkley speak, essentially, the same thing. And I am left wondering where, exactly, the suggestions coming from the One Bermuda Alliance were.

We found ourselves now in a situation we could have never imagined that we would ever, ever be in, coming off from a year where the entire world has seen an economic downturn and basically shud-

dering because of the COVID-19 issues that we have seen. And, you know, you have people say that this is an economic downturn not seen since the last Great Depression. And so, it is going to take all of us working together to pull us out of where we are.

I commend the Finance Minister for the budget that he has put together for this time, and it is a budget for the time that we find ourselves in and it is going to work. But it cannot work unless we have all hands on deck rowing in the same direction.

As I said, I just want to commend our Minister of Finance, Minister Dickinson, for putting out a document. I mean it clearly states where we are, how we got to where we are, and what we need to get to a better place. And so, when I listen to the Opposition Leader speak, and he talks about it is devoid of ideas and it does not take into account the doldrums we were in, I would have to remind that Member that, prior to COVID-19, we were headed for budget surpluses. It was clearly articulated in the broad path that had been put forward several years ago that that is where we were headed. And so, to talk about this as if the economy was in a tailspin prior to COVID-19, and COVID-19 has just made it even worse, it is rubbish. It is absolute rubbish to anyone who is actually paying attention.

Now, there is no doubt that the COVID-19 crisis had a tremendous effect on our finances. But there are things that had to be done to ensure that our people survived what, as I just stated, was a global calamity and things were done and money was borrowed, and the debt ceiling was increased. And all of those things were done, and we should not be upset about that because these are the things that had to be done and these are the things worldwide that had to be done.

And so, to try and pooh-pooh that and try to make light of that is truly disingenuous and it truly does show us the . . . I am trying to be parliamentary here, but you know, the head-in-the-sand, airy-fairy things that consistently come from the other side, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this was a difficult budget to put together. I was there. I was in the room. We fought each other. We argued. We challenged our ministries to do better, to look at where we are, find those necessary reductions so we could have a budget that does something that has not been done in a long time, and that is not increase taxes to everyday Mr. and Mrs. Bermuda. We have done that. We have accomplished that. The deficit from last year has been cut in half this year. We have done that.

And so, you know, instead of finding ways to poke holes with gotcha moments, as I said, I would like to see the Opposition actually come and either provide some useful commentary, some suggestions on how we can do things differently, some credible suggestions, instead of continuously trying to catch us out and, say, *So, Bermuda, look what they've done,*

instead of saying, *Hey, we understand what you did, let's see how we can move it forward.*

And so, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Reply given by the Opposition Leader and, you know, I started going through it. I am sure other Members will follow me and they will find other particular points because everyone finds their things that they kind of latch on to when we have these things.

The one thing, Mr. Speaker, that really stood out initially as I was listening to him reading this, was when the Opposition Leader started talking about base rates. And he was opining about Government better talk to the banking association if you are going to talk about adjusting rates and gave a pseudo threat of what could happen if we figured out a way to give lower borrowing rates for our hardworking Bermudians. So there are ones out there thinking, you know, *There is no future for me in Bermuda because it is just too expensive, I would like to buy a house, but I cannot afford it. I would like to buy a car, but I cannot afford it.*

And so, I was interested to hear the Opposition Leader, Mr. Speaker, go on about that and threaten that the banks will leave here. But Mr. Speaker, what I did not hear from the Opposition Leader was his declaration of interest. He works for one of these major banks that he talks about. So, is he speaking because he wants to protect his livelihood—

Hon. N. H. Cole Simons: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister, just to correct you. He did declare his interest when he made reference to the banks.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Ah! Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I do apologise for that because I did not hear that when he did.

But Mr. Speaker, when he does speak of that, is he speaking about protecting his livelihood? Or is he speaking about what is truly good for the electorate of Bermuda? That is the question that we have to answer. And I know that there is a fine balance to walk because you will often hear people say if you are not conflicted, then you're not involved here in Bermuda because of the fact that it is that small of an Island and everybody, you know, it is even said that there is one degree of separation between just about everything that we do around here.

But, Mr. Speaker, that did stand out to me. And I think in the coming weeks that Member will probably have to clarify, you know, is he looking out for himself or is he looking out for the electorate when he talks about that.

Now Mr. Speaker, the next thing that stood out to me . . . and this was interesting. And it is when the Member was talking about immigration. I want to quote from the Reply at page 20. And he says, "It has

been a political football, and with the aid of successive PLP Governments, this issue has also stoked civil unrest.”

I found that an interesting statement that the Member would state, because what he is implying is that immigration, whenever there has been civil unrest or whenever there has been a push-back, it has to be the PLP Government stoking the fires behind the scenes for these people. But, no, Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what we find wrong with the One Bermuda Alliance—the refusal to admit and acknowledge that they screwed up. That is absolute refusal. People were not . . . there was not civil unrest because the PLP stoked it. There was civil unrest because of positions made by the One Bermuda Alliance around immigration were horrible. They evoked emotions within people that they only brought about themselves. No one had to . . .

You know, Mr. Speaker, I was in the Senate . . . I sat in another place when the Senate was overwhelmed because the then, as they put it, the great, Senator Michael Fahey introduced legislation to allow PRCs to purchase *any property* they want in Bermuda. They removed the threshold so they could purchase any property in Bermuda. And why were people upset? Because the One Bermuda Alliance was blind to the fact that we were going through an economic crisis and Bermudian families who had owned properties for generations within their families were finding themselves in financial trouble.

When you take an opportunity to unleash the spending the power of the PRC who were not allowed to purchase properties under a certain threshold, of course, they are going to swoop down and purchase these properties from these hard-working Bermudian families. And yes, Bermudians are going to be upset. You do not need a political party to stoke those emotions, Mr. Speaker. They did it to themselves. As Bermudians were struggling to hold onto their properties, they unleashed a group of people in Bermuda that had tons of cash . . . because if you go back to then, remember the real estate agents were excited and saying *yes, property prices are inching up*. And what is the biggest surprise is most of these property purchases were by cash. How many people . . . and Member Dunkley who spoke earlier, talked about the two Bermudas. What side of Bermuda is walking around here with a million dollars in cash, Mr. Speaker? It certainly is not the hard-working Bermudian, Black Bermudian that has been struggling and trying to figure out how to navigate around these interest rates for mortgages, et cetera.

So, when they talk about civil unrest, own it! Simply just own it. Stop trying to deflect that you screwed up and you did things to anger people. Understand that. But we can go back to the immigration law in which a loophole was found. Legislation was introduced by the great late Walton Brown to close the loophole, and the One Bermuda Alliance refused to

close it. They refused to close it. How can you blame the Progressive Labour Party for that? You said, *No, we will allow the loophole to be open, we will allow persons to sneak and buy Bermudian status under the darkness of night because they found a loophole*. You could have closed it, but you did not.

What about the suggestion to allow non-Bermudian children to compete against Bermudian children for summer jobs? You did not need the PLP to stoke any emotions around that. You did it yourself. Own it.

And see, we will not get to a place where we are able to move together hand-in-hand until we stop playing politics as normal. And that is *own* when you make a mistake and then *admit* you made a mistake so we can move on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to highlight that because I thought it was interesting when we looked at the immigration policies and we were talking about immigration. And I thought it was pretty good as well, this morning, when the Premier gave the Ministerial Statement about the Economic Recovery Plan and one of the questions—and it was asked repeatedly—can you name five of those [items] of the Economic Recovery Plan out of the 30? And, Mr. Speaker, and rightly so, I really do thank the Honourable Member Dunkley who went back to the Budget Statement and turned to pages 13 and 14 where seven of those are named.

And so, I just wonder, well, what was going on . . . name, name, name . . . and here we are seven of them. Their Opposition Leader speaks about increasing the population of Bermuda as a way of economic recovery, and that is listed. That is listed here as number four of the seven listed in our Budget Statement—“expanding the resident population.” And so, we are working in step . . . we can work together if you just want to, if you stop trying to figure out . . . *Let me see how I can catch these lies out . . . How can I point out where they said one thing and did something else?*

Stop it! That is not helping us. That is not helping our people and it is not helping our country. All it looks like is that we are just here bickering back and forth, bickering back and forth, because we have nothing else better to do. We do have better things to do, and that is moving our country forward together, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the next thing that stood out to me was . . . and this is when you start talking about pure politics. Pure politics.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition Leader . . . and I quote from page 39 where he says, “. . . it was noted that the Ministry of Youth, Cultural Affairs and Sports Head Quarters had a 38% reduction in allocation. Is this department not valued?”

You know, I read that, and I thought 38 per cent? Let me actually go take a look. You know, Mr. Speaker, 38 per cent works out to be \$822,000. Eight

hundred thousand of that is a reduction in professional services and a reduction in salaries, meaning there are posts that may have been funded and unfilled that will not be filled and there is a reduction in consultants—the very things that we go back to the page where that Member was talking about the SAGE Report and how we should be following the SAGE Report and figuring out how to run our departments better and reduce the [amount] of the money we spend on (and if we go back to the actual SAGE Report) consultants and the number of employees in every department.

We now have [an example of following the SAGE Report] that is there, but because it is just politicking, it is mentioned in his Budget Reply as an issue. You cannot have it both ways, Opposition Leader. You cannot demand that we look at the SAGE Report and we come up with ways to run government more efficiently, and then take a pot shot because we are doing it because it makes for good political theatre. Stop it! That is not how we are going to get Bermuda moving forward.

And you know, we talk about the SAGE Report, and I was interested to read that in this document and, as the speaker before me had started off by saying, you know, talk about reducing the number of MPs, reducing the number of departments, reducing the number of Ministers. The SAGE Report was done in 2013. [The year] 2013 went by, 2014 went by, 2015 went by, and most of 2017 went by and the One Bermuda Alliance instituted very little of the SAGE Report. Here we are now, three and a half years later after . . . here we are just under four years later after the last election and, all of a sudden, it is the *why haven't you guys implemented the Report that you commissioned? The Report that you spent \$1.2 million to commission?*

Stop it!

Stop with the political theatre. It is not helping any of us. It really is not. And the Two Bermudas out there, as Member Dunkley referred to, they see it too. They see exactly what it is you are saying.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do want to move on to my last part that I want to talk about which is education. And I am always interested, obviously, as Education Minister, to see what the One Bermuda Alliance has to say. And, of course, we started off with reference to the Independent Education Authority. And they will note that you will never hear this Minister say “independent education authority” we say “Education Authority,” Mr. Speaker.

And it goes on to say that the Education Authority cannot bring about . . . it is not the cure, and it talks about some other things that could happen, that should happen—“Continuing Professional Development Centre,” Mr. Speaker. It talks about “Foundational Counsellors to support our children,” Mr. Speaker. It also talks about the “Government should

protect Bermuda College from the financial impact of the crisis.”

And Mr. Speaker, when I read this stuff, it truly does sink my heart. And do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It is because I have reached out to the Shadow Minister of Education, the current one. I reached out to the former Shadow Minister of Education, MP Jackson, when she was Shadow Minister. I have reached out to the current one. I have asked them to come and sit with me so we could talk about education reform, so they could be informed, because I recognise that education requires all of us to be on the same page.

Mr. Speaker, not one of them has taken me up on that opportunity.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We will take your point of order, yes.

POINT OF ORDER

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to state that we have met with the Minister and he did give us a comprehensive overview of the reform. And we look forward to meeting with him again in the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, and I was going to get to that. The last meeting that I had with the Opposition was March 2020. I have contacted both of them since the last election and neither of them have found time to meet with me.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I can read verbatim: *I will check my calendar and get back to you when I am able to meet.* That was their response.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I have not received any response.

The Speaker: We will take a point of order.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I have sent a communication to say, “Can we meet?”

POINT OF ORDER

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Mr. Speaker, I and my colleagues have attended the online Parish Primary School Reform meetings and presentations and we have remained engaged. We are listening.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I will restate it. I have reached out directly to the Shadow Minister of Education. I have asked him to come and sit with me one on one so we can talk about education reform. The response has been *I will check my calendar and will let you know when I can meet*. We have followed up on several occasions and the response is always the same. And I will leave it at that, okay? If you really want to know what is going on with education, you would come and meet with the Minister, not sneak into—

The Speaker: Minister, you have been on a good ground all this time. Keep doing well.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when I read things in here, when it talks about the public education reform and the consultation that is going on now about the parish primary school concept in March 2020—in March 2020—I held a zoom session with the One Bermuda Alliance. And guess what we talked about in that zoom session? Parish primary schools and that the consultation was going to start that summer. However, COVID-19 did not [allow] us to do what we wanted to do that summer, so it was pushed further down into the year, Mr. Speaker.

So, again, for the Opposition Leader to put in his document—as if it is this *ah-ha! I-got-you* moment . . . if this was so important, you would have mentioned it in your election platform, Mr. Speaker. This is the same Government that held a Throne Speech and then signed an airport deal a week later, without even mentioning an airport deal in their Throne Speech. So, again, disingenuous, Mr. Speaker.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, I really wanted to cover that because if there had been meetings as I wanted to have they would have heard things about continuing professional development centres for our teachers because they would already know that the Bermuda Educators Institute, which actually had its genesis just before I became Minister, which means the now Opposition Leader MP Cole Simons would have been the Minister of Education during the genesis of the Bermuda Educators Institute . . . he would have known that that is already well in train to do exactly what he keeps saying we should introduce.

When he talks about “Foundational Counsellors,” Mr. Speaker, he should know, as a former Minister of Education, about the multi-tiered system of support that does exist within our schools. They already exist. If they would come and sit down with me they would know about the curriculum that incorporates restorative education practices within our school system that we plan to introduce. They would know all of this, Mr. Speaker. But it is often said by the Opposition Leader that we need to take politics out of education. Well, I wish he would take the politics out of education. Come and sit and talk so we can all be moving

toward the goals we want to move to hand-in-hand instead of having to listen to soundbites like this, instead of listening to absolute rubbish op-eds being written that really reflect nothing and do nothing to help us move education along. That is where we would be, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this response and its gotcha moments that are littered throughout, we have to ask ourselves, *Do we really want to work together?* Does the Opposition really want the country to succeed? Or has everything got to be political? Has everything got to be from the position of, *What can I do to make those guys look bad?* I cannot wait until Wednesday when we do the Education budget and see what they do bring with their questions, because we will be ready with the answers they need. We will be ready to show you where we found the savings within our budget, and we will still deliver everything that needs to be delivered for our education system.

As the Member who did interject said, they have been sitting in on the zoom consultations. They would know, Mr. Speaker, and they would not have put in here, *Why isn't there any funding in here for the restructuring of our school system?* because the restructuring of our school system and the parish primary schools is not slated to start for two more fiscal cycles—two more fiscal cycles. They would know that. All they have to do is ask before they speak.

And the last thing on education, Mr. Speaker, and obviously my colleagues on the other side completely missed, an absolutely wonderful press conference that we did two weeks ago about the Bermuda College, about the half a million dollars in additional support that we have been pumping into the Bermuda College since 2017. The additional support that provides tuition help for students that has seen 800 students benefit from tuition grants, that has seen a system put in place that allows any student that graduates from our high schools with a 3.0 GPA or more to attend the Bermuda College tuition-free. This started in 2018. There were 27 students in the first year and now we are up to over 80 students taking advantage of that.

They would have heard about all of the articulation agreements that the Bermuda College now has that allow you to do two years at the Bermuda College and enter directly into the third year of prestigious organisations, institutions in Canada, the US, the UK and the Caribbean.

They would have heard that during their last year—the last year of the OBA administration—enrolment had fallen to just over 900 students and now we have increased dramatically because of the support that this Government has given to the Bermuda College.

If they had come and sat down with me, they would know of the companies that have now commit-

ted to build the new \$3.5 million student centre that is now under construction at the Bermuda College.

They would know about the \$1 million that has been put into IT upgrades and increasing the bandwidth and installing new servers and such and rewiring all of the Bermuda College. They would know these things, Mr. Speaker, all they have to do is come and sit and talk. And that is all I ask of them.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time that I was given to discuss the Reply. It has been a very difficult year for our country, and I applaud the Minister for being steadfast sometimes. He is not the most popular guy when you sit around with some of the fiscal decisions he tortures us to make. But I understand that he cares for all of Bermuda. He does not care about the political platitudes. He cares about making sure that Bermuda comes out on top, Mr. Speaker, and that is the Government that this country needs and this country deserves at this time of crisis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. You indicated you were not going to use all your 30 minutes, you used 28 of them. How is that?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: [Laughs]

The Speaker: Would any other Member like to make a contribution at this time?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Minister Furbert, are you feeling up to it now?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I [was feeling bad] myself. Anyway, I am back.

The Speaker: Okay, you can have your 30 minutes now.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that today is our economic debate, and it is my intention to stick with facts and the economic impact on our Island home. We all understand the role of the Opposition, so we are not surprised at what we hear from them or what the public will be hearing. That is their role. They complain, they say what we said or did not say. It is not surprising. So, we will let those things slide.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are two things that I want to mention, point out, that I believe—not believe, I know—that the Opposition Leader was factually wrong.

First of all, the BDA was not created by the One Bermuda Alliance. The BDA was created by the Progressive Labour Party in 2012. And the reason

why I know that is that I was there to make those things happen.

Mr. Speaker, now, when did it actually start? It did start in March, I think, 2013 under the One Bermuda Alliance, but the actual founding was [done under] the Progressive Labour Party.

Mr. Speaker, another thing that I want to point out . . . and I, from time to time you hear the Opposition speak about . . . and they mention on page 28, they say that: “The Sinking Fund, was devised by the late David Saul for a rainy day, just like this one. For clarity, Bermuda should note that The Sinking Fund was set up specifically to provide for the RETIREMENT OF DEBT.”

And that is absolutely true, Mr. Speaker. I just happened to be in the room at the time when this thing was all done. And the purpose was . . . David Saul, the former Member of Parliament and Finance Minister, took money out of any surpluses. No money was taken out of . . . it was not . . . when there was a deficit, why would . . . and just think about Bermudians. When you say you are going to set some money aside. *I am making \$10,000 a month, there is surplus there, I am going to set aside \$3,000 for the future*, whether it is expenditures or buying a car or something or for retirement. No one says when they are going to set some money aside that they are going to go and borrow money when they do not have any money, Mr. Speaker.

And that was the whole concept that the Minister of Finance last year grabbed hold of. Why would somebody go and borrow money—borrow money—to set aside? So, the money that you were borrowing was higher than what you were paying back, Mr. Speaker.

And so, the idea was to take money out of any *surpluses* to put towards a sinking fund. And I challenge anyone . . . as I said, Mr. Speaker, I happened to be in the room at the time when this particular fund was set up. A good idea. And as time goes on when we start getting surpluses and the Minister of Finance is projecting some [surpluses], hopefully in 2023/24 or whenever it takes place, then rightly so, we should take some money aside and set it aside for any future capital expenditure. That is what it is based on, Mr. Speaker, putting money aside for any future capital expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, someone once said that resilience is fundamentally underpinned by the concept that it is not so much the hard times we face that determine our success or failure as the way in which we respond to those hard times.

Mr. Speaker, I guess the key word is “resilience.” No one within the sound of my voice, Mr. Speaker, can deny that we have been going through a tough period in 2020. I do not think anyone, Mr. Speaker . . . maybe some people who have been through World War II, I do not know, I was not there, or for World War I, I do not know. But Mr. Speaker, in

my lifetime as a Member of Parliament, in my time on this earth, the few years I have spent here, I have never gone through tougher times than we did in 2020.

So, when the Opposition and the Honourable Member Michael Dunkley talks about job loss and GDP . . . what do you expect, Mr. Speaker? We all know that there were job losses in 2020. We all know that. We knew that GDP would fall in 2020. It is not a surprise that those things took place.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right now, my hat goes off to the Minister of Finance and his team for what they have come through and where they want to take the country.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right now it was not easy. Recognising that we had to raise revenue, recognising that we wanted to keep jobs, recognising that we did not want to go after the union again, [knowing how] the unions regard austerity, what do we do?

Mr. Speaker, my hat goes off to the Minister of Finance and, particularly, Mr. Speaker, my hat goes off to the different controllers in the different ministries, and Tina Tucker, who is the Budget Officer.

Mr. Speaker, it was not easy. And as much as those Honourable Members can talk and say what they want to do, and that is what I expected out of the Opposition, it would be very interesting to see what they would have done at this time.

Mr. Speaker, I can probably say that they would not have raised taxes. And, Mr. Speaker, they would have had to do some of the same things we have done. The question is: Where have we come from, Mr. Speaker? And where are we going?

Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe that there is always a particular time in history when certain individuals or certain groups should be in place. In 2017 when the electorate voted for the Progressive Labour Party, it was the right time. Everything has a right time, there is a time to sing, there is a time to dance, a time to cry. The year 2017 was the right time. The OBA had lost the Government.

Mr. Speaker, in 2020 they lost significant numbers—significant numbers. No one would have guessed that amount. Even with my political background, I would have never thought we would have those numbers. But the people of Bermuda have confidence in a Government going through rough times, Mr. Speaker, recognising where it has come from, particularly with COVID-19. And my hat goes off to the Honourable Minister Kim Wilson and the Honourable Premier, who have, every week, stood in front of this country and told us where we are, chastised us when we were wrong, patted us on our back when we were right. And at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the people spoke and said *we want you to take us through this rough time . . . we want you to take us through the battle . . . we want you to take us through*. And Mr. Speaker, I believe that the timing was right.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that when the Progressive Labour Party Government took over, they put certain things in place. And let me just say a few things that they put in place: a reduction in payroll taxes for those making under \$96,000; eliminated payroll tax for the employer who hired disabled Bermudians (first time in history); provided tax relief for first-time entrepreneurs; reduced taxi drivers' payroll taxes from, I believe it was, an average of \$2,500 down to \$1,000 (not heard of, Mr. Speaker); reduced custom duties from 5 per cent to zero per cent (and I can name some of the things like, I think it was on healthy foods, such as eggs, potatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, turnips, oranges and apples. They lost customs duty revenue on this, but the Government believed that we do things to make things happen). There was duty relief on textiles, Mr. Speaker (this is [from] the 2018 Budget); duty relief for sporting clubs, particularly on uniforms for our young people; incentives for international business that encouraged them to hire other individuals without paying the payroll tax as long as the numbers were fixed, I think it was, at March 31, 2018. And, Mr. Speaker, we saw some of the benefit of that.

Mr. Speaker, the stage was set. So, let us take a look at what happened. And Mr. Speaker, normally we are able to lay things on the Table so Members can see. But, Mr. Speaker, if you do not mind, with this technology will you allow me to share some of the graphs I want to at least show the public? If you do not mind.

The Speaker: You can share your screen.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Is it coming up?

The Speaker: We see the graph, yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, Mr. Speaker, let me just look at total revenue . . . this is the Government's revenues, just under a billion dollars . . . \$999 million. Can you see that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes, go ahead.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Okay. The revenue went from \$999 million to over \$1.022 billion. And then in 2019 the revenue went up to \$1.060 billion. So, revenue started great.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at Government expenditure. It was \$1.176 billion in 2017 and reduced in 2018 \$1.082 billion and in 2019 it went down to \$1.075 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, you saw that things were taking place within the economy. We saw construction go from 147 in 2017, to 172 in 2018, to 201 in 2019.

If you look at table 10, Mr. Speaker, we talk about policy that the Government put in place to allow

creation of dwelling units, we went from 62 dwellings completed in 2017, to 80 in 2018, to 81 in 2019. This is a policy that the Progressive Labour Party put in place and, in fact, it reflects on some of the retail sales, which I will show the Members later on.

So, Mr. Speaker, you saw that we were . . . and the Honourable Member was talking about employment earlier on, let me just see if I can pull that table up.

Mr. Speaker, 2017 33.6 thousand, 33.8, 34.3 . . . my point is that things were happening. Things were happening and, as a matter of fact, the projection the Minister of Finance had for last year and this year would have been either break even regarding our financial situation, or even an additional surplus before interest on the debt.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 struck us. Something that none of us could have controlled. Unfortunately, the GDP contracted by 8.5 per cent, as reported by the Minister of Finance. There were job declines—surprise, surprise, Mr. Speaker. Business decreased. Who is surprised at that, Mr. Speaker, that when planes are not coming in that businesses are going to decrease. Cruise ships fell off. None of the cruise ships are coming here, Mr. Speaker, because of COVID-19. Our public revenue is impacted, we have \$161 million, and the budget deficit, which is depicted, and you see it in the Estimates of Revenue where it is \$247 million.

Mr. Speaker, there were some bright spots in 2020. Let me just see if I can find those numbers. As you can see, the current GDP went from . . . Mr. Speaker, do you see this one? I just want to make sure you can see those.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The GDP went from \$7.1 million, \$7.2 million up to \$7.4 million—that was 2019 year—and, of course, it dropped off in 2020. Retail sales index, Mr. Speaker, look at this . . . look at this, Mr. Speaker. In January was down 2.3 per cent, February was up 2.2 per cent., March up 4.3 per cent. What happened in March, Mr. Speaker? And we see a drop in retail sales—no one was shopping—it went down 30.1 per cent, then climbed to 13.8 per cent retail sales in May.

Then we climbed to . . . this was when the Government started putting things in place—*Come out and start shopping, start buying*. We knew people were not flying out and taking their trips, but, Mr. Speaker, thank God that we had some Bermudians who have said *We're going to invest in some small mom-and-pop stores and larger stores*. Particularly in places like Gorhams, the government had policy in place to improve the idea of . . . to speed up building projects and stuff like that. And there was 1.3 per cent . . . Mr. Speaker, we saw on a positive note in July. Look what happened after that in August . . . went

about 10.1 per cent. September 6.8 per cent. October 8.7 per cent, November 8 per cent. And Mr. Speaker, the first time the year it goes as 14.2 per cent in December.

Mr. Speaker, there were some bright spots. And yes, they are because Bermudians were home and they were shopping, we know that. But as you know, Mr. Speaker, they also the ability to shop online, which many of them did. We saw some increases in courier packages, people buying from FedEx and the rest of the stores. (Now I do not know how to come out of this, Mr. Speaker, you might see a graph for a while.)

So, Mr. Speaker, the statistical data proves that we were heading in the right direction. But with the bump in the road, where do we go from here? Where do we go from here?

When I heard the Opposition say that the Government basically had no plan, Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that what I heard them say was what I knew they were going to say. Recognising, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right now that this Government has a plan, and in due time you will hear about it. The Premier's statement today laid out some key points in regard to economic diversification.

And I heard Honourable Members talk about vertical farming. Mr. Speaker, you can bet your bottom dollar that that will take place. As I told the Honourable Members, particularly MP Jackson, the Government is doing some more due diligence—full stop. But you can bet your bottom dollar, Mr. Speaker, that this is going to take place.

And there are other things that we are working on, Mr. Speaker, but we want to make sure that our due diligence is done and make sure that we get all the information out there. But I can guarantee, Mr. Speaker, this Government will move ahead to get the vertical farming done. And not owned by the Government—despite all the criticisms that I hear over there that the Government is going to own this vertical farm. No, Mr. Speaker, the Government made a commitment that we will make sure that we have Bermudians who have investment in things that we do. We want Bermudians, predominantly, to own that vertical farming. We want Bermudians to own it. And so that is why we are looking at the numbers to make sure [there is a] return on investment there, how would you set up the structures, those things are being worked on, Mr. Speaker.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, in due time the public will hear where we are and how we will move ahead in regard to that.

And there is other great stuff, Mr. Speaker. There are great things that this party is doing in regard to moving, as far as growth is concerned. Financial markets, infrastructure investment, expanding the resident population—these things the Premier spoke about today—our health care regulatory reform, and the list goes on and on.

Mr. Speaker, just because we do not put everything in the Budget Statement does not mean that it is not happening. It does not mean that the public will not know. The public will know. The Premier has made a commitment that the Minister of Finance will come sometime in due season and lay out the points that we plan to move ahead with, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that Bermudians are resilient. I believe we can recover quickly from difficulties. We have the brainpower on this Island home of ours to come up with the right solution. This Government was elected to lead, Mr. Speaker, and to make decisions in the best interests of our people and residents alike.

Mr. Speaker, this Government's Summary of Consolidated Fund speaks to . . . we will incur a deficit in this year of \$124 million. We will incur a deficit of \$24 million . . . this is a projection, Mr. Speaker. For change in 2021/22, we will incur a surplus in 2023.

Mr. Speaker, these numbers are not just put there to be put there, because the Government has a plan. And, as I said, Mr. Speaker, everyone will hear of those plans as we go on.

Mr. Speaker, the future is in good hands under this Government, and the buds of the tree will blossom very soon.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to end with this quote: "The past is a place of reference, not a place of residence; the past is a place of learning, not a place of living." Let us put our minds together and see what we can do to make Bermuda a better place for every one of us, especially our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I can't hear anything. I can try to disconnect. Mr. Speaker, can you hear me?
There you go.

Hon. Michael H. Dunkley: MP, I can hear you. I can hear you loud and clear.

POINT OF ORDER
[Standing Order 16(3)]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I raise a point of order as it relates to guidance from you. The Honourable Minister alluded to tabling those spreadsheets, and under Standing Order 16, I believe that we are entitled to get a copy of those. And I would like to know when we would get a copy of those. The Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics, tables 5, 6, 9, 10 and 18, and the document as well labelled ["RSI By Month For 2020"] with worksheets GDP and RSI.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem passing that information on—

The Speaker: I am sorry, my microphone was muted, I am sorry.

If we were in the House, Whip, yes, the Minister would have had to table it. Being we are not in the House, he asked permission to share it on the screen. So we all saw it, but the expectation is that, yes, as soon as possible, he will have it circulated so that all Members can have a hard copy.

The fact that he showed it to us . . . I allowed it to take place because, had we been in the House we would have seen it anyway. So, if you go and speak to something that we did not see . . . the fact is that he shared it on the screen. We all saw it.

But, yes, the follow up to that would be that a copy will be made available, whether he sends it out electronically—which I do suggest that he just send it out electronically so that all Members can get it.

If you send it to this office, we can have it put on the SharePoint site, but you do need to follow up, Minister, to make sure we all get a copy.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No problem, Mr. Speaker. I will have the Department of Statistics send that information to you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, what is the guidance if we do not get it before the Committee of Supply when it would be of most use?

The Speaker: Well—

Mr. Jarion Richardson: When I raised the point of order, I would have raised an objection in the House.

The Speaker: We would like to have it as soon as possible. So, Minister, as soon as possible if you can get it sent over, because the Budget Debate will start on Monday, and if someone wants to make reference to it, at least we have it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with sharing this information so the Opposition can be educated.

The Speaker: Thank you.

With that said, I think we took care of the point of order.

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

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: MP Cannonier?

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes.

The Speaker: MP, you have your 30 minutes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to colleagues and to Bermuda as a whole.

I would like to start out by saying thank you to the Opposition Leader for his methodical Reply and his consideration of where we are, how we should be potentially moving forward in his contribution. I certainly want to thank MP Dunkley, as well, as he articulated well our issues.

In addition to that, I would also like to thank the Finance Minister for this opportunity to sit down and to consider, not only his thoughts on where we need to go forward as far as Bermuda is concerned, but the Cabinet as a whole. The Budget certainly was presented by the Minister, but it is a reflection, clearly, on not just what the Finance Minister believes, but, additionally, on what the Cabinet believes on where we should be going forward.

You know, as years have gone by I have come to understand that this whole budgetary period and the presentations really are two-fold to say: Number one, to report on what has been happening, what has been done, not just in numbers when we look at dollar values and the likes in debt and revenue, but to put some flesh and some meat around that to explain exactly how our people are being affected by the economy within which we live. And then secondly the other objective is to show how the Government expects to go forward with the objectives for the future and how it plans on meeting those objectives.

I believe that this is where some of the contention lies. We are hearing objectives and we are hearing principles that this Government continues and will continue to put in place that it believes will benefit Bermuda. But there has not been enough said about exactly how some of these things are going to play out. There have been some that have been talked about, and we will talk about those as far as infrastructure projects and the likes.

I think it is important that, as I begin here, you know, I have been listening very intently to everyone. And I do not believe that there has been anyone . . . and I am sure that the colleagues will correct me when they have the opportunity, if there is need to be, but I do not believe that anyone has berated the Government, especially amongst my colleagues, for how COVID-19 has been handled. I believe that we were involved, maybe, could have been involved even more. But in our involvement, we understood the concerns, the challenges that were being faced. I do not believe that anyone challenged this Government, as I have heard already about the borrowing that was necessary and needed to ensure that we looked out for our people.

So, you know, I have already heard about this picking grounds and picking a fight, and I do not see where that has taken place during COVID-19 where

there has been criticism applied to this Government over its handling of COVID-19. I believe a very valiant effort has taken place by this Government when it came to COVID-19, and we have acquitted ourselves well.

You know, some may argue, well, you know, all we had to do was shut down the border and the likes. Well, that is an argument for another day. Right now, the conclusion is that we have fared extremely well over the last year, almost. Yes, a year actually. It is March now—a year since COVID-19 took its grip on not just Bermuda, but the world in and of itself.

So, the question really has never been about the money that was borrowed. The question really has not been about the policies that needed to be put in place to ensure that people are safe. Not at all. The question is that now that we have very little money, how is this Government going to find ways to ignite and to charge and to stimulate financial growth going forward for Bermuda? And I believe that is where we are hoping to see . . . as we flesh out in more detail through this budgetary period that is where we are hoping to get more answers. They certainly were not in its entirety throughout the Budget, and I do believe that as we move forward solutions will be forthcoming.

I certainly have a few that I will put as we go forward, but Bermuda needs to hear exactly what we are doing and how we are going to go about ensuring that we have a brighter future going into the rest of 2021 and into 2022, and its projections have gone out to 2023. Exactly what can we expect? And where is this Government positioning itself when it comes to the opportunities . . . expanding the economy is vital. It is important that we concentrate our efforts on exactly what this Government plans on doing.

Now, I will go to the very front. I appreciate the comment by the Finance Minister on page 2, in the second to last paragraph. He says in the last sentence: “We must harness the intellectual capital, the spirit of collaboration, the backbone and grit of our resilient island community which knows how to work together, and most importantly, wants to get back to work.” I do not think that the statement could be said any clearer. Some might argue, maybe better, but it could not be made any clearer and I appreciate the fact that he has put this in here.

I think one of the concerns as we go forward really is the very first part: “We must harness the intellectual capital.” And you know, Bermuda has become a powerhouse economically in the past primarily because it has taken advantage of that intellectual capital which resides within Bermuda. That is Bermudian expertise, and expert expertise, coming into the room and finding a way forward with the resilience and the stability of a Bermudian economy. And we have done that so well by working together and finding ways to create a very unique economy here in Bermuda, probably second to none, quite frankly. In fact, other islands—you name it—are seeking out some of the

opportunities that we have benefitted from. And that really lies with some of the contention and some of the challenges that we have.

You know, COVID-19 has highlighted the fact that we were all vulnerable. And the models that we have used in the past make it clear that, whether it be the OECD, European Nations, whether it be other Caribbean Islands and the likes, whether it be London or Britain itself, you know, we have been a powerhouse. And quite frankly, we are part of the deep ocean that is out there, and we are under attack. And if we do not come up with creative ways of being able to hold on to the business model that we have and to continue to diversify where we can . . . but [with] the base of what it is that we do, we still have opportunity.

And I have not yet heard from the Government . . . and I am hoping that as we flesh this thing out we will hear more about how our tourism department plans on moving forward. How do we plan on treating our international businesses as if their intellectual capital, actually is treasured? And, in addition to that, how are we now merging the Bermuda expertise that we do have to some of the opportunities that we think might actually improve our plight in Bermuda?

The one thing that is very clear to me and that was highlighted within this Budget, if I flip over to the Economic Recovery Plan . . . you know, the question really is not about the Plan itself, the question is whether or not this Plan is actually going to bring about the results that Bermuda needs. And it was highlighted earlier that one of those solutions is expanding the resident population (on page 14). And I think really, at the end of the day, if you look at the sentence or two that was provided by the Finance Minister on expanding the resident population, this really should be the number one goal. He clearly states that: "More people means more economic activity, more know-how, more diverse businesses, more for everyone." And that means more revenue and more opportunity to pay our bills.

And so, the great ideas that came to Bermuda were because we had more people here. No one can argue the fact that we have less people working here, from 2008 losing 6,000. We are now recognising that even today we are losing jobs in the thousands and so, we have got to come up with a way.

But the one thing that we all agree on is the fact that we need more people here to spread out the cost of living here in Bermuda. Which takes me back to page 13, where the second item or principle that this Government has highlighted is, reducing the cost of living. And quite frankly, I have not seen anything in these options that points to how this Government is actually going to reduce the cost of living. The cost of living, the cost of doing business, is extremely high in Bermuda. We have a challenge here in Bermuda, and that challenge is emigration and people continue to leave the Island. Not just expats, but Bermudians

themselves. And as this number continues to grow—and I believe that maybe we are tracking it now, but I do know that at one time we were not tracking emigration at all—we have a challenge on our hands.

We are under threat. And one of those threats is we have an inverted demographic. What do I mean by that? Well, this inverted demographic really states that the largest population within Bermuda is now becoming seniors, and the smallest population of Bermuda are our new-borns and those who will help regenerate, help pay back into taxpayers' funds, help keep Bermuda resilient. And so, this inverted pyramid, quite frankly, the point is sitting on a very, very, very thin line. And all of the weight is above it. And those of us who are working are having to now ensure that we can provide for our seniors, who are becoming the fastest growing and is the fastest growing populace within Bermuda. And with the birth rate as low as we have today, I think some numbers are showing in the negative figures, quite frankly, we are in trouble as a nation and as a people. And the only fix to this here is by ensuring that we get more people here.

Now, there have been some assumptions and there has been some talk about the fact of we are just saying just let any old person come to Bermuda. No. What we are talking about is not only high net worth people, but people within the trades, if we do not have the expertise, coming to Bermuda and ensuring that we have this intellectual capital so that we can thrive.

The cost of living will be spread out if we have more people sharing that cost. We have been experiencing this phenomenon for years now. Ten years ago, when I got involved in politics this phenomenon was still there. Now, some of the rest of the world, like Japan and other places are beginning to experience this here. In fact, as I was looking at some of the stats around the world, astonishingly enough, it was evident that in Japan itself they sell more adult diapers than they do baby diapers. And so, they are facing the very same phenomenon that we are actually experiencing, that as our population becomes more and more aged and it is growing, we have to find ways to support that. And so, I did not hear enough on how it is that we are going to reduce this cost of living.

The other opportunity that I believe exists within this reducing of costs is more and more as technology becomes a major, major part of our lives, we are going to need more and more electricity. And I recognise that the sale of BELCO has invigorated some new activity. I am hoping that we will be able to produce more power, because with the building of St. Regis and, hopefully, the rebuilding or renovations that are going to take place at Southampton Princess, more power is going to be needed. And with the households requiring and technology moving as fast as it is, we are going to need other sources of power. And so, therein lies some opportunities, I believe, that we should be looking at which will bring about a lower cost of living.

Reducing of the cost of living and the cost of doing business here . . . quite frankly, if we do not address it, and in my estimation, it has not been addressed in any formidable way since 2017 . . . and that is a real challenge.

I also just wanted to tie into this, when I spoke of intellectual capital, that there was talk about immigration and how there were some of us who were speaking out or speaking against what was taking place with the Government and its immigration reform. Well, quite frankly, I do not know where that is coming from. What I am hearing from colleagues and others is that finally, finally we seem to be getting somewhere. I mean this whole idea of expanding the resident population is not new. It is good to see that it is actually in this Budget Statement. I mean we have been talking about this for so long now and getting to a point whereby we need to ensure that we have more people here, it has not happened. And so, the question is whether or not, after writing it down, putting it in a Budget and giving it lip service, our Government is going to move forward with this.

Now, why do I ask that question? I ask that question because in the Budget Book it talks about things like Caroline Bay and I know that has become an opportunity for the Government to take a few swipes at the OBA, when it was Government. But let us just be very, very, very clear. This whole idea of expanding the resident population here in Bermuda was at the heart of helping stimulate Caroline Bay.

Discussions were had with Brian Duperreault and his team about what was necessary and the opportunities that they saw. And they very quickly stated that they had billionaires who were interested in Bermuda and they had plans of donating, they were willing to commit finances to all kinds of things. And then I see in the paper just today where the Finance Minister is talking about setting up family offices for the super-rich, the super-wealthy, here in Bermuda. Well, that is exactly what Brian Duperreault was putting on the table when he was speaking about how we could get some relief and how to Caroline Bay.

Now, no one is disputing the guarantee that has been put in place. And I am happy to hear that there are potential people who are lined up looking at Caroline Bay. But let us not be fooled by the fact that opportunity did exist to save Caroline Bay. And Brian Duperreault made it very clear on what these people, these billionaires, these super rich people who were willing to bring their family offices to Bermuda . . . a couple of years ago they were willing to bring their family businesses to Bermuda. And in his estimation, it was turned down by our now Government. Now, I do not know what those reasons were. Maybe, it did not fit within the matrix of what they thought should be offered, maybe they thought more should have been offered, I do not know.

There was opportunity to communicate and there was opportunity, as this Budget speech talks

about. And that is working together. There was opportunity to work together with these guys to bring about a solution, but it did not happen. So, it will be very interesting to see and to hear from someone within Government as to exactly why they did not take up those offers. Now, I know what they were offering. And it was quite substantial when it came to contributing to Bermuda.

And so, I say, again, to this whole idea of expanding the residential population, finally, it is good to hear that this Government is acknowledging this and, finally, it is good to hear from the Immigration Minister that he is willing to move forward, albeit he has to key the door, and that key to the door [will] cost \$2.5 million. I am hoping that he puts some more flesh on how he is going to make that happen.

But we cannot expect that this is going to work if we continue on with the kind of rhetoric that we have heard in the past approach to this whole thing. And so, you know, just like what happened in the prior PLP Government, you cannot expect folks to readily stay here when you berate them, when you do not look out for their interests. And I am not saying that we had to sell our souls. Not at all. But there was opportunity there to sit down and to discuss how we could come to a happy medium here to ensure that Bermudians thrive in their own Island, their home.

But yet, we scared many of them away. And I had conversations in 2013 with many of them who had left the Island and we were seeking out opportunities to bring them back. Some came back. But if you scare them off and then you turn around and say, *Well, hold on a second, no, no, no, no, we want you to come . . . we do want you to come*, then that is going to take some time, because birds of a feather flock together. And these folks all talk, whether they are talking in Bermuda or whether they are talking abroad.

As I have been reminded many times by this Government, you know, they say *stop the rhetoric*. Then some of the things that we are seeing taking place in a democracy here in Bermuda when people speak their minds, to be berated by this Government for standing up—all you have got to do is look in the paper today—for what they believe in they become berated. And I am not talking about expats, I am talking about Bermudians—Black Bermudians, female Bermudians—for standing up for what they believe in and then they have to be subjected to a berating by this Government for talking and speaking to what they believe in. What kind of democracy is that?

I mean I know in my conversations with the Premier he believes that this particular system that we have is one of the best in the world. And so, the system that we have is working. And because it does not go according to the plan of this Government, you get a berating for it. You are either tied into this Government, or the Governor, or you are tied into Number 10 Downing Street. It is hypocrisy! It is foolish. People need to be able to speak their minds.

Not everybody wants to line up and put on green and say *Premier, play that next tune*. I mean it is foolhardy. This is a democracy, and we need to allow people to be able to speak. Creating fear does not work. And at some point in time all governments know—the PLP has been subject to it and so has the OBA—that when you create that fear it will come back to sting you.

So, no one is immune to this. So, if we are going to get this right, I herald the efforts of this Finance Minister and what he is saying. I have got a lot of respect there for that—a lot of respect. The question is, will he be able to carry the rest of the Cabinet along with him in this endeavour? I am hoping so because the future of Bermuda really, at the end of the day, is relying on it.

And so, the global context that the Honourable Member has brought forward in the Budget in talking about the fact that, you know, we have our challenges, and through COVID-19 we have had to borrow money. You know what? Hey, it is what it is. We recognise as an Opposition that those things had to happen.

But the local context as we move forward is where I am concerned. And unless we start putting things in place and, yes, we saw the numbers that the Honourable Member put forward about how retail increased. But retail is so far behind and so far in debt it is going to take another decade of positive results in order for it to rebound. And the only way that we are going to be able to do this is we have got to defer the duty that these companies pay up front. It has just got to be deferred on to the point of sale. And so, cashflow is paramount. And the reason for the challenges that these businesses who have been around for a while are having is because cashflow is low. Why is cashflow low? Well, the number one reason is the fact that their expenses are so high and they have got to pay this money up front for their goods and services.

And the number two [reason] is there are [fewer] people here. And so, this Government has got to find a way. And any upstart and new entrepreneur opportunity, whether it be in retail and the likes, is reliant on numbers. The intellectual capital may be here, but if you do not get the people spending the money and taking the opportunity, then we are going to fail.

And so, our young people coming along who we are looking to ensure that they have opportunity to work in Bermuda, they are the ones who are going to have to pay for that inverted demographic that I told you about—those of us who are getting older and older. But we are still around; we are healthy. You know, we are having some challenges, yes. But the fact remains that they have to foot the bill. And so, balancing the Budget is vital, ensuring that we have an economy that thrives is important, but it all stems on one thing—and the rest of the world is now experiencing the same thing we are—and that is low birth rate or nega-

tive birth rate and the fact that we need more people to supplement and to keep the economy going.

And we are not the only ones in this. The Chinese, you know, they did away with the fact that you could only have one baby for that mere fact. Numerical reasons, but number two, they needed to ensure that they need money being paid into the coffers. The last administration, and I am sure Biden is going to be faced with the same thing, they have got to get their businesses and their people back to pay off the debt that they have. And the only way we are going to pay off this debt is not with the population that we do have, we have got to grow the intellectual capital in this Island to ensure the safety and the future of Bermudians.

Now, on page 27 the Finance Minister says, “If there are obstacles to growth, we must remove them, quickly.” Another one I like from the Finance Minister. You know, in 2018, almost, not quite, a year after . . . several months into this Government’s administration, I was calling on the Government at that time. You know, we were still having challenges with job losses and the likes. We needed the economy to be stimulated and that we were heading in the wrong direction, we were not getting enough people back into the working field. Well, if we are going to grow, we must remove them quickly.

We have been talking about immigration reform. Whether we were on a committee or not, this has been at the table for Lord knows how long. It is no new issue of getting people here on this Island. We have got to move with some swiftness. Why? Because our people and their livelihoods are at stake. And I know at times I have gotten very animated about how I feel about this here, because I am hearing from people every day. I know Government is hearing from people every day. *Well, what are we going to do? What are you going to do? I have not had a job for the last two years.*

So, when I ask the question about Caroline Bay and growth and the likes, it would be very, very interesting to hear from the Finance Minister exactly what happened when Brian Duperreault came with some of these ideas and opportunities.

And one of those other areas that is interesting is Grand Atlantic or the Bermudiana Resort out on South Shore. And we have had our bantering back and forth because I always believed that the OBA stifled the opportunity there. This thing has been around probably 15 years plus, costing . . . a low-cost housing project of \$42 million. The value of it is certainly not \$42 million as of today, and the taxpayer continues to pay millions of dollars into this particular opportunity. We now hear that the Finance Minister is putting \$10 million more into this opportunity. And one of the things that he states why it is different than Grand Atlantic is that—

The Speaker: MP Cannonier, you are in your last minute. I did not realise that. You started at 5:47, it is now 6:17, you have got your 30 minutes. Just wrap up quickly if you can.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay. Well, the Honourable Member says . . . he is being quoted in the paper today saying, you know, he needs to move forward. And I am wondering what exactly is happening up there, we spent a lot of money.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, and I apologise, the time went by so fast, . . . we are hearing about the Arbitration Centre. Well, Mr. Speaker, you cannot hire an overseas contractor, not tender the project, not advise on costs, not have approval from the Minister of Finance, and expect people not to ask questions. And so—

The Speaker: Thank you, thank you, MP.
I appreciate your contribution.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words.

The Speaker: MP Jackson, yes, you have your 30 minutes.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to begin by saying that we are definitely in a position here where it is a bit of a holding pattern. And, you know, I have heard this quote lately that *we are surviving, we are not thriving yet*. And when I think about COVID-19 and the pandemic that we have been through, and certainly we have shared all of the pros and cons of that experience, I do want to share some optimism for the vaccination protocols that are taking place right now.

I am giving my little testimony that I have had my first shot, my first vaccination. And certainly, things are running very well. And it immediately brings me to thank the so many patient and supportive members who are conducting the vaccinations, the essential workers that have spent so many hours making sure that they can keep this Island safe and healthy. And I cannot take . . . every opportunity I just have to say thank you because we are, as a country, so appreciative of it.

But the economic recovery is going to depend on as many of us as possible to get vaccinated. And I am bringing that to the fore because I see that if we could get what is termed as herd immunity, where enough of us are vaccinated, then it puts us in the unique opportunity for especially our tourism industry,

that people will have a sense of security, wanting to come to this Island because they know it is safe. And that, in and of itself, has been a major motivation, at least for me, to make sure that I do my part by getting myself vaccinated.

And it is going to take the whole Island to bring the economy back into a healthy position. We are all going to have to play our part. And certainly, when I reflect back on essential workers, I have to also realise the struggles that they have been through. They have worked through some very long hours, they have been affected, whether it is through job hours that have been reduced or even, in some cases, job losses. And so, with that I recognise through the Budget Statement that as many as 2,924 jobs have been lost, and 1,056 of them are in accommodation and food service, 256 in retail and wholesale, and 484 jobs lost in health and social services. And so that is a lot of people that have been without work and those who are working, many have seen, as was quoted in the Budget Statement, their salaries decrease by something short of 7.5 per cent.

So, I am just wondering, you know, has Government really accounted for the fact that even if we get things started again, there are going to be folks that are out there working [fewer] hours and receiving less pay, and whether the idea of the financial unemployment assistance will be extended any further. I know that we have put a cap on it, but I am just . . . to mitigate the risk that we are not able to get the economy up and going fast enough, [I wonder] whether the Government has considered putting some funds aside to extend that unemployment assistance.

When out canvassing I found that there are a number of people, especially those that are at retirement age who were working part time, and their hours were not sufficient to qualify for the unemployment assistance. I can understand that in, sort of, a healthy economic environment when you are pulling together the formula for who gets financial support during a pandemic such as this, but at the same time I just want the Government to be reminded, or to recognise, that there is also a population of people out there who were not able to get any unemployment assistance because they were not working enough hours to qualify, and the impact that this is having on folks that are often quiet and silent about the struggle that they are experiencing, but they are still out there. And what could be done, or at least what preparation could be made just in case we are not able to get the economy going again as quickly as we may like.

So, the Budget Statement had mentioned that we are at about 8.5 per cent unemployment and that the rebound, the pent-up demand for people to come out and start spending again should create some employment. And we are projecting, through the Budget Statement, that we could have as much as a 3.5 per cent rise in employment. But, Mr. Speaker, that still

leaves 5 per cent of the population unemployed, who are not working.

And what can we do, what can we sit around and consider finding as a way to supplement . . . and I do not mean, necessarily, by just doling out additional funds. But that we must recognise that even if we do start to see the demand and we start to see the economy begin to pick up, that we are still going to have, to me, a high percentage—5 per cent possibly—that will remain unemployed even when things start to pick up again.

And one of my other . . . you know, the job of the Opposition . . . you know, it is not about me wanting to be critical about a situation, but I do like to see whether I can peer between the lines and find the gaps so that there is almost a bit of a contingency plan on the side. So, you know, we have looked at the really big numbers in the Budget. But what happens when we are talking about the individual and the experiences of the population that are going through their day-to-day experiences and are feeling the challenges and the struggles? And because of that I feel as though it is important for somebody to be a bit of a Devil's advocate in order to prepare for the unexpected. You know, having come through an entire year, almost to the date, of an experience that the world has not ever had to go through in our lifetime creates a level of uncertainty that makes me want to consider what we may need to put aside or think about just in case things do not go according to plan.

And one of my observations has been consumer behaviour. So, we all think that, yes, as soon as we are allowed to freely move about the community that people will start spending money again and we are just going to all bounce back. Well, I am also considering the fact that people have been living at home for the past year, and because of that there could be some unexpected changes that we may not be prepared for or are not recognising right away. And just as an example, I think about consumer behaviour with the reopening of the economy. And you know, I do not mean to be trite about this, Mr. Speaker, but people may spend differently. I mean many people have been living in, you know, socks and sweatpants for the past year, so, you know, is going back to work going to create that relatively expensive professional wardrobe again?

Are people going to move into a new kind of consumer behaviour? And are we considering that? Are we looking at things from a different perspective, just in case they are not going to snap back as normal?

You know, certainly I have heard the Premier and the Minister of Finance say that it is not going to be the same; we are not going back. But we have got to look to what the new future looks like. And I just want to make sure that we consider the fact that there are certain behaviours that have, I am sure, undoubtedly changed over the past year and whether we, as a

Government, are considering those possible changes and are preparing for the eventuality that some of the stuff may be different when we come out of this overall shelter-in-place.

So, just getting back to those 2,924 jobs that have been lost, and where do the people go, so, yes, 3.5 per cent back in employment, demand is up again, the economy is moving. But where do we, as a Government foresee those who are returning to work, going to go back to work [at]? The international business, as has been mentioned numerous times before, has fared quite well through this. But, you know, international business is not for everyone. Working in an office in front of a computer is not for everyone. And then just the sheer volume of numbers of people who would be looking to return to work far exceeds what the international business would be looking for or would be demanding as far as their employment figures are concerned.

So, where are all the people going to go back to work? We have lost so many hotel beds that I do not see a huge rebirth in the tourism industry right away. Even when the cruise ships are given permission to start sailing again, it is going to take them months before they are really up to standard and ready to sail again. So, we are looking at an extended period of time, especially in the hospitality and tourism industry. And so, yes, I have heard that the Minister of Public Works is looking at infrastructure projects so that we can get some people back [to work]. But I do believe that we really have to start having a national conversation about the specific kinds of jobs, whether they are to feed into, sort of, greenhouse agriculture (if we are going to go with vertical farming), or else . . . or other, that we can start to look at what we can do now so that there are jobs for people to come back to.

Now, the Budget Statement also mentioned a national unemployment insurance scheme, which would have been fantastic if we had had one. But it is unfortunate that we do not. But I do not see the positive side of us starting a national unemployment insurance now, or even a year from now, because so many companies are struggling financially right now. And the idea that additional funds would have to come out of an already empty pot in order to build an insurance fund for unemployment . . . these are the kinds of things that I see us getting involved in and starting to build up when we are in economically good times. But to try to all of a sudden flip the switch on unemployment insurance when everybody is on their knees, to me, just does not sound like it is the most timely . . . I want to say the most sensible time to start that kind of initiative. I think that it will scare a number of businesses to think about the idea that they would be having to create or having to find the finances to put aside now when every dollar counts to keep the businesses open.

The Budget [Statement] talked a little bit about what we can do with our \$935 million that we spend

running the Government. And it immediately made me think about the government reform. And a couple of years ago [they] came out, fired away, energised about government reform, and it would be interesting to find out the status of the reform and any of the, sort of, trimming of the sails that has taken place within the public service to see how we can make things more efficient. And the Minister of Finance mentioned in the Budget Statement that, you know, we definitely need to manage the public's expectations, we need to achieve better value for money, and I could not be in more agreement with that.

It is just that it will be important, I think, for the Government to share as much information about how the services that may be provided by the public service may change, whether it is because they are becoming more digital . . . I mean, certainly, in the House of Parliament we are in our digital space. Leave aside the fact that we are having these virtual sessions of Parliament, but I would imagine that the House of Assembly must be over the moon with the savings on the paper. I mean we used to get everything on paper and now we are getting everything electronically. Those are the kinds of things that sound very small, but when you think about the amount of the little things that we can find efficiencies in, how those small projects and those small savings actually build up to much larger savings.

And I have all confidence that the Government is looking at all of those things. But I definitely feel that it is important for the public to remain aware of, you know, again as it was stated, making sure that the public understands or gets the information so that they know that things are different, and they can adjust their expectations when approaching any of the public services knowing that these efficiencies arise. Because, you know, in all of the Government's energy to make efficiencies, there is nothing more frustrating than not knowing what those efficiencies are, and then the client or the taxpayer or the resident that is looking for services from government, is feeling as though they are getting a bit of a run around because that department is no longer active or now you cannot do it in [person], you have to go do it online. These are the kinds of things that can create a lot of frustration.

And so, I am certainly hoping that the Government is going to communicate with the public when these efficiencies take place, and that the items that have been included in the government reform are actively pursued, and whatever initiatives that the Government had wished to implement, they move forward with in the spirit of efficiency.

When I think about Government, one of my concerns, I guess, is the Sinking Fund. Everybody likes to have a savings account. And it is unfortunate that the Sinking Fund had become depleted and that the funds that are in the Sinking Fund now are borrowed funds that have been put into savings so that we will have something moving forward. But as the

Finance Minister has mentioned time [and time] again, it makes absolutely no sense [to borrow] money in order to save it. And so, you know, that argument was accepted, and we stopped making contributions to the Sinking Fund in 2019.

But I guess I am mentioning this because I do not want the public to think that the \$400-odd million that may be sitting in the Sinking Fund now is savings, like genuine savings. This is just the leftover funds from the Government . . . leftover funds, I should say, from when the Government went out to increase our national debt and this is sort of the balance remaining that is sitting in that account.

We do not know what is going to come up this year. I know that the Government hopes that they will be able to use those funds in order to sort of balance the deficits moving forward over the next couple of years. But, again, this is one of those situations where I have to come back and just put it out there that, you know, we have to be prepared if something else unexpected shows up. And some of that unexpectedness is probably going to hit us from offshore. Certainly, we have got the OECD that are breathing down our backs, we have got the European Union and the effects of Brexit, and my focus through the Budget Statement is certainly heightened by the contributions that the IMF (the International Monetary Fund) has mentioned.

So, just for the public's understanding, the IMF is a lender. They are a global lender, so large countries all deposit money into a big pot and then that money is distributed to countries that are really struggling financially and are unable to raise debt on their own, basically. And so, you know, they are the watchdog. They are also sort of the dark cloud looming on the side there because if any country were to, you know, really financially fall to their knees and the IMF is the option, and any country has to knock on that door, the lending of that money comes with a lot of control and lot of oversight and, certainly, Bermuda would not ever want to get into that position.

So, when the IMF makes recommendations, as were stated in the Budget Statement, to find pathways to economic recovery, I certainly would think that the Government would take heed of those recommendations, because, without doing that, the IMF, which has, you know, substantial experience in the world of economy, would . . . it would be in our best interests to make sure that we are able to tick those boxes so that we can, at least, show that we are performing and accomplishing things that globally are considered to be good procedures, good behaviour to maintaining our own independent economy.

So, the IMF in their Pathways to Economic Recovery mentioned three suggestions. One, find projects to create jobs, and the Minister of Public Works has already listed a number of infrastructure projects that can be initiated in the short term to get us back into job creation.

[Two,] that we have fair and inclusive legislation. And so, it will be interesting. Certainly, last week we had a piece of legislation that was around the potential for some economic stimulation. And certainly, the Government has made a list of some of the initiatives that they are interested in pursuing as sort of new pillars within the economy here in Bermuda. And making sure that the legislation which is drafted does remain as inclusive and as fair as possible, because we want to be able to create legislation that opens up opportunity for everybody and does not necessarily make legislation that is only going to be good for a few.

The other piece that the IMF had brought up is the environmental industry. I believe that this is definitely the way that the world is going. And we talk a lot about what Bermuda can do to become more environmentally conscious, where we might be able to create more environmental sustainability within our own Island. But I would like to hear a little bit more about what kinds of industries, or what kind of business or research we might be able to attract to the Island that is environmental.

I have not heard much conversation around, yes, and certainly, I do not want . . . I do not need a sort of point of order, because I certainly know that from time to time different environmental projects are brought to the House of Assembly and mentioned. But I am just wondering whether a more comprehensive environmental . . . I do not want to use the word “pillar,” but, you know, how can we create or how can we discover how environmentalists might be able to use Bermuda as a hub, or how we may be able to support people who are creating environmental industries to do their creation and have the potential for head offices, research facilities, and the like here in Bermuda.

You know, it is wonderful to be able to sort of wave and clap when BIOS [Bermuda Institute of Ocean Studies] says that yes, they have initiated a programme, or there is going to be some research in the ocean. But it would also be really, really nice to have a bit of a plan where we have looked at the environment from a number of angles and tried to figure out how we might be able to create a business community here that would attract businesses from overseas to want to come here in order to establish some form of head office or organisation here in Bermuda in order for them to develop environmental . . . I do not know, products and services and that they would then go and market globally.

So, if it is possible, it would certainly be a positive point to be able to add the environment to the list of diversifications within the economy. So far, I have been able to garner that some of the diversifications that the Government has suggested so far are: the national digital bank, commercial cannabis, an on-shore fishing facility, vertical farming and, if the environmental sustainability piece is added to that I think it will help. But when I look at this list of diversifications

within our economy, I do recognise that there is risk there. There is risk of people’s feelings around the reflection which that might have on Bermuda, you know, when I think about the commercialisation of cannabis, how that would be received.

And when I think about the national digital bank, again, there is the idea of risk around how the due diligence, how the security of it all is put into place. What are the prospects of this taking off? How can we grow something like a digital bank so that there is not a recirculation of Bermuda dollars, but that there is an influx of currencies from overseas? Because that is the real crux of it. You know, it may look good that we are out there in town and people are shopping again and maybe some folks are starting to do some renovation and the rest. But that is money that is already here in Bermuda. So, it is not going to grow, it is just going to recirculate around the community. And what we need to do is come up with industries that we can market to other jurisdictions to come to Bermuda, and with it they bring with them their investments. They bring the financial stimulation with them.

And the Bermuda Development Agency, they have within the Budget Statement, it was quoted that the Bermuda Development Agency would want to safeguard and enhance Bermuda’s outstanding reputation and remain an exceptional destination to live, work and play. And when I think about diversifying the economy, I also feel that Government needs to place a balance between who we are as a culture and—

[Timer rings]

The Speaker: Honourable Member—

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Yes?

The Speaker:—your 30-minute alarm is going off.

Ms. Susan E. Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you for your contribution.

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

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Minister Tinee Furbert.

The Speaker: Minister Furbert, yes, you have your 30 minutes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am hoping I do not take all of my 30 minutes.

The Speaker: Well, the alarm will let me know when you have gone past it.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, anyone knows that managing a budget can be very, very challenging, because you can only spend what you have, or what you borrow. So, I remember as a young girl listening to videos about money management and I remember hearing the advice that you either want to make more money, you want to invest your money, so that money is being made over time or you are making money while you sleep, you save your money and if you want more, you have to be able to make more or you have to pay more. And I think people forget that, particularly when we are managing a government's budget. The more things we want, the more we have to pay out, if we are not staying within a particular budget or ceiling.

And so, this Budget that we have [been] presented with is something where we have not added any new taxes because we do not want our people to have to pay more money by the way of taxes. When governments are looking at budgets, they are looking at the opportunity to make more money, to make money through new initiatives, sometimes through tax—we do not have any new tax this time, but they do look at how they can increase tax or create some sort of new tax. Governments look at how they can save money and how they can borrow money. But there is always a . . . it is a fine line, Mr. Speaker, how we balance our economic stimulus and also balance our saving and how we balance our borrowing.

Going through this particular budget with my team, Mr. Speaker, was very interesting because, you know, when we are saying we have to stay within our particular ceiling within a budget, and the team is saying, *Well, my goodness, how can we be squeezed anymore? We have been squeezed for the last couple of years.* It is difficult to squeeze, squeeze, squeeze some more.

But we are confident, Mr. Speaker, that this Budget which was presented by this Government is a recovery budget. And I smile when I think of that because, you know, we have been really . . . we have been hit hard with this COVID-19 pandemic. And we have to see that it has done a number to us, to every country around the globe. We have businesses around the globe that have shut down and possibly even locally. There are increased rates of unemployment and non-employment. Some children are not even back in school, Mr. Speaker. They are not even back in school yet. Fortunately, our students are back in school.

And so, it has been a very, very drastic measure and nobody . . . nobody wanted, nobody predicted

that we would be going through such a drastic pandemic. And so, it has affected us. It has affected us as a country. It has affected many countries around the globe—all of the countries around the globe. And so, we cannot deny that this must be our first thing that we should focus on. We should focus on protecting our citizens so that we do not find ourselves in any further economic decline.

I remember some time ago, Mr. Speaker, when I was in the Senate. I was attending meetings as it related to the new airport that we had. And we were being told that the new airport was a good idea, that it was good for Bermuda, and that there was very minimum chance that we would have to pay back this minimum revenue guarantee because Bermuda, actually, had really low rates. Actually, I do not think we had any rates for the Zika virus, which was out some years ago. And that is what they were using as a benchmark, as a prediction, for us not having to pay the minimum guaranteed revenue.

But look at what has happened today, Mr. Speaker. Look at what has happened today. We are now faced with COVID-19 and we find ourselves in that very same [situation] that we thought that we were safe from. Even though it was not a Zika virus, it came as COVID-19. And so, we are still having to fork out money via the minimum guaranteed revenue, something that we thought that we were protected against.

I bring that up because there are so many things sometimes that are unknown, particularly when it comes to how our economics will be affected.

So, again, I have to boast, Mr. Speaker, that we have done a good job in trying to protect our citizens because we want our people to be able to do well so that they can contribute and be productive members in our society. But, again, COVID-19 has thrown everything in the ringer, and we are hoping to bounce back. We do have an Economic Recovery Plan, which I am sure you will be hearing more about over the next couple of months. And we are hoping, and we are praying, and we are actually quite positive that we will have a bounce back once we get through this COVID-19 period.

And I would have to say that we have done a great job thus far. Well, at least my constituents tell me that, Mr. Speaker. They tell me that we have done a good job. And I would hope that that good job will carry us over and carry us through with our tourist industry bouncing back because they are going to want to know whether or not Bermuda is a safe jurisdiction to come to, to travel to. They are going to want to know how well our processes work, whether or not there is too much red tape to be able to travel, where our COVID-19 numbers are. They are going to want to know all of that information in order to make decisions about travel. Because nowadays, Mr. Speaker, you can just about travel anywhere. You have many choices. And so, Bermuda's bounce-back is going to

be contingent on how well we continue to manage the COVID-19 virus. And, again, I do believe that we have done a good job thus far and that people do travel here, right now, [and] they feel safe. And we have to give compliments to all of those health workers who are out there who are making Bermuda safe for our citizens and our tourists.

Mr. Speaker, this budget still accounts for those in need, you know, even going through the budget process, we know that people are unemployed. There are many people who are unemployed, and there are still many people who are vulnerable out there, and we have provided stimulus packages for our people so that they do not find themselves too much in the rough. I am not saying that the stimulus packages helped everyone, nor did they probably pay every single one of our bills, or their bills, but it was definitely a *step* to be able to help people to have some sort of income coming in.

There was so much and there still is, so much uncertainty as we navigate through the coronavirus, Mr. Speaker. It is uncertainty with jobs, there is still uncertainty with income, but our first order of business, Mr. Speaker, is the protection of our people and so that is what we are focusing on as a Government.

We have an economic plan. It is important, Mr. Speaker, that we keep the people in our country safe so that we can have them return back to work and stay steadily employed. It is important, Mr. Speaker, that we continue to work on reducing our cost of living. We know that a huge topic and burden for our people is the cost of living in Bermuda, and so we will continue to work towards that. We will also continue to work towards physical prudence, as well as financial wholeness, because we have heard the term financial wellness, or financial well-being. What we want is a picture of financial wholeness.

It is also important, Mr. Speaker, that when we are introducing things and we are introducing legislation to help encourage our economic stimulus that we do it in a timely manner, and that is very, very, very important to our economy. It is also important that we display fairness as well, making sure that we are touching all groups of the social economic population. You know, it is important that we touch every, every group. Not just the rich, not just the poor, not just the middle class. We have to be able to create some sort of balance so that our people can live comfortably, and, you know, especially have their needs met. So, we are quite comfortable in believing that in the years to come, Mr. Speaker . . . and we are not, you know, saying that everything is going to bounce back like this, because we know that it is going to take some time. But we do believe with the things that we have in place that we will bounce back, Mr. Speaker.

But even though we have encountered some economic disruptions, you know, many families have gone through many hardships, financial hardships, and the solution is not, Mr. Speaker, to just throw

more money at these financial hardships, because economic challenges also have social consequences. So the Ministry of Social Development has been very conscious of the fact that we still have to be able to provide for those families who are experiencing financial hardship and to make sure that we are still being able to provide for those persons who are vulnerable. We have heard, you know, in regard to COVID-19 coming to Bermuda, and all over the globe, that it has just shown that it has been a magnification of some of the many problems that have already existed. And so, there is still a need to be able to protect the most vulnerable persons in our community, so that, you know, we do not fall further in a slump.

And so, this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development has a budget allocation of \$23,733,000, and we are going to use these monies, Mr. Speaker, to continue to assist the third sector. Actually, 17 per cent of the monies within the Ministry of Social Development are going toward the third sector. We are going to use these resources or allocations, Mr. Speaker, to continue to help programmes such as the centre for abuse, as well as the Women's Resource Centre. We did hear that there was a magnification of physical abuse, particularly over the COVID-19 period, and so, we know that once COVID resolves itself that those issues are not just going to go away. So it was very important that we continue to maintain those funds for those services. And we have managed to do that, Mr. Speaker.

We have managed to still be able to provide for our emergency shelter, which is the Salvation Army. When we have difficult times, people find themselves in sometimes difficult positions when it comes to housing. And so, we have made sure that we have allocated funds to still be able to provide for the Salvation Army. Because when you are doing a budget or looking at a budget, Mr. Speaker, you know, you have to evaluate what services our people need the most. And we never know what sort of situation we are going to be in, having to go through something that is so traumatic, such as COVID.

I remember, you know, listening to people's stories about not knowing whether or not they were going to be returning back to work, or people calling me and saying that they got laid off and they are still waiting to hear back whether or not they are going to be returning to work. And so, these are very unsettling times. We want our people to know that we are just not going to leave them out in the cold. We have provided for them via the unemployment benefit. We have also provided more opportunities within Financial Assistance so that if persons were in need, they could benefit from the financial hardship through financial assistance. And so, those sorts of benefits or allocations have been put aside to be able to help our people.

We are looking forward to some new initiatives as well, because you know, even though we

have to be able to maintain programmes and services that we have within our ministries, we also have to look at some new initiatives as well that might not necessarily cost us money but may put us in a planning sort of process so that we can predict what sort of funds we will need in the future.

I have heard a lot this evening in regard to our ageing population and how that population will grow over the next couple of years. And so, the Ministry of Social Development is committed to a national senior strategy. And I have to say that there are already many reports and lots of research that has been done already in regard to our seniors. I have seen lots of reports and studies already that we have done in Bermuda, statistics that we have collected in regard to our ageing population. And so, we are looking to have a national senior strategy, particularly looking at dementia care in Bermuda, and that is something that is not going to cost us money, you know. We have a technical team that is going to be allocated to bring all this data together to make sure that we are considering our ageing population as we go forward. And so, this is a new initiative that the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors is going to take on, which is something we need and something we need to stay on top of.

We are also looking forward to the Children's Commission, Mr. Speaker, which is going to be replacing the Childcare Placement Board, so that we can stay on top of oversight of children in care and outside of care by promoting programmes and services and best policies to respond to children's needs.

One thing that I am particularly elated about as well is that for some time, well, since 2019 when we passed the Child Safeguarding [(Miscellaneous Amendment)] Act, Mr. Speaker, we were able to meet the obligation of being able to put funds aside for providing physical and psychological assistance to a child victim of a sexual offence as well as a child perpetrator of a sexual offence. And so monies have been allocated to be able to provide support services for them by the way of psychological assistance, which is something we should all be very thankful for and very proud of. This will benefit children who need these services to help with whatever trauma that they may have undergone.

And we have spoken a lot in the media, Mr. Speaker, in regard to the independent living coordinators, particularly making sure that children who turn 18 within the Department of Child and Family Services are not feeling unsupported when they turn 18. And so, now they will have the choice, because we cannot make someone stay if they are 18, even our own children, you know. If they want to leave and they are 18, I mean, I am sure we will probably be trying to put on the brakes if we feel like they are not making the right decisions. But we are definitely giving our children who are in the care of the Department of Child and

Family Services the option to stay on and be financially supported.

And so, these are some new initiatives that we are very thankful for, thankful that we were able to find the allocations to be able to meet these needs. And so, we want our people to know that even though we are going through hard times, this Government is very, very cognisant of the many social issues and concerns that are out there and that we are a Government that about our people, and we will continue to press on. There are many initiatives that we have enacted over the years as well, and, I mean, I just, if you give me a minute, I would just like to speak to those.

We eliminated important payroll taxes for the disabled—

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, Honourable Member, you are going into something that your brief will cover. We are just talking about the Budget, not the specifics. You are going really into your Ministry, something that you would have in your brief.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: No, this information is not in my brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, but it should be in your brief. This is not the time.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: No, it is totally unrelated, but I will take your point. It is totally unrelated.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to close by saying that we are a Government cognisant of the social issues and we will continue to support our people who are most vulnerable when they need it.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Are there any further speakers?

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will yield to anyone in the OBA if someone—

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair recognises the Honourable Member Lovitta Foggo.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, imagine you being the Finance Minister of a country when COVID-19 hit. Imagine being responsible for trying to come up with solutions to address and meet the impact of COVID in

the way that many governments worldwide have been tasked with doing. It is not an enviable task. But yet, it was a task that I can say that I was extremely proud to be part of while I sat in Cabinet, given the way that our Government responded to COVID-19 and the economic impact that it has had.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the whole world looked at how we handled that situation, and we received accolades and praise from all over because of the way in which we did respond. And I think we are all familiar with some of those responses. But as a Government our first concern was how we were going to carry the most vulnerable through this so that they at the end of the day could still have bread and butter on their table, could still feel confident that a roof would still be over their heads. And the answer to that was the unemployment benefit and the relaxation of certain regulations that did govern areas like financial assistance and allow persons who would not otherwise be able to benefit from the unemployment benefit, because they did not pay into the tax system, to at least be able to benefit, so that they too would not have the worry about whether or not they could feed their children the next day.

Amidst trying to put a new health reform package in place that would mean at the end of the day down the road our people would realise better health benefits, we continued to work on that even though I can say that this has not come to full realisation. And so, when the Opposition asks, *What are we doing and what have we done?*, those are some of the things we are *still doing* and those are some of the things that we have done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see the major impact that it has had on the delivery of things like education. And I have no doubt that going forward it will task the Education Minister, and he is already looking through a lens that will allow him to ensure that as we reform education, we do it after COVID-19 has forced us to address this and forced the world to have education online. We know that there are some things in the delivery of education that were brought to the fore because of the pandemic that will remain. And measures are being looked at in terms of how we are going to deliver that for our people going forward, because we do live in a technologically advanced society where technology every single day is becoming the centre of how we do our business.

So, when we took office, this Government looked at the FinTech space and what we needed to do and we put in regulations and the like to try and create an environment where businesses cooperate in that space without being considered to just simply operate in that space in a way that demonstrated to our regime that you can create regulations that make this a safe space to operate in. I will put it like that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we are still tasked with looking at how we can expand and grow going forward in that realm. And

so when we are asked, *What are we doing to address the issues that pertain at this point in time?*, those are the things that we are doing on a continuum to try and ensure that this 21st century Bermuda meets the need of our people and our businesses. We are not blind to the needs. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, look within government itself. We are still in the throes of reforming government to try and make it a 21st century government for the people of Bermuda. We said that we would be leaders in this area. And with every step that we make we are making it mindful of that, so that the government that operates in our jurisdiction matches the broader environment. We cannot have our people operating as though they were in a 20th century Bermuda when everything dictates that we are now operating in the 21st century, and we cannot have institutions that hold on fast to the former way of doing things when we say as a Government [that] we are going to move our people forward.

So, at every step of the way where we can employ measures that pull our people forward in the way that we do business and the way that we are setting up our government institutions in Bermuda, we are doing it, and the laws and regulations we are doing it in a way to ensure that this transition is a smooth one and will put our people in good stead to operate as we continue to move forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We recognise the major impact financially that this has had on us, and we are all familiar that this is the effect worldwide. But yet, we still have a commission that has been tasked to work out a minimum wage and a living wage and they are working on establishing that minimum wage while they continue to do work, to make certain that a living wage will follow. Because we know that it is important that our people be able to . . . if they go into work and work in dignity and have respect in the workplace, then they at least have to have the assurances that their income is such that they can go buy bread and butter and keep a roof over their heads.

And so, any modern-day jurisdiction that boasts to be democratic and concerned for its people of course will look to ensure that a proper minimum and living wage operates in their economic space to give people some measure of confidence that they are being treated fairly.

We have put measures [in place] that deal with bullying and that deal with sexual harassment in the workplace, and we are at the same time looking at pay equity to make certain that in this modern-day Bermuda you get paid for the job. You don't get paid based on the fact that you are male, based on the fact that you are white or Black. You get paid for the job that you do. And that pay should be equal to anyone else who does the same type of job, regardless of their sex, regardless of their ethnicity. So, when asked, *What are we doing to ensure that measures are being put in place?*—that is what we are doing. Because when the Premier reshuffled his Cabinet, he

put together a Ministry for Social Services. He reshuffled some of the agencies that we have within government because the focus has to be, especially given the financial constraints that we have to operate under, *How can we do this efficiently and efficaciously?* How can we do this? Because guess what? We know that . . . this Government knows money does not grow on trees, and we know that we have to operate within a tight, constrained budget. So, it requires recalculating. It requires putting in policies that will allow for things to happen more efficiently, while not necessarily causing greater expenses, even if anything, reducing the expense to deliver with the same programmes.

And so, when asked, *What are we doing to try and meet this task of trying to bring stability back?* That is what we are doing. We are looking at every avenue to try and deliver for our people with a tight budget. And I think the Finance Minister is seeking to save something to the tune, like . . . I hope I am not . . . I have got a little more grey hair, so I hope my memory serves me correct. I think he was trying to reach a savings of something like \$20 million, while at the same time the Cabinet is tasked with ensuring that the programmes that they deliver on still allow for our people and encourage institutions that employ our people to be able to do it in a way where you don't see businesses fold, but we see them, I guess, reinvigorated and push to use ingenuity and figure out how they can continue to offer the services that they do.

I saw first-hand how we did that. And with the policies and programmes that are being suggested going forward, and the fact that this Government demonstrated both from the health perspective as well as with the programmes that they put in place to carry us through this pandemic, I have every confidence with our hands held together that we will—regardless of the challenges—help march our people through this successfully.

Yes, it means that we all have to do our fair share. It has to be a shared sacrifice. We all have to do that. But that shared sacrifice, if we are willing to go through it—make the sacrifices, put the types of policies and programmes that can frogmarch us through this to a better state—then, once again, we will be able to establish to others that we have the ingredients to make it, to make it work.

Again, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker, with the health care reform, with the unemployment insurance that we have talked about getting in place for protection, because we do not have a safety net, or we did not operate with a safety net such as those types of safety nets in place. When we get policies and programmes like that in place, it will indicate to our people, as we have told them over and over as a Government, that their needs are what we consider first. I think we have demonstrated that every step of the way throughout these crises, and I think it has forced us to be innovative and use ingenuity that maybe we did not even

know we had, and figure out a way for us to march through this.

Again, no one said in response to this pandemic that it is going to be easy for us, but what we all have said with the programmes, with the budget that has been put in place, with the regulations that we intend to put in place, with the changes that we make, with the reform that we have proposed and will continue to put in place from the Government proper itself, with all of that we are showing and demonstrating that this is how you get the job done.

So, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker, I chose to approach my comments in a very general way, but I am also mindful of the fact that we need to remind us as a people that we have done the job that the people elected us to do. And we have demonstrated that we have put them first. We have demonstrated, I guess by putting this fiscally prudent budget in place, by redesigning our ministries, by telling our people of the programmes that we are still working on to level the playing field so that people can have some confidence that what is being implemented addresses equity at every level.

I wanted to approach that in a general way and just remind our people of Bermuda that this PLP Government is here to do the work for them and that this PLP Government will leave no stone unturned to make it happen for them.

So, on that note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member Foggo.

Are there any further speakers?

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: That sounds like MP Richardson.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: You have the floor, sir.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, sir.

First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude to the Minister of Finance and his civil service support team who have undoubtedly contributed countless hours to this budget. Although I say it tongue in cheek, it is with a bit of admiration and sympathy because it is hard to divide by zero and he has nonetheless put in the effort. I don't want anything I say to ever detract from his acumen, his effort, and the effort of the permanent secretaries, the civil service, and even the Cabinet Ministers with whom, by the way, I disagree. And we will get to that. But nonetheless, their efforts are appreciated.

I am sympathetic to their plight. Bermuda went through a significant crisis just like the rest of the

world and we are hard-pressed to come out of it in a way that will be beneficial, well, first of all, hold us together and, secondly, be beneficial to us altogether as a nation as a people. And so the efforts, especially in the social services area, of this Government to ensure that our people are taken care of are to be commended, even where I disagree with them. So, I want that to definitely be on the record. So thank you for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I found the Opposition Leader's speech to be objective and thorough. It was very long. And it had a number of points in it, some of which were contentious. I am mindful that contention can raise the volume of a conversation. Whilst I am going to speak to international business and immigration, I will wrap-up by putting my two cents in about the volume of our conversation and how that does not help us because, following on from Honourable Minister Furbert, there is a thing to be done here and it is to be done with all deliberateness and seriousness and we want to make sure that we get it done.

And for that I will offer the following. I just want to also reiterate my colleague, Michael Dunkley's position, that the Opposition Leader's position was very thorough; and my colleague, Honourable Member Craig Cannonier, that the Opposition is not actually attacking the Government but scrutinising it. We do have a role to play, as said by Honourable Member Susan Jackson, to be the devil's advocate. And so to that we will commit ourselves thoroughly and completely and, with any luck, contribute and make us all better for it.

So with that being said, I would like to quote the Opposition Leader. We are a service economy with no physical exports and only two pillars, two-pillar industries, one of which produces much of our foreign exchange, employment and tax revenues, i.e., international business.

Now I am going to reiterate what Honourable Member Craig Cannonier said about our competition. And I think it is important because even though we all subscribe to the song "Bermuda is Another World" (because it is), unfortunately that does not mean that we are isolated from the rest of the world. And we do have competitor jurisdictions that would love to eat our breakfast and then take some more. Cayman, Jersey, Hong Kong, Singapore are all [chomping at the bit] for a piece of the reinsurance pie that is in fact a product of Bermuda, of this jurisdiction. The innovative insurance products that have been generated here are descendants of a kind of [INAUDIBLE] that has only happened here. As other jurisdictions are trying to catch up, we are hot on the heels of huge financial centres in our financial services industry, so much so that we attract international attention.

Much can be said for the motivations of the international authorities in addressing us. I do not think they are all nefarious. But, nonetheless, little old Bermuda has got a lot of people's attention, and that means that we have something of value, something to

be retained and something to be used for the benefit of our people.

I am mindful that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that not all people will be able to participate in the international business sector or reinsurance, as it were. It requires a certain kind of training and expertise and one of our . . . I would say one of our downfalls nationally has been that we have never had an organic ability to feed our labour force, or our upcoming labour force, directly into that industry. They often have to go overseas to be educated and trained and even then, you need quite a lot of experience. So, I am not even sure if that is a possibility, but without that initial first step in the educational process, making us qualified to enter that space, organically, on Island, I do think that we are at a disadvantage.

So with that being said, that single pillar of the economy has been . . . sorry. Of those twin pillars of the economy, only one of them has been bearing the weight of our economy. As COVID-19 ravaged the world and wiped-out other portions of our economy, the international financial services were trucking along steadily. And that speaks to their resilience; that speaks to the things they do. And that speaks to a kind of insurance Bermuda has, that we have an industry that could weather a storm as bad as this.

One of the things I want to be very careful of here is, because we have competitive jurisdictions, that we do not make our environment hostile. Now, that is not to say that we have to make sure that everyone is accountable. Right? Because there are disparities, there are obvious cases of people being treated unfairly in these markets, and we have to make sure that we regulate it well, not just in terms of the Bermuda Monetary Authority, but in terms of the labour market. Just because a person sits behind a desk all day does not mean that they are not offering their labour and that we should not avail all the protections to them. So, we do have a thing to contend with, and it is a great and valuable jewel, so to speak, with \$830 million contributed to the economy, and I think it was 1,700 employees ABIR reported, 72 per cent of which are Bermudian. We are seeing, there is a lot of up here.

We have to be careful, though, because a lot of times, especially in our political discourse. Perhaps we are not aware, but international business is sensitive to inflammatory language. They are in the business of measuring geopolitical risks, and they have many equations which will tell them just about when to pack up and leave. Whilst I hope and pray that we will never see that equation being run in and on Bermuda, nonetheless it is there. And if anyone tells you otherwise then I am not entirely sure we have been paying attention to the world news.

So one of the things that I want to make sure that we do here is that we do not, in this conversation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, especially in this conversation where we are talking about the Government budget

and we are trying to save a lot of people from a lot of pain, that we do not attack one another for having alternative points of view. I know that might be hard, because I can only imagine the amount of time that it took to put this thing together, our Budget. Nonetheless, it is not a piece of perfection. There is no monopoly on being absolutely right.

And even though it has been chewed on, digested, argued about up and down, in the civil service and in the Cabinet, nonetheless, in our democracy it is subject to scrutiny. I have spoken about this quite a few times now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Anyone who flinches from scrutiny, concerns me, because scrutiny is accountability. And as much as I will hold the Government to account, I would expect nonetheless for myself to be held to account.

I think, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker, and I truly mean this, that the best position for Bermuda comes from the contention between us. Now I know that is a hard thing to digest in our political framework because as I said, the books have been printed and circulated, so it is not as if there is a lot of room here. And of course, we in the loyal Opposition have only so much political heft in this current environment. Nonetheless, we will do our best to make sure that the Government is held accountable.

Mr. [Deputy] Speaker, if we use words, if we call our political opponents . . . well, first of all, if we call those with alternative points of view “opponents” or “disingenuous” or “complainers” we are actually to my mind cheapening the dignity of the House. We are cheapening the fact . . . I mean, parliamentary process, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker, we refer to, you just said it, *Does anyone else have a contribution to make?*

We did not say, *Does anyone else have a gotcha moment?* We do not say, *Does anyone else want to complain?* We say, *Does anyone else have something to add?*

And I think that this *pro forma* parliamentary language is built there to remind us that we are actually all in this together. We are 65,000 more or less people on one rock a long way from anything that looks like a road, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Point of order, Mr. [Deputy] Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: What is your point of order, Member?

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Deputy Speaker, good evening.

The Honourable Member is speaking about we are one rock, and inflammatory language. But on page 8 of the Reply to the Budget it says, “The Minister of Finance has failed to deliver either one of these objectives in any kind of robust or detailed fashion.”

On and on, disparaging whatever we do. So you cannot in one breath say we need to be *Kumbaya* but in your own writing you are disparaging what the Government is doing.

The Deputy Speaker: Carry on, Honourable Member.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And to that end I do not think an evaluation, however uncomfortable, is always inflammatory. And to that end that is why . . . and I am going to continue with this point, but I do take the Honourable Member’s point. And he is someone whom I have always wanted to speak with so with any luck we can do that outside of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our international business sector is, as I said, sensitive to our political processes and we have to be very mindful that when they see us attack one another over alternative points of view then what is bound to happen is they are going to question, *Well, what happens when I raise an alternative point of view? What happens when I have a question? Do I get attacked as well?* We have to be careful so that business confidence is something we maintain as high a level as possible.

Now, that does not mean that we let them have a *carte blanche* run. As a compliance professional, I can tell you that the last thing we want is an unregulated market. Nonetheless, we are very much dependent on them at this stage. And I would like us to just be mindful of that, because our restaurants, our entertainment industry, so many of our subsidiary industries, or feeder industries, I should say, many of our other industries are fed by the revenues that are generated and then paid out into those industries from international business. So to that end I just want to make sure that what we are doing is not something that kills the golden goose because we do not have another one.

So, with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will also speak to immigration. The Opposition Leader’s points said that good immigration policy is good economic policy. Although I am not sure where this came from, someone had spoken to Honourable Minister Hayward saying something to the effect of holding the keys to the door. And one of the things I think we want to make sure about in our immigration policy, and I have made this point publicly, is obviously that we take care of the people who are here. And that is what we have to do. But one of the things that we are aware of is that we need a diverse and larger tax base. These things, taking care of those who are already here and have every right and . . . I don’t believe that they are opposing forces. There may be some tension between the two, but they do not need to be enemies.

And by that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I am saying is that we do not need to take care of one

group of people over another in order for us all to be here. There has to be some balance because if a person is going to commit some 20-odd years to Bermuda, then the amount of money that they are going to kick into the economy and their role that they are going to play in our community and in our society, is consequential and it should not be disregarded. I am very mindful—

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, I think you saw it demonstrated and the world saw it demonstrated during the last year. The Government paid everybody whether you were Bermudian or foreigner.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Exactly. Exactly.

The Deputy Speaker: I just do not want you to forget that.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: No, no, no, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mean, it is hard to sort of balance in a half hour all the good . . . not all the good, because I mean, I am trying not to say that something is horrible and there is something that is wonderful. There is complexity to this conversation and nuance. And what I want to make sure that we are doing is we are actually having *that* conversation, because it is so complexed, because it is so nuanced, and we are so poised on the precipice that if we get it wrong it ends badly for everybody. So, it is sort of like, *All right. Well, let's talk about the hard thing instead of each other.*

And that is what I was saying here. I mean, I will point out that immigration . . . and the Honourable Deputy Premier actually said this, *I understand the difference between a Ford Model T and a Tesla.* I would use that to point out that not all jobs are alike and that is part of the thing we have to contend with here. A reinsurance broker is not like the building inspector, he is not like a librarian, he is not like a teacher, he is not like a landscaper. And so what I would say is that if we are going to . . . since we have to control this industry by way of immigration, all of these industries, then we do things like have standards and qualifications for each one of these. And I know that there has been some space or some effort to work there.

To that end I believe . . . and I could be corrected by the Honourable Immigration Labour Minister, but I did look at the statistics that relate to our labour market and how we quantify which positions work and where. When the Honourable Minister, for example, announced that we were adding more people to the constrained or controlled or Bermudian-only occupations, (I do not quite have the verbiage there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.) But I did look up which ones, and it was a bit hard from the announcement because he said “waiter” and then there were sort of six or seven different criteria or types of waiter. So my point here is that if we are going to fight the immigration

battle then we have to fight it with all of our—all of our—efforts, as clear-eyed, and as unemotive as possible.

I think that the more we make it an emotive issue, the less successful we are going to be at it, because, again, following on from the Honourable Education Minister, who said, *People are watching.* Yes, lots of people are watching. And we want to make sure that those who are watching, if they are going to commit a lifetime to join our small community, if they are going to commit all of those funds to our small community, they are not made enemies simply because they are different. I do not want us to get into the habit of making political scapegoats of those who are different from us because we ourselves are the descendants of those who were scapegoated the most.

To that end I would say that there must be some value from Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus." It is actually, part of it is sketched on the Statue of Liberty in New York. "*Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.*"

There has to be value in that. Right? There has to be a moral high ground to be accepting of people who are different from us.

We are all aware that the utility of the Immigration Act has expired. The world has just changed way too much. That thing was drafted in 1956, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our Island has changed so much in that time period. I echo what the Honourable Deputy Premier had actually said in terms of understanding that we need to build a different Bermuda going forward. So to that end we have to throw ourselves wholeheartedly at dealing with immigration, again, not [dealing with it] as an emotive issue but as one that can be dealt with as clinically as possible, even though the consequences are not that. The social ramifications to our population are significant and could be detrimental if handled improperly. So we have to handle it with all of the professionalism and all of the calmness that we possibly can. I take the point of Honourable Member Famous that this conversation has not always been had in that way. But I just got here, so maybe I can help in some way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as much as we have to concern ourselves with population control, when I was in the Regiment, I was fortunate enough to be assigned to the Royal Gibraltar Regiment. So we had to spend some time in Gibraltar, what is called colloquially “Gib.” And what blew my mind about Gib was (and I have a few statistics) how small it was but how big the population was. They had some 2.6 square miles and had 33,000 people. And let's not forget that in the middle of this is a big rock that no one lives on. So, you just thought, *I wonder how they did that.* Because you come back home and we have 20.5 square miles (I think; I looked it up.) and we have about 63,000 people. So you go, *Okay. Something is happening*

here. I don't think that we have dealt with this in a proper fashion. They have got 12 per cent of our land mass, but half of our population. So clearly, we can do better at this.

And this strikes me that this has a lot to do with planning and how we actually preserve our lands. Now, I am very mindful that planning came about during the glory days of tourism. And I am mindful that those glory days have abruptly come to an end and we have to determine what happens next. What do we build? Maybe it is a specialised tourism product. I don't know. But the 1980s are over. So, we cannot live in the 1980s.

And I would impress upon the Honourable Members of the Cabinet to remember that—the 1980s are over. In fact, I think one of the Honourable Members spoke to the past, not constraining ourselves by the past. So that means not only racially but that also means institutionally. So, insofar as we are going to move forward and fix a lot of the problems that Bermuda has, institutionally, then we have to address things that were built for another age. And, again, those things are not going to be addressed if we spend the whole time having a go at each other, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am just going to wrap [up] here. I have about seven minutes left. I want to close with something that I have not seen a lot of, and I think that we could probably use a healthy dose of. And that is things like feasibility studies, Green Papers, and White Papers. The reason is not because the ideas are bad in and of themselves. It is that the level of examination of the idea appears to not be as deep as is required.

For example, when we addressed the licensing and trading of a previously illicit commodity in Bermuda, what was the impact on . . . now I know there was a lot of work that went into this, so I do not want to take away from anyone. But what I am saying is that there was not a document that came out and said, *Here is how it is going to work for Health. Here how it is going to work for Education. Here is how it is going to work for Security.* And so I think that is what led to *Okay, well, what about . . . ?* And we have to be mindful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is always going to be someone who says that. Right?

So we do have to curtail the extent to which we ask these questions. But nonetheless they are there and I think we have to move from a place where we have ideas to a place where we have substantiated ideas backed up by feasibility studies, by Green Papers and White Papers. I think that is the only way that we can conceivably enter such complex topics and then have a mature and thoughtful and considered conversation, not just in and amongst ourselves as parliamentarians, but with the public at large, as well as stakeholders. So I think that this is very important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not want to poo-hoo the idea of all these task forces and committees and groups, but we certainly have had a fair share in our time, and I have not been around that long. But it beggars belief that we could have that many for one topic. I mean, how many times are we going to beat up immigration? It is just sort of like, *Okay, surely, you must have an idea by now guys?* So, I am not convinced every time I see a new committee, task force, group, whatever you want to call it . . . I am not convinced that this is always the best way, because I have seen so many of them and they do not seem to be producing a lot.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I go back to my earlier point that I think we need to be looking more in the direction of feasibility studies, impact studies, someone has to commit to writing the things that we have discovered and the things that we are . . . the risks that we are going to face and the costs we are going to face. And then we can go down that road.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are in drastic times. We do require drastic actions. In principle, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I therefore disagree with a lot of the Minister's works, but only because I see it as the same level of thinking that got us into this situation. (Which I believe is a quote from Albert Einstein.) And I do not see that drastic change. I do not think the minimal reduction of spending. I don't think our efforts to increase revenues . . . for example, they are based on a lot of hope. A few people have already spoken to that saying that we are hoping that the world gets better.

I agree again with the Honourable Education Minister, people are listening and as we face larger and greater problems, our political spectacle, our political theatre is just cheapening our efforts to fix things. If we push back too hard on people with alternative points of view, we are only going to generate fear. Hyperbole, sideways insults, for example, are not going to be helpful. And like the wave on the beach, every time we do that, we ebb away at what we have earned so hard, which is the franchise to actually be in this Honourable House and have this conversation.

So, we need not always, granted we are not going to be . . . we do not have to be friends. We do not have to sing *Kumbaya*, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we sure as heck cannot be enemies.

With that being said, again, I express my gratitude to the Finance Minister and his efforts. I refer to his quote about the obstacles to growth and how he can remove them. I would say right now, our largest obstacle to growth is our necessity for one side to be right and the other side to be wrong. There is no monopoly on being right. There is always room for improvement. I look forward to getting into the Committee stage. Our vision of the future must be more than hopeful, it must be evident. It is not going to be enhanced by the spectacle of political theatre. It needs no help . . . that is, vision needs no help from our political biases and prejudices. I hope that we are all ready

to go into having a frank and fulsome and professional conversation for the betterment of our country.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member Richardson.

Are there any further speakers? Is that you, Mr. Pearman?

Hon. Renee Ming: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, I called her Mr. Pearman. Yes, Honourable Minister, Ms. Ming. You have the floor.

Hon. Renee Ming: Good evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and listening audience. Thank you for allowing me a few minutes to be able to add my thoughts and comments to the general Budget Debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I have been doing budgets now for probably, maybe the last eight to nine years. And one of the things I always think about when I start any type of budget, and I think I kind of belaboured this in the 2014 budget, that budgets are not just numbers they are actually about people as well. We have to keep that at the forefront when we are looking at budgets and even talking about the impacts of budgets.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this would be my first budget in the capacity of Minister. And that would still be the mantra that I would look at in terms of establishing a budget, looking at your budget, looking at what things may need to be cut, what things need to be kept, because at the end of the day we are our people. I think that is something that for me that I would never want to forget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last year has been a challenge, to say the least. Actually, I was on a page today. If anyone gets time, KPMG put their 2021/22 budget statement up on their page, and it is speaks about what their thoughts are on the budget. And they actually titled it "A Year Like No Other." And I remember seeing that and thinking, *Absolutely correct! A year like no other!*

I do not think many of us will forget 2020 and the things we either went through or some of the things we even learned. A pandemic! Mr. Deputy Speaker, not many people can say that they would have even lived through a pandemic. And science, in some ways, says that this happens maybe every 100 years. I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will be around the next time and you will be able to give some good advice to whoever the Government is and those who are sitting in these places because . . . You know, you brag about people who seem to stay around for quite some time.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was definitely a year like no other. And when you stop and you think about the "people" aspect of the budget, there are so

many things that we could look at. We could sit here and we could talk about the numbers, because the numbers are very important as well. But what I would like to start off talking about is the people part of it and what did this Government do for the people?

I know one thing for sure. There was \$56 million spent on unemployment benefit payments. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you were in the space of losing your job, just like that, and not even understanding the impact of the pandemic . . . we did not know what was going to happen. And within a very short space of time the Government comes and says, *Here you go. Here is something to help you. Here is something to put some food on your table. It might even be enough to keep your lights on.* You know what? That is something that they will not forget. Okay? It is about caring for our people.

And there is . . . you know, we could look at the Budget Statement that the Minister of Finance has provided us. I have had a read of the one that the Opposition has put forth as well. And I say, *Where does the caring side of this lie?* Well, one evidence of that is the \$56 million spent on unemployment benefits. And then when you go further into the Budget Book, Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$127 million on unbudgeted COVID-19 expenses. So these were things . . . because we would not have budgeted last year for a pandemic we would not have known about. So unbudgeted expenses, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is your testing, your PPE, your cleaning products, now your vaccinations, all of these things have been offered to our people at the expense of the Government.

So imagine not having job, not having any money, having to pay for tests, having to purchase PPE, having to pay for vaccinations. Come on, this is what a caring Government does. Okay? And, yes, it is not an easy hit for the Government in any stretch of the imagination—\$127 million is a lot of money. But that is the price that we have paid to keep our people safe, to keep them vaccinated, to keep them covered, to keep surfaces clean, because that is what a caring Government does, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I note . . . and I wouldn't say I smiled because I didn't smile. The Opposition Leader in his speech spoke about using COVID-19 as, I think he meant, *Get-out-of-jail-free card*. But those types of comments do not indicate us caring. Because there are 12 families in Bermuda who are mourning the loss of loved ones as a result of COVID-19. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I think about those families and what they went through and what they continue to go through, because the grieving process could last from now to whenever . . . you know, you can finally get out of your bed some days.

I think that as a Government and what it is we have done is phenomenal. I too have had people stop me on the street, Mr. Deputy Speaker, send messages, place phone calls to say, *The Government is doing a great job*. Okay? And those persons who have lost

loved ones, I have had the opportunity to speak to not all, but a few. And even though they are in a difficult stage, they too still feel that the Government did a good job, that the Government *is* doing a good job.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the pandemic, and I think it was written somewhere, has forced us to urgently recalibrate. And what does that mean for us? It means that we have to look at doing things differently. Our Finance Minister, who has worked extremely hard—extremely hard—he speaks today in the Budget, he speaks to us doing things differently. He speaks to us advancing. He even speaks to us working collaboratively with persons who may not even think like us, because at the end of the day, we are in this together, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And another part of recalibration with regard to the pandemic is family. That is what I think about as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We had opportunities to probably spend more time with our families than we have had in past years. There are many negative parts, I think, that you can look at with regard to the pandemic, but there are also some things that we could say we learned from this. And not just learned as a Government, we learned as a people. We learned about family. We learned how to do things differently. I know in my home during the pandemic we did some budgeting and menu planning and cooking meals together and things like that. And things that, you know, [previously] we were generally busy [to do], Mr. Deputy Speaker. I probably always did not have time to do, but we were forced and urgently required to recalibrate. And you know what? We take a minute to kind of look and see what is important to [us].

But again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, budgets are about people. And I continue to say that because this Government, again, when you look [there were] no redundancies or reductions in our staff. No reductions in scholarships. Because you know what? As a parent who has a child in school, you are thinking about that. Where is the money coming from? Things are tight all around. No elimination in critical programmes such as the [Child] Day Care Allowance, the Summer Employment Programme for students, support for our seniors in rest homes, and no extension of the 10 per cent public sector payment. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are things that a caring Government does. These are just examples of it.

We recognise that we are now in recovery mode, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it won't be easy, it won't be easy. We have to be prudent. Our Minister of Finance has told us this, that it will be a challenge. But you know what? He has told us to be prudent about it . . . to remember that . . . we are at a stage right now where we cannot have everything we want, but let's try and make sure we have everything we need.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, that extends beyond just the Government. That is for us as Bermudians—period—right now to live by. We may not have every-

thing we want; but let's make sure we have everything we need. What we saw, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through this pandemic and this past year was strong leadership. It was strong leadership that got us through and is continuing to carry us through. And it is the same strong leadership, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is going to get us through our recovery, because it will not be easy. But strong leadership, a caring Government, I have no indication in my mind that we will not be able to achieve that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a caring Government. I am just going to refer to the very last page of the Budget Statement. You are listening to the Minister of Finance tell you that he is the son of parents who worked hard to educate him. He is the father of three children, [with] his wife. He wants his children to have opportunities in Bermuda with all of the possibilities. He wants to have a fair and level playing field for his children.

He also talks about protecting our public health. That is evident, as far as I am concerned, that he has, and this Government has, done that. He sees a new economy like no economy of our past. We also see . . . because his view is our view, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a Government. He says, "It must not only be diversified but must actively engage diversity." And that is another conversation, Mr. Deputy Speaker. "It must not only be stable, but it must cultivate innovation." That is again asking us that we need to now be creative. We have to think outside of the box because that is where we are now as a Government and as a people. And he also says, "If there are obstacles to growth, we must remove them, quickly."

The future of the economy requires all of us to dig deep, collaborate, listen, and most of all, not fear change. Because change will come. And if we do have a fear of it, then address that fear. And have the courage to press on. And that is another thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are in a new space. And so as we embrace the space we are in, let's not be fearful. Let's not stifle our growth. Let's be creative.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am going to close my comments on that. But my one thing I want to say is that I am thankful, thankful, for this caring Government that got us through with their strong leadership and will continue into recovery with our strong leadership. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member, Minister Ming.

Are there any further speakers?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Pearman. You have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Good evening.

Can you see me there, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, yes. I can see you and hear you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: It would be better without the video, but I am afraid that is what I look like so . . .

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: I make no comment.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is hard for me believe that as the once-newbie, this is in fact my third Budget Debate already. It has gone quickly, I know, I know. But here I am. What I did in my first two was to try to be as balanced as I could and make observations about the budget that I thought were commendable and then offer what I hoped was constructive criticism. And having done that twice, I think I am going to try it a third time.

So let me start, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the elements of this budget that I would like to commend. Firstly, and it has been said by others before me on both sides of the aisle, I note, that this was not an easy budget for this Minister of Finance. And I think everybody needs to recognise the difficult circumstances that our Island finds itself in. And so this was not an easy budget. And just for having the boldness to tackle it, he deserves our commendation, and we freely give it.

Likewise, I do want to reach out and pay compliments to his efforts last year to restructure our debt. That was something that went largely unnoticed by a number of the people in the population. It was a clever move, it was done well and, again, he deserves our credit there and I freely give it. I also have had an opportunity to look at and read carefully the Budget Statement.

One of things that I would observe is that when the Minister of Finance has identified what he calls “the way forward” and a broad umbrella concept of an economic recovery plan, he identified six principles, which are on page 12 and page 13 of the Budget Statement. I think what is interesting to me is how in relation to these six principles, all of us, I think, agree. One, combating COVID-19 is a priority. Absolutely! Yes! And you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when my colleague, MP Richardson, was speaking earlier, interjected to make an observation about how during COVID-19 the Government tried to help all. And you were right to do so. I would make an observation along a similar line, offered in good spirit, which is that the Opposition did its best to support the Government during COVID-19. And we really were not squawking, or at least I did not think we were.

The second principle identified on page 13 of the Budget Statement, Reducing the cost of living. I do not think there is a single MP in the House, or in-

deed anyone in Bermuda, who does not think it is a good idea if Bermuda was able to reduce the cost of living. It is a principle we can all support. It would have bipartisan agreement. The more difficult question is, How? And the answer to that question is where people start to have different ideas.

Likewise, Fairness and equity. That is the third principle identified by the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Minister of Finance. Again, agreed. Fairness and equity. The question is, How?

The next two are Financial viability and Fiscal prudence. Certainly, the latter sounds as if it is something that falls easily from the mouth of the Minister of Finance, He is certainly someone who is an advocate of fiscal prudence. And we on this side of the aisle very much agree. He has our support there.

And his sixth principle is Timeliness. If I could be objective about it, one of the difficult things for any Government is deliverables. It is easy to say something; it is a lot harder to do it. And even if you are trying to do it, it is a lot harder to get it there to the end as a deliverable. It is not just a box-ticking exercise, because box-ticking really does not help anyone, but actually getting it done so that it matters and so that the recipient of that effort knows that he or she has benefited.

Likewise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if one were to turn to page 24 of the Budget Statement, there the Minister of Finance has determined to defund any vacant posts unless the funding for it has been allocated in support of delivering a service, or active recruitment for the post is underway. Now, it was before my time, but I understand that this was something that the OBA Government did during its tenure as well. And whether they did or whether they didn't, as I said, it was before my time. But I think that this is a positive step by the Minister of Finance. And where I see a positive move, I call it as I see it. So, well done there.

Another slightly more complicated discussion or debate is the Minister's explanation of why he does not think it is a good idea to borrow money to put it into a sinking fund which is intended to be a rainy-day fund to pay off debt when you can. Why do you increase your debt to have money to put into a fund dedicated for decreasing your debt? It all sounds very circular, and it costs us cash. And so, on that point too, I am entirely with the Minister of Finance. I know there are some who would disagree. But I do not see the point in paying the bank interest to borrow money—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Excuse me. The Leader of the Opposition is reminding me that the entire OBA team says that as well. It does not make sense to pay a bank to borrow to put into a fund to pay back the money you borrowed from the bank. And so there too, I offer commendation to the Minister of Finance.

The last point of commendation that I would like to highlight . . . and I am going to dovetail this with something that one of the previous speakers said before me, the Honourable Craig Cannonier. He commended the Minister of Finance by pulling a quote from the Budget Statement where the Minister of Finance himself said this: "If there are obstacles to growth, we must remove them, quickly." And like MP Craig Cannonier before me, I would commend the Minister for that observation, and I would offer our agreement and support. If there are obstacles to growth, we must remove them quickly.

And I would also pause to note for a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what MP Jarion Richardson said about that quote as well, because that quote was referred to in his speech to this Honourable House. And he pointed out that one of the largest obstacles to growth is the necessity for one side always to be right and the other always to be wrong. And he said there is no monopoly on being right because there is always room for improvement. And that certainly struck a chord with me because in this game of politics we do often try to be right and try hard to portray the other side as always wrong. And of course, that is the politics that the people do not like, because there is no monopoly on always being right. And there is always room for improvement.

And Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is in that spirit that I would now turn to some slightly more critical observations. And lest MP Famous chooses to point-of-order me, these observations are freely given and honestly held. Not to be critical but to offer a critique, and those are different things.

I want to identify one of the overarching themes. Having identified the point about obstacles to growth and the need to remove them quickly, I am very much agreeing with that sentiment. Let me identify another theme which runs through this Budget Statement, which I really do not agree with. We have been hearing it a lot. It is a cliché. And it is the idea that *the perfect is the enemy of the good*. With the greatest of respect to those who have used the phrase, I would ask them to step back and pause and think about whether that is really the sentiment by which they want to live their life.

The perfect is the enemy of the good. Well, sure. Because achieving perfection is so difficult. But does that mean simply because we cannot achieve it we should not try? The perfect is the enemy of the good is, again, like saying, *Well, I have done something, and something is better than nothing, so I should be rewarded for doing something*. And, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that approach does strike me as flawed.

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Scott Pearman: And I would offer, as I have offered previously—

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not want to interrupt MP Pearman's flow, but I think context is really important when referencing my remarks and then offering a critique or a criticism of what was said.

The statement was made in a context of the unemployment benefit and not having the time to perfect a perfect solution because people were at the risk of potentially going without food. And so I appreciate the comment, but I think that its context should also be considered before offering a critique.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I readily accept the intervention from the Minister of Finance. I take his point. I fully accept that the quote was deployed in the context that he states it was. Nonetheless, it is a quote that I have been hearing a lot of late. And not just from the Minister of Finance. And I think it is perfectly reasonable of me, and I hope I am doing it in a reasonable way, to ask whether that is the mantra by which we, Bermuda, collectively, want to live our lives. And it seems to me, and I have said this before, that I prefer, and it is a cliché as well, but I prefer the cliché, *Do it well or not at all*.

Now, I will take another cliché that was in the statement that came from the Minister of Finance, and that was, *A good plan poorly executed [can be] worse than no plan at all*. And with that sentiment, I wholeheartedly agree. It is not always true. Sometimes a good plan poorly executed gets me out of some hot water and quick. But sometimes it is better to do nothing than to do something badly or do something that is wrong. But I do say in terms of the perfect being the enemy of the good, I would prefer the approach to do it right or not at all.

Anyway, moving from high themes to the reality on the ground, almost every speech this evening, and rightly so, has identified that COVID-19 has turned the world on its head. I would just like to observe, yes, COVID-19 has done our economy a great deal of damage, a great violence. But I would also like to observe, again, fairly, I think, that we were in bad shape before. Our economy was diseased before COVID-19. COVID-19 was the proverbial coffin. As I am talking about clichés, let me move on to another one. It amazes me, and one of my colleagues on this side of the aisle, used it earlier. It amazes me that

people are talking about approaching cliffs. Maybe I am the negative one here. But I think the cliff came and went long ago. I think we are over that cliff and we are falling fast. I wish it were not the case. I really do. And contrary to some of the interventions, and one specific intervention earlier, we do not wish the Government ill simply because we are the Opposition, but we are entitled, and indeed obliged and duty-bound, to point out when we differ, and why we differ, because we are here to offer solutions or alternatives.

The biggest issue to me about this budget and our economy and where we are going . . . yes, it is COVID-19. But actually COVID-19 will pass. And to me the biggest issue here is debt. Debt is the big monster in the room. We are \$3 billion in debt net of the sinking fund. And the Minister of Finance informed this Honourable House back in, well, reasonably recently, that in August 2020 the gross debt figure was \$3.35 billion.

I have not checked the number myself, but it was suggested earlier this evening in the debate before the House that are unfunded pension obligation was \$1.47 billion. So if one takes the net debt, which I accept is a fairer way to approach it, and adds the \$1.47 billion, then that is \$4.47 billion. Now, that is pretty much \$4.5 billion.

So far in my speech I have been speaking in the spirit of good will, and actually I think a number of the contributors to the debate this evening have spoken in the spirit of good will. I was a little disappointed to hear earlier from the Minister of Education about how when you make a mistake you must own it. But let me throw it back at him. Minister, who owns \$4.5 billion in debt?

Anyway, as MP Richardson pointed out, and I am paraphrasing, *we can disagree respectfully. We can disagree without rancour even though we are still disagreeing.* This \$3 billion in debt, or \$4.5 billion in debt if you include the unfunded pension obligation, you know . . . just take the \$3 billion. In 2020, our population was 62,278 according to the UN statistic. If you divide the population, that is the resident population, so that is Bermudians and others, you divide \$3 billion, that means a per head figure of \$48,171.10. That is \$48,171.10. That is \$50,000 for each head of a resident in Bermuda if you think our residency is certain around 62,000. If it were only the Bermudians it is far higher. And why do I mention that? Well, because if we get out of control along taxation, it will be only the Bermudians. Because everyone else will have the freedom to leave and will not necessarily want to remain here to help us repay our debt.

Turning now to the budget itself. The Opposition Leader noted in his Budget Reply at page 7 . . . with your liberty, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I may just quote. The Opposition Leader said this: "Mr. Speaker, many Bermuda residents see this budget as very aspirational, and one that lacks detail." I appreciate that this criticism by the Opposition Leader may not have

been welcomed, and I preface in my speech this evening that I recognise the difficulty and I commend the Minister for the difficulty in which he is functioning in producing this budget. But it is an aspirational budget, and it is one that lacks detail. We looked at the six principles earlier at pages 12 and 13 of the Budget Statement.

Slightly less persuasive in my opinion are the initiatives at [pages] 13 and 14. Those, we can remind ourselves, were, firstly, economic diversification. This is interesting. Economic diversification. If you asked, *Shouldn't Bermuda have a more diversified economy?* I think 9 out of 10 people would say yes. Possibly 10 out of 10. But then you start to say, *Well, diversification, how?* Well, we need to find more pillars. We start talking about a green economy, a blue economy, a tech economy, FinTech, crypto, et cetera. All of these ideas, some of which may be very good ideas, others which may be unicorns in the sense that they do not exist. I think that it is right to try to diversify Bermuda's economy. I think most people wouldn't differ. But it is also difficult.

What is less difficult, in my respective opinion, is that you have got that which is right before your eyes. You have an opportunity to grow what you know. Again, I will remind the House of what MP Richardson said earlier. *Take care of the people who are already here.* So insurance and reinsurance, yes. Harder to grow, I appreciate, because there is a lot of merger going on in that sector. The fund industry. I said it and perhaps it is going to be a Pearman cliché because I have said it so often. But imagine what the Bermuda economy would look like if we had just one or two more Orbises here. I mean, it would be fantastic. Hard to achieve, I accept. But grow what you know.

Likewise, we have this massive trust industry here. If we could focus on growing our trust industry, if we could start to take it to some of our competitors to the south, and in this occasion, it is not Cayman I am talking about. But, you know, the trust industry is an area of great growth and benefit to our islands.

Another observation that I would like to agree with earlier in the debate was actually a comment by MP Dunkley. And what he said was *Thank you to international business.* I am very sensitive to the fact that some of the things that we throw one way or another in the House get heard by those who are visitors to our Island, who are residents here, not necessarily Bermudian, who are working in international business or a part of international business looking at our Island from afar. And because international business is the success that it is, and because it has actually weathered the COVID-19 storm better than any other sector in Bermuda, it is easy to forget the gratitude.

So I echo that sentiment, and I do thank international business, because there were a lot of Bermudians employed by international business and they could have been cast aside. There were other islands

facing COVID-19 who were putting people on planes and shipped them out. We welcomed and we embraced those who were here from international business and by in large they repaid the favour by maintaining Bermudians in employment even though there was little work, or less work, to be done. And it is, I accept, hard to adjust to working from home but some people have jobs who can do that better than others, but I think the fact that they maintained people on their payrolls rather than jettisoning them is something for which we should offer thanks collectively.

Now, solutions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, how much time do I have left?

The Deputy Speaker: You have got 10 minutes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Okay. I'm grateful.

Looking at page 14 of the Budget Statement, I am delighted to see that one of the seven identified initiatives is extending the resident population. I think the PLP is right to be on board with this. The OBA has been there before. But this is not a he-said, she-said moment. There is no benefiting in crowing. There was a bipartisan committee before the election that as I understand, although I did not sit on it, reached a high degree of consensus on this very delicate and sensitive issue of immigration. I fully accept that it is a delicate and sensitive issue. Not only owing to historical atrocities and improprieties, but also because we all do not necessarily agree about what it is to be Bermudian and who should be Bermudian and when should they be Bermudian and how.

And yet, you know, look around the House. How many of us are married to people who were not born here? How many of us might have had kids born here or born elsewhere? It is very, very difficult to define what it means to be Bermudian. And I think when we embark upon this journey to grow the resident population, which I hope we will do, we must remind ourselves that it is not as easy as the stark contrast picture that we (and I say "we," collectively) politicians like to paint.

The Opposition Leader said in his speech earlier today that a good immigration policy is a good economic policy. And that is absolutely right. And I would like to extend praise to the Minister of Finance for recognising this as a fundamental and important initiative and I would also like to commend the Minister of Labour for perhaps saying the unexpected. Because I think it is right to have the conversation. I am not saying we all are going to agree. I know that historically one party has certainly been more pro-immigration than the other.

But the fact is that our collective backs are against the wall. Bermuda is in deep, deep, deep trouble. [We are] \$4.5 billion in debt. How are we going to repay that? To me—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Point of order.

Mr. Scott Pearman: —there clearly is—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order, Honourable Premier.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member cannot make up figures. The debt figures are clearly published for all to see. And we understand exactly what Bermuda's net debt position is. And Bermuda's net debt position is not \$4.5 billion. The Honourable Member must speak to the facts; he cannot make them up.

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, just be mindful of what is in the book.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is unfortunate perhaps that the Premier tuned in late because I explained precisely how I got to the figure of 4.5. I added in the [\$]1.47 [billion] unfunded public sector pension fund, which is a promise to our public sector workers—

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member . . . Point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member cannot invent what the definitions of debt are. And so, he cannot use in his argument that Bermuda is \$4.5 billion in debt when we have laws and statements which state what the net public debt actually is. So he cannot just throw things in. Is he going to start throwing in something else to make the figure larger? Maybe that is what the Opposition Leader was doing. We have facts and he must stick to the facts as they exist, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, just be mindful of what is in the Budget Book, where our debt is. I understand what you said, but you got to quote the book.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Our gross debt, as I said, as of August 2020 was \$3.35 billion. Our net debt as I understand it from the presentation is just below \$3 billion . . . or just

above \$3 billion. Our unfunded public sector liability, which is a promise for pension for public sector workers, as I understand it earlier in the debate, was \$1.47 billion. I pointed out earlier in my speech that I had not checked that number, but if one adds \$3 billion, which is the lesser number the net number, and \$1.47 billion, we are pretty close to \$4.5 billion.

I accept that one is a net debt, and one is a pension obligation payment. But really, we are dancing on the head of a pin here, Premier. What I am talking about is what we as an Island have to repay, and you can point-of-order me—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order, Mr. Premier.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: It is wholly inaccurate to state that future pension obligations which are unfunded due to actuarial calculations on money that has to be repaid. It is not accurate. It is not keeping with finances. It is a way to go with a political item to make something larger, but we must deal with facts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the facts are that it is not proper to say that underfunding on pensions . . . because there are numerous things. The pension liability assumes that there are no more payments into pensions as of this day and that is where the underfunded matter comes from, and that is not correct, because people are paying into pensions every year. And so for the Honourable Member to say that this is money that has to be paid back is not correct. He is misleading the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, stay away from that because it is speculating. That is not the exact figure and we do not want Honourable Members to give the public that notion that that is what it is. So if you can stay away from that.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Absolutely.

The Deputy Speaker: That is appreciated.

Mr. Scott Pearman: And I would just point out that splitting hairs between \$4.5 and \$3.0 billion . . . I mean, they are both pretty bad. But I will leave it to the Minister of Finance and the Premier to have the conversation about the unfunded pension liability and I will leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the direction.

Let me move on now to the principles. Where I was before the interjection, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was commending the idea of expanding the resident population. The reason for that is because if we have a \$3 billion net debt obligation as an Island, we are going to

have to figure out some way to pay that back. Yes, you can raise taxes, and we have seen taxes being raised. But the other way, and in my opinion the preferable way, is to try to expand your tax base which means getting more people here. And it was interesting to hear the earlier speech by MP Richardson talking about the size of Gibraltar and how much smaller it is than Bermuda, and yet the population is just half the size of ours, give or take.

I understand from the Premier's statement to the House this morning that there will be 30 key initiatives to follow. It might be thought unfortunate but here we are having our Budget Debate and the 30 key initiatives have not yet been announced. And we will not know them for another 11 days until the 16th of March. It would have been more helpful perhaps for us to know and the public to know what those 30 key shiny pieces of hope might be. But we don't. We don't. And we will wait to see what the 30 initiatives are and we look forward to seeing them and we hope that they are more than 30 pieces of silver.

The Opposition Leader in his speech said this: "The question is, what now?" I do not think anybody approaches this budget with any sense of pleasure or pride in where we stand. It is depressing news indeed. I, for one, do not envy the Minister of Finance his position and as I said at the beginning of my speech, I commend him in many, many ways for the difficulties he faces.

In another context the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, [Jr.] spoke of, quote, "the fierce urgency of now." And to me that about sums it up. *The fierce urgency of now*. Here is where we are, and as the Opposition Leader said, the question is, *What now?*

So, Minister of Finance, good luck to you. Be bold. Do grow the resident population; you will have our support. You will not get cheap shots from us on that. We will support you. Why will we support you? Because we must grow our tax base. We must. Otherwise, there will be fewer and fewer people here to pay \$3 billion in net debt, and whatever the pension obligation happens to be as the days and years unfold in front of us. Also—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: —it will put more people in Bermuda . . . how much time, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: You have two seconds.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Okay. It will grow more people into paying our health care system. To conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to commend the Minister of National Security, Renee Ming, for what she said, which is, *We are in this together*. And I would say back to the Minister, *Yes, we are*.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member, Mr. Pearman.

Are there any further speakers?
Do I hear Mr. De Silva?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, Mr. De Silva.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to ask you to just be a little, give me a little leeway from time to time. I am operating with one hand.

The Deputy Speaker: It has nothing to do with your mouth.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: True. But I have the session up on my cell phone and I am trying to hold and look at my notes at the same time.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, go ahead.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Please bear with me if I need to look down at times.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Understood.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to start off first by congratulating “Porky” Manders and his team. “Porky,” as we know, was the former Financial Secretary. He passed away just a few weeks ago. I knew the man. I worked with him for years. I have known him personally as well as professionally. I know that he was the type of person . . . you would know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when the budget was over he started again. So, a lot of the work that was put into this budget I would think certainly say has his fingerprints all over it. I would like to put a big thank you out to him and his team who worked with the Finance Minister.

And whilst I am on thanking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to thank the Minister himself for producing this budget. I would like to thank the Minister who I know he must have had to go through hell working with him throughout the course of the last several months, let alone several years. And of course, I would like to thank the Backbenchers of the Progressive Labour Party because I know that throughout the course of the year what goes on in the room and what they contribute to us developing and creating legislation and policies for the people of the country. So that is where I would like to start.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member Pearman who just took his seat said something that really bothered me, you know. He said, and I will paraphrase. He said he a person that if you cannot do it well, then do not do it at all. Well, as someone who has been an entrepreneur all of my life, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, and known how the Progressive Labour Party are, we want to try to help people. And sometimes if we don't quite get it right, trying to act quickly, then we are willing to accept any faults that we have. So, whilst his mantra may be *if you can't do it well, don't do it all*, I would like to think that the people of this country appreciate when you try to do the best for them as quickly as you can even if it does not get done right at all.

The other thing that MP Pearman talked about, the Honourable Member, is that we are already over the cliff and we are falling fast. It made me think of the Grand Atlantic and how the OBA poured sour milk, sour water, anything sour they could think of over that project, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I would think that that had a big part, outside of the economy, of going through the very challenging times, unprecedented times at the time, [INAUDIBLE]. And I am sure that he remembers all that they poured on the project. Saying that they, you know, when he talked about we are over the cliff in terms of our debt and we are falling fast, that was just an example of what they used to do and they continue to do. And I will speak to “continue to do” in a moment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member Pearman talked about Orbis, and wouldn't we like to have more companies like Orbis, and more trust fund companies on the Island and people who did that type of business? Of course we would, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we have never ever in my time in the Progressive Labour Party discouraged international business from coming to the country. Ever! And when that same Honourable Member talks about we can discuss things without rancour but see these backdoor things that they mention all the time, and whilst he may be a new Member, and we have other new Members in the House . . . in fact, we have many new Members in the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We both know that rancour has come from the other side a hell of a lot more than what it has come from our side. And I do not forget our history.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, we cannot forget these. I certainly am not going to forget the history, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will not because there have been too many things done against, and continuing against our people on the Progressive Labour Party side that we cannot forget. We cannot forget some of the things that have been done and continue to be done to us.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member Pearman and the rest of the OBA Members, a few of them talked tonight about international business. And MP Pearman thanked MP Dunkley for thanking international business. Well, guess what? We thank international business too! We now how important they are. They are very important to this

economy and there is nobody in the Progressive Labour Party that does not recognise that and does not give them the thanks . . . and show . . . and see that we don't show our thankfulness for them being in this country.

But Mr. Deputy Speaker, they do well in this country too. Let's not forget that. But the other thing is, on one hand they are thanking international business, the next minute they get up and talk about us being \$4.7 billion in debt, and the Premier straightened that out. I mean, they might as well add another billion or two for buses, ferries, and infrastructure and everything else if they are going to talk about what sort of debt we are going to have in the future.

But see, this is what they do. And they have got to stop it. Because one of them will mention \$4.7 today, and I can bet you, if it hasn't been done already on the blogs, that number will be to \$6 billion and \$7 billion debt. And they will try to paint the picture that the Progressive Labour Party does not know what they are doing. We are stringing up the debt. And we are causing all this . . . we do not have a clue of what we are doing. But they do not have any problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker, . . . and I will run a few numbers by for you. Right?

The MRG [minimum revenue guarantee] at the airport, so far we are up to \$25 million and counting. Do not be surprised if another \$20 million is not added to that if things do not improve. Morgan's Point, we are \$200 million and counting. America's Cup was \$200 million. Cross Island is \$40 million. Corporation of Hamilton, \$18 million. That is half a billion dollars right there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now, if I was to sit here and make notes for the next hour, I could give you another billion dollars.

But then they talk about the debt that we have accumulated. And then this last year in the Opposition Leader's Budget Reply, he talked about a billion dollars in the last year. Well, what country in this world has not spent tons and tons of extra money because of this COVID-19? How many countries have not? Everyone has been in the same boat. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they keep crying wolf.

And then I would just like to touch on something that MP Cannonier talked about. He said the arbitration centre. You know, no tender, no RFPs, no prices, no this, no that. I would like to remind that Honourable Member about the America's Cup. There was no tender for the America's Cup. There was no tender for a legal rep that was put out to all their legal firms, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during that four- or five-year period. And they stood up during the House of Assembly and said, *Listen, we are going to use the people that we know and we trust*. That did not go out to tender.

BC&M [Burland, Conyers & Marirea] worked up America's Cup up there. Lord knows how much money they made, Mr. Deputy Speaker—maybe \$10 million or \$15 million worth. That did not go out to ten-

der. But we mention one project, and I am sure Colonel Burch will come out with details when he is ready, but the fact of the matter is that they try to paint this picture. Every time we try to do something positive, they try to paint a picture. And it has got to stop.

And then they will tell you in the next breath, Mr. Deputy Speaker, *Listen, you know . . .* and the other thing that they do, and of course it is again in the Budget Reply, and a few of their Members talked about it tonight, was lack of confidence. They are going to start that again, I see.

One minute they say let's encourage international business, let's encourage new business, let's get more people to the Island, but every time you turn around . . . when you say we are in deep, deep, deep trouble, talking about \$4.7 billion, and if you look at MP Cole Simons's Reply, he says, *It is the worst . . .* What did he say? *It is the worst . . . confidence is at the worst level it has ever been in our history*.

Really?

But that is what they do. So one minute you say, let's encourage these folks. Let's stop doing this, but at the same time they put all these bad, bad stories out all the time. It's funny. It's funny. I found it very interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other thing that . . . and I will read a section, with your indulgence, just out of our Finance Minister's Budget Book, on page 11, which I found was interesting. In the last paragraph, and I quote, "To date, the financial impact of the Government's guarantee for this failed project" (Caroline Bay) "has been severe. Close to \$200.0 million of public funds has been unnecessarily tied up and at risk. Not only is there an ongoing interest cost, but this has also significantly reduced the Government's capacity to fund productive investments that could be critical to Bermuda's economic recovery."

That is important, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is so important. And everyone seems to brush it under the rug. [It was] \$200 million and counting. And we still have not . . . you know, the Finance Minister has got a dog's breakfast up there to sort out. It is a dog's breakfast. And Lord help the taxpayers of this country. Lord help us, because that is exactly what it is.

And then if you look at the Opposition's Reply, what I found interesting with regard to Morgan's Point is on page 15, the Opposition Leader said, and I quote, "While I am on the topic of Carolina [*sic*] Bay, what happened with the Morgan's Point liquidation? What did the Government actually receive for the \$165 million dollars expended for the adoption of the loans? Again, the Minister of Finance has been very thrifty with these details."

Seriously, Mr. Deputy Speaker? This is what the Opposition has in his Reply? *What did the Government actually receive for the \$165 . . . ?*

First of all, it was not \$165 million. It is \$200 million. And the Opposition Leader has the gall to put in his Reply, *What did the Government actually re-*

ceive for it? I tell you what we received for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We received \$200 million of added taxpayers' money to our debt. That is what we received. It beggars belief to think that this would be added. It makes me wonder if the Opposition Leader even wrote this himself, because I cannot believe for the life of me that he would make this statement.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, on that note I just want to finish by saying that I think that the majority of people in this country know what time it is. They know the challenges that we face as a Government and as a country. I think they saw how we handled the pandemic. I think they saw without the pandemic that we were on the road to recovery. I think we were in the best financial position we have been in for years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the deficit that the Finance Minister had predicted. And I think we were even going to end up with a surplus at the end of this fiscal year.

So I think the people of this country voted us in in record numbers for a reason. I think they had confidence in us. I think a lot of people who normally did not vote for the Progressive Labour Party voted for us. I think there is a little change going on. I think they do see that the Progressive Labour Party is the party that can run this country. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's remind us of an old cliché. *The OBA are the past and the PLP are the future.*

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member, Mr. De Silva.

Are there any further speakers?

Mr. Christopher Famous: Good evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: That is Mr. Famous.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, your cousin.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Famous, Honourable Member, my honourable cousin. You have the floor.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Deputy Speaker, normally I hear people say, *I wasn't planning on speaking, but . . .*

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: So tonight, I am going to add to that cadre and say *I wasn't planning on speaking but when I heard MP Jarion Richardson and MP Scott Pearman speak I was inspired to be like Cousin Wayne Furbert.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the advantages of having this virtual Parliament where you can see people's faces and all of that, sometimes you actually see their backgrounds. Like, for example, I see you have

some nice taste in curtains and venetian blinds. Nice background. My background, I have the Honourable Minister behind me.

Earlier today the former Premier, former Opposition Leader, Honourable Craig Cannonier, had a background. His background was a blackboard, or as they say nowadays, a whiteboard. And on that whiteboard, it had some writing. Can I say what was on it? The writing said, *Tell them what you are going to tell them. step 1; step 2, tell them; step 3, tell them what you have told them.* What is that? That is a form of PR, a form of messaging, a form of reinforcing your message. So as my colleague, the Honourable Zane, aka Skillarchie De Silva said earlier, *They are putting a narrative out there to the public.*

Last week the narrative was *Corporate cannabis, corporate cannabis, corporate cannabis!* The people who were going to benefit from it started to believe it. So they told them what they are going to tell them, they told them, and they told them what they told them. They reinforced their message. Corporate cannabis. Today their message is, *Oh, we are \$4.7 billion in debt. Oh, the PLP caused civil unrest.* That is their messaging. I find it interesting, if not hypocritical, that on one hand they say, *Kumbaya*, and on the other hand they want to try to lash us. That is what you call passive-aggressive behaviour. They try to appear to be a nice guy, but you really just want to stab people in the back. I will wait for him to point-of-order me but . . . no, they can't.

I find it also interesting that MP Pearman sat up, looked like he was suffering from, I don't know, flu or something, I don't know, I wish him well. I hope he feels better. But he had on a sweater, the sweater said, "CDP, Conyers, Dill & Pearman" and he kept on talking about *We have to protect our business and know our competition.* But do you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I have been to the Cayman Islands, our competitor. And a big building down there said, what? It says "Conyers, Dill and Pearman." He can't point-of-order me because it is the truth. So, some of us who are here are trying to keep Bermuda business up and going, and then some of us are benefiting from our competition. I'm just saying.

I am going to move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, onto MP Jarion Richardson. I like him. Maybe one day we will sit down and have a beverage and get to know each other. Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I quote something from this publication, OBA Reply to the Budget 2021/22. Page 20. And I quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, "Immigration reform has been a thorny, and very emotional issue for successive governments of Bermuda and her people. It has been a political football, and with the aid of successive PLP Governments, this issue has also stoked civil unrest." And I quote, I go back to what MP Craig Cannonier had on his blackboard. *Tell them what you are going to tell them. Tell them. And then tell them what you told them.* They are

trying to reinforce the message that we stoked civil unrest.

Let me take a moment to remind people of something. This is the first week of March of 2021, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Five years ago, exactly five years ago, thousands of Bermudians, including our dearly departed Sister LaVerne Furbert and Brother Glen, and others who are no longer with us, put their lives and their freedom and their jobs on the line to surround the House of Parliament, that is to the south of where I am sitting. Why did they do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because the day after the OBA lost another bye-election in Devonshire, the very next day they announce Pathways to Status. An extremely liberal immigration policy which was basically just telling anyone who has been here for however many years *You will get Bermuda status*. Forget the history of what has happened to this country. Forget Bermudians' aspirations. Forget the fact that people are getting educated but cannot get a job in their own country. *We will give you Bermuda status*.

And their hypocrisy was that they had four posters, and on every one of their posters was a person of colour: a Filipino family, a lady from Jamaica, another lady from some other country. Yet the statistics, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are clear. [They show] that the people most likely to benefit from those policies that they were putting out were people of European descent. So why did they go through the lengths of hiding who was going to get the most benefits out of that immigration policy? Because they knew that this was a continuation of the UBP policy and the British colonial policy of decades ago that [blatantly] gave people of European descent mass advantage over Black Bermudians. So they wanted to colour it up by putting [in] a few faces of people of colour.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was one of those first people over the wall that Monday morning, along with others who locked arms, willing to die for this country to stop that policy. There has never been in the history of Bermuda or the history of the British West Indies (because that is where we are) where the people have surrounded Parliament and stopped legislation in a *peaceful* manner. There were no riots. There was no pepper spray. So this civil unrest narrative is totally false. The people stopped that because they knew what was coming down the line.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2017 the people of Bermuda—Black, white, Portuguese, St. David's Islanders, Bailey's Bay to Shelly Bay—all voted for a change because they did not trust the OBA with immigration. That speaks to their credibility when it comes to immigration. They decided to put their trust in us for immigration issues.

And in December of 2017, the late Honourable Walton Brown put together a committee, a bipartisan committee, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Two OBA and two PLP, equal in number: Honourable Ben Smith, Honourable Leah Scott, Honourable Renee Ming and

myself. And for two years under Honourable Walton Brown and then under Honourable Wayne Caines we sat in this very room that I sit in right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we sorted out immigration policies to benefit all—not just one side of the equation, all.

In February of last year, we passed the ¹mixed status family legislation so that persons who found themselves in the position where one person was a PRC and the other person did not have anything, they were able to regularise their status. There was no civil unrest. Did you see anyone surrounding the House of Parliament? I did not see them. I saw people come to us at CedarBridge to thank us, thank us for giving them a chance in their country, thank us for acknowledging that they are as Bermudian as anyone of us, thank us for allowing them to contribute to the economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2018, myself, Minister Furbert, MP Jackson, and Speaker Lister went to the Cayman Islands. The same Cayman Islands that Minister Fahy kept on saying that we have to be like Cayman. *We have to be like Cayman Islands*. The same Cayman Islands that MP Scott Pearman has an office at. We went down there and we saw a nice booming economy. So on one hand, yes, that is great. But we also got to talk to native Caymanians. There were none in the hotels. There were none in the restaurants. There were none in the retail shops. Very few of them worked in the trades. So where were they? They were unemployed because they could not afford to work in their own country for \$6.00 an hour, whilst cheap labour was being imported into their country.

When you go to the airport in the Cayman Islands, it is hard to see a Caymanian—in the national airport of Cayman Islands. And this is what the OBA had planned for us. So for those thousands of people who put their life on the line five years ago, we thank them. Because if they did not do it, that is the position we would be in.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will move on. We are now in the year 2021. We realise our financial position, three-something billion dollars in debt. Not good. Our ageing population. It is very good that they are still with us, very good. There are not enough Bermudians in the workforce—not good. We also realise the social history of this country because persons like yourself, persons like Mr. Hughes, persons like Walton Brown, persons like Sister LaVerne Furbert, have inculcated the history of this country into my generation so there is no way that anyone sitting as a PLP MP is ever going to vote to give away this country. But we are not going to vote to see our country go further into debt either.

¹ Bermuda Immigration and Protection Amendment Act 2020, passed [16 March 2020](#)

So where do we go from here, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I will tell you where we are going from here. Under the leadership of Honourable Jason Hayward; under the leadership of Honourable Crystal Caesar, who is the head of the now bipartisan immigration group, we are going to work our way out. We are not going to say it now, but we are going to work. And we are not going to have civil unrest, because why? Because we are going to talk to our people. We are going to understand the situation, the same way as when we went to the Cayman Islands and we understood what Caymanians are going through.

We are going to talk to international business. Right? Because there is this fallacy that we do not have a good relationship with international business, and we are aggressive toward them and we put inflammatory language out there. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am quite sure the Honourable Finance Minister has regular conversations with those people in international business. I have regular conversations with people in international business. The Premier has conversations. Any number of our Ministers have these conversations. So this fallacy, this narrative that they are trying to paint, that the PLP is anti-business, and we are this and we are that. Then why do we have 30 seats? We cannot be that bad if most of the country voted for us. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am going to clear this up in a little bit.

I say to the people of Bermuda, before October the 1st, we let you know we were in for a rough ride coming up. We told you that we would give you strong leadership. We will take the slams that we have to take because we are here for you. On October the 1st they overwhelmingly voted for us. The numbers do not lie. OBA supporters did not come out to support the OBA. Some switched to us and some just did not come out. The same Honourable Craig Cannonier who had those narratives on his blackboard . . . his own people did not come out for him. So, he is the last one who needs to talk about anything.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know the irony in all that MP Richardson said? *Oh, we want to work together. We want to stop the inflammatory . . . well, guess what? We have offered them olive branch after olive branch. Help us form the cannabis legislation. They refused to be part of that. Help us form the bipartisan immigration. They were part of that, suddenly now they said, No, we are not going to be part of it.* So how can they talk about a process of immigration policy that works for all?

How can Honourable Scott Pearman say that we are in this together? They have officially said they do not want to be part of the bipartisan immigration group. They do not want any part of working with us to form our immigration policy going forward. They are hypocrites. And I dare them to point-of-order me. They cannot.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PLP Government that you helped to form, that Honourable

LaVerne Furbert helped to build, will do what is best for immigration for this country because we will never forget our people. We will never forget what people went through five years ago in the cold, day and night outside of that House. Hunger strikes. People not going to work. People taking their children out of school to stand up for their rights.

So when they come with this crap about *We have stoked civil unrest*. No, we did not. When Trevor Moniz, Michael Fahy—who was never an MP . . . it was said in here that he was a JP MP . . . he was never an MP, and he will never be an MP—and Honourable Sylvan Richards got up there the day after they lost that bye-election, that is what stoked civil unrest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I commend the Honourable Finance Minister and his team, the late great Honourable “Porky” Manders. I commend now Miss Cheryl Lister who is going to be Financial Secretary. [I commend them] for all the work they are going to do to save our economy. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member, Famous.

I hear the great Colonel Burch.

Colonel Burch, you have the floor.

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: I haven’t said anything. How do you hear me?

The Deputy Speaker: I can hear way, way before you speak.

[Laughter]

Lt. Col. Hon. David A. Burch: Oh, I see.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the challenges of going this late in the batting order is that many people who have gone before you have said what you wanted to say. But I still have something to contribute.

This is my 14th budget I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am guessing, so I could be off. But I think I said this in one of the discussions that we have been having about budget before we got to this point, that it has been the most challenging budget that I have ever participated in. Challenging, because we take this responsibility seriously and the Minister of Finance has done an excellent job fashioning this budget, even though we have had some bumpy rides along the way in terms of fighting to retain funding for the operation of our ministries. In my case, it has been about \$8 million that we have lost over the last two years. That has been a challenge for all of the people in this Ministry.

I am not sure how other ministries do it, but in Public Works we take all of the heads of departments, put them in a room, and they have been in a room since last September, to agree the Ministry’s budget.

And by that some people give out some money for some things and delay some projects and others make the case in order to be able to get there. On this occasion we have gone back about six times, I think, with reduced budgets and looking at ways in which we can meet the cash limits that we have been given.

I have shared with anybody who would listen in this Ministry that I think that this is a good exercise. I think that we have to in this COVID-19 period, more so than at any other time, look at the way we do things and decide whether it is still the way to continue to do things. On some of those the answer will be yes, and some of the answers will be no. But I think that in this coming year where money is tight and there are restrictions going in in terms of what we can produce, we are going to be forced to assess every type of spending that occurs even though it is included in this year's budget.

For those who have served in this capacity, they will be aware of what I call "March madness spending." And it has been typical of governments, at least the ones I have served in, where you wander around the Ministry and the areas of responsibility and you see all sorts of new things appear in March, late February/March, where people are trying to spend the balance of last year's budget that has not been spent on things that are nice to have, in many instances. Some necessary but mostly things that are nice to have.

This year in Public Works . . . because they know I wander around on a regular basis when they are here and when they are not, I have been able to curtail that type of spending significantly. And I would like to see that expanded across the board every year. But there are financial thresholds that . . . items are approved that do not come before the Minister. But I have directed the accounting people, the chief financial officer, and the comptroller in the Ministry, that we need to have a better control on things that we are spending money on. And it is going to be critical this year, because in order to meet this cash limits, you have one of two choices. You can either get rid of staff or reduces services. Clearly, in this budget we have chosen not to reduce staff. We have also chosen to find the funding from funded posts, which I also think is a good thing because it is going to force us to reassess at every level how it is that we do things. And I think, and I believe that we can come up with better ways of being able to deliver on our message.

Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . I am getting a message that I am running out of juice here, even though it has been plugged in all day. In any case, I am going to talk until it dies. When it dies, then I guess I am gone.

I would like to address, I'll be honest, I have not listened today to a lot of the comments from Members of the Opposition or read the Reply to the Budget. I took the view today that I have heard all the negativity before and I really do not wish to hear it

again. I heard the comment that there were no details in the Budget Statement. And I sat here in absolute amazement because the day before yesterday we got a schedule that we are going to spend the next two weeks—56 hours—debating the budget and providing background information and details on what is planned and the whole outlay of the plan to get us through this year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was very much impressed and pleased by the comments of Minister Ming who talked about budget's being about people. And I think that this Government has demonstrated over the last year and up to this budget that people are a priority and come first in decisions that we make. On the doorstep and out canvassing you run into people, and I am sure everyone else has as well, who talk and say that the Government hasn't done anything.

And I ask the same question of all of them. *Did you get paid during shelter in place? Did you apply for unemployment?*

And they say, *Oh, yes.*

And I ask, *Well, who do you think did that?*

The statistics that were released recently on the decline in air and cruise ship arrivals crystallise the challenges that we must be facing when the source of most of our income did not exist last year. And having responsibility for WEDCO, you will know that this is the primary cruise ship port. And we have not seen a cruise ship in more than a year now. So, I want the people of this country to know that this Government and successive PLP Governments will always put people first.

How can I say that? I joined the PLP because of its philosophy, and with some encouragement from some people who I had respect for. But my loyalty and my commitment and my dedication, as is the case with many of us, can survive successive leaders, successive chairmen, successive officers of the party because we believe in a philosophy, not an individual. And that philosophy has always put people first.

This budget has been referred to by the Ministry of Finance as a recovery budget. And I think I would invite the Members of the Opposition during the 56 hours that we have to debate this to ask all the questions that you have and get all the answers. I suspect that you will not have to ask many of the questions because the information will be presented by those who are presenting individual budgets. At least that will be the case with Public Works where I have directed them for the third year in a row now to leave out all the fluff and the stuff that does not really matter, and let's talk about what it is that we are in the process of doing and what we are going to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was most impressed and have been encouraging our staff to come up with ways and means of how we can stimulate the economy. And I was absolutely delighted when the Minister of Finance provided \$13.3 million for the current

stimulus package that I reported on earlier this morning. That is going to create jobs. It is going to address some of the infrastructure challenges that we are having in the country. And it is going to provide income for folks.

We will continue to look for ways in which we can expand that programme and beg for money in order to be able to do so. But I am delighted where we are at the moment, where 98 contractors have submitted documents to be pre-qualified. And we will do everything within our power to ensure that all of those who are approved get a piece of this pie. Or we will go back to the well if that is not possible and see if we cannot find a way to expand it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to touch finally on the question of the Arbitration Centre just ever so briefly. The lack of information on the Arbitration Centre is as a result of our still being in negotiations. I have publicly indicated recently and continuously for the last several weeks that the financial package is with the Minister of Finance, which is as it should be. And once that is agreed with, or negotiated or revised, and agreed with the developer, then all of the information will be put into the public domain. But let me ask this question: Does it make sense to continue on this journey with every step you take being reported in the public domain? The answer, as far as I am concerned and as far as this Government is concerned, is no, because if we did that, then we would be criticised for doing that, too. So we will take the criticism that you do not know what is going on. And when the time comes before we start building, all of the details of this arrangement will be put into the public domain.

And I can assure the people of this country of a few things: (1) we will not be giving away anything for 30 years; (2) it will not cost anywhere near \$250 million; and (3) we do have some experience in doing things in a business sense that *makes* sense. And I will not be harassed, browbeaten, criticised into making a statement to appease people who cannot and will not be appeased. We will go through this methodically. We will have the proper discussions with the Ministry of Finance and Milhouse [Engineering & Construction, Inc.], and we will come to an arrangement or not, as the case may be. But at the end of the day, we will come up with the best solution for the people of this country and for Bermuda.

There is a market for an Arbitration Centre. There is interest from the legal fraternity in the country. And there is the potential to put us on the map in another way. This is what we are doing, looking at new ways to generate revenue and to increase the income to the country of Bermuda.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am convinced that if we say what it is together, what that means in reality is that we all are going to have to accept less. Let me get into the individual departments. It is my intention to try and indicate as best we can where there are going to be reductions in services and what we are

going to do to pause some of those services in order to save money. That does not mean they are off the table forever, because our plan is to get us on a proper financial footing that addresses the debt and increases the economic activity in the country. And so I see this as a pause for a period and not the way that life is going to be going forward. We are working extremely hard on a number of fronts on ways in order to be able to address that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to end my remarks by thanking the chairman of the two quangos that we will not be discussing in the Budget Debate; they are not listed. And that would be the outgoing Chairman of both the BLDC [Bermuda Land Development Company Ltd.] and WEDCO, Mr. Charlton Dill; and the new Chairman of WEDCO, MP Neville Tyrrell; and [of] BLDC, MP Lovitta Foggo. They both have hit the ground running, along with Mr. Vance Campbell, who is the new Chairman of BHC [Bermuda Housing Corporation] and are up to speed on where it is that we are going and the actions that we are taking and the activity that we want to see occur in this financial year.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister, Colonel Burch.

Any further speakers?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Vance Campbell: [It is] MP Campbell.

The Deputy Speaker: MP Campbell. Continue, Honourable Member.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Bermuda is fortunate to have Mr. Curtis Dickinson as its Finance Minister during these challenging economic times. He is doing an admirable job, given the circumstances. Mr. Deputy Speaker, few would want his job right now. And even fewer would be able to match his performance. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not here to sing the praises of the Finance Minister, albeit those praises would be well deserved. I am here to speak to the budget that he has laid before this Honourable House with the help of his finance team.

But before I do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me first address some of the key points from the Opposition Reply. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we heard from the Honourable Member for constituency 10, who said that the PLP Budget lacks hope. It is amazing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this was said after we were subjected to two hours of doom and gloom in their Reply to the Budget. In their Reply they said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the PLP Government gave no attention to our young people. We heard from the Minister of

Education that a half-million dollars was given to assist our young people in attending Bermuda College. I guess a half-million dollars equates in the OBA camp to *no attention*. And I can also bring to your attention that this budget presented by the Minister of Finance does not reduce any scholarship allocation across ministries.

We are looking after our young people. The Premier in the last six months, maybe a little more, has constantly been in the news presenting our community clubs with money for their programmes, for their facilities, because it is recognised by this Government that it is our community clubs who are one of the first lines of defence for the protection and the education and the development of our young people.

Another comment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Opposition Leader replied that the shock from the COVID-19 provides opportunities for bold new initiatives. And I am on board with that. But then he said that these bold new initiatives require us to revisit tried and proven programmes. So bold and new, but we have got to look back to the old and broken.

[Laughter]

Mr. Vance Campbell: We heard about the SAGE Report, 140 pages, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you do not believe me, I will show it to you. I have it right here, 140 pages. I believe it was completed in October of 2013. And again, the Minister of Finance when he spoke indicated they had three and a half years to implement the recommendations. Little to none implemented in that three and a half years.

I could not believe this one, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When it comes to the threats to our economy from the EU, the OECD and the like, the recommendation from the OBA . . . and this is us trying to remain off of the blacklist that these organisations have artificially created, I will put that out there. The OBA recommendation—and you cannot make this up—Bermuda should form a strategic alliance with members listed on the EU's blacklist. So to avoid being on the blacklist, we should form an alliance with those on the blacklist—

[Laughter]

Mr. Vance Campbell: —amongst other influential lobbyists, NGOs and other influence. That is very naïve, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to think that this is going away no matter who we align ourselves with.

We know what this is about. It has nothing to do with anti-money laundering. It has nothing to do with terrorism financing. It is about getting their hands on the profits of these countries. And so it is not going away. And it is very naïve to think that it would. But to recommend that we align ourselves with people who are on the blacklist is ludicrous.

The OBA, the *Old Bermuda Alliance*—

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Oh boy.

Mr. Vance Campbell: —would have us believe they are the financial geniuses. But today we heard from the Leader of that party. When referring to the Caroline Bay, the Morgan's Point development, he indicated that it was a poisoned chalice from the start. But his Government turned around and provided \$165 million guarantee for something that was a poisoned chalice from the start. Unbelievable!

Cross Island. It was built, \$33 million, [with] no plan as to how this country was going to repay that. The airport. We gave away control of a major revenue source for the government for 30, maybe 35 years. We gave away all of the revenue. And in somebody's great wisdom, we kept some of the expenses. I do not know about you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could do without that kind of financial genius.

I will move away from their plans, approximately two hours of *Let's go back to the status quo. Let's not change anything.*

I believe the budget presented by the Minister of Finance steadies the ship. It stops the bleeding. Small reductions . . . as the OBA said, a *paltry reduction*. I forget which Member said a paltry reduction in expenses. But the most important thing is it will result in an overall reduction in the deficit from the previous years. In fact, prior to the interest charges, it is anticipated to give rise to a surplus. The Economic Recovery Plan, they mocked that. They did not think much of our six principles—combatting COVID-19, reducing the cost of living, fairness and equity, financial viability, fiscal prudence, timeliness. They were not impressed with trying to diversify the economy, amongst other things.

They say we *finally* recognised the importance of immigration. Again, that shows a lack of understanding of the history of Bermuda. Because immigration, as we all know, was one of the things used to keep Black people in this country in their place, according to the then status quo. But as I said, Minister Dickinson and his team, I believe, have presented a budget that is an excellent platform from which to launch our economic recovery.

It has been said that we are a service economy. We cannot increase revenues derived from the mining of bauxite, diamonds, gold, emeralds. No, we do not have any of that. We cannot manipulate the market to increase revenues derived from crude oil, because we do not have any of that. We cannot increase our food exports to derive additional revenue. We do not produce enough for our own needs. We are a service economy. And as a service economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must make sure that we provide value for money.

It is not the cost of doing business in Bermuda, per se. It is not the cost of a vacation in Bermuda,

per se. It is what international business and what the business community believe is the value. Are they getting value? It is not the cost of a stay in Bermuda. It is whether or not the visitors to our Island on vacation believe they are receiving value.

And there is where I will take an issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in regard to our people, because the Government can put out a solid fiscal plan. But if we do not recognise that we are a service economy, if we do not provide the level of service that will support that plan, that plan will fail. We must wake up as a people and get back to providing that service that we know we can and that we know is being provided, but only in little pockets.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not just talking about service to those who are visiting our shores. That service applies to the service that we provide to each other. It is not just for our international business partners or the tourists to the Island. When I go to the grocery store, I am talking about that service as well. When I go to check in at the airport, I am talking about that service as well. When I go to the retail outlet and I purchase some clothing, I am talking about that service. My doctor provides a service to me and to his other patients. But when I go to 30 Parliament Street to avail myself of the services that government provides, I expect value.

In the classroom we expect value. We expect our kids to be taught for the money that we are putting into and taught at the appropriate level so that they can compete in today's world based on the money that we are putting into education. And before I leave out the establishment where I work, or like establishments, at the checkout at the hardware store we expect value, service of the highest level.

So we can sit here and talk about a wonderful plan we as a country must get back to give those whom we serve value. And I will conclude again, we are fortunate to have Mr. Curtis Dickinson as our Finance Minister, and his team. And I appreciate the solid plan that they have put on the table before this Honourable House that becomes the launching pad for our economic recovery. And with that, I will conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member, Mr. Campbell.

I think the Speaker will take . . . Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy, for filling in. Thank you, Honourable Member Campbell, for your comments.

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

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if no one else wishes to speak, I am happy to do so.

The Speaker: Premier, I am going to acknowledge you, so feel free to make your contribution.

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

Mr. Speaker, let me start where the Honourable Member from constituency 9 left off, in congratulating the Minister of Finance for delivering an excellent Budget Statement and putting together an excellent budget in incredibly difficult circumstances. Let me, Mr. Speaker, also congratulate the entire Government team for their work in leading up to this budget. As others have indicated, it has not been easy by any stretch of the imagination.

And certainly, with the Minister of Finance having to do it during the time of the untimely passing of the Financial Secretary, Mr. Anthony Manders, who gave great service to this country, and certainly the difficult financial circumstances that we find ourselves in during a pandemic, while having to balance the need to support the economy with also the constraints of which we have been left due to the poor choices of the former Government. And we are speaking about the hundreds of millions of dollars that we have had to find for Morgan's Point and all the money of which we have had to find to cover the airport revenue guarantee, let alone the capital grant for Cross Island and other things, Mr. Speaker.

It is an incredibly difficult effort in incredibly difficult circumstances. But our Minister of Finance has delivered. And he has delivered, and he has done it well, Mr. Speaker. So, I would like to congratulate him in this Honourable House so that all of the listening public can hear and understand.

And one of the things that I will say, Mr. Speaker, I was actually having a conversation earlier today with an international businessperson who has started a new company in Bermuda. Yes, that is right, Mr. Speaker. Companies are investing in Bermuda, setting up companies and providing employment in Bermuda for Bermudians no matter what the One Bermuda Alliance may tell you, Mr. Speaker. But the joke was that I actually said, reflecting on the Finance Minister's budget presentation, that the Minister of Finance is the yin to my yang insofar as I come with a more animated (I would say) presentation, and the Minister of Finance is always cool, calm and collected. And he delivers his presentations with calm and poise, and he sets out in this Budget Statement with unparalleled professionalism and incredible transparency.

And that is the reason, Mr. Speaker, that he will get accolades in delivering this budget from not only the people on Pitts Bay Road, but also the people

on Union Street. We get it from the unions, we get it from the businesses, and we get it from the community, because they understand and recognise, as the Honourable Minister of Public Works said, where the heart of the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party is. And they understand where our Government is and how, Mr. Speaker, we can deliver on the promises that we have laid out.

Mr. Speaker, this is a recovery budget! And it is a good recovery budget, Mr. Speaker. And we are very proud of this Budget Statement, which has been pragmatic and transparent, and has been designed to put Bermuda on a path towards a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker. And the Statement that was delivered by the Minister of Finance demonstrates the Government's focus on tackling serious issues and taking care of the people of Bermuda.

The Honourable Member for constituency 3, MP Lovitta Foggo, spoke about the caring nature of this Government, the investments which are necessary [in] making sure that people are not left behind but continue to work, of which we had to do during difficult circumstances, Mr. Speaker. And that is what we are continuing to do. And so this budget deals with that.

This budget does not introduce new taxes, Mr. Speaker. This budget does not reduce scholarships and continues to make sure that we invest in the re-training and re-education of our citizens, Mr. Speaker. It does not cut critical programmes like the child day care allowance, summer student employment programme, support for seniors in rest homes. And we heard the Honourable Minister of Social Development and Seniors speak about the work that is being done in that area, Mr. Speaker.

It does not ask for any redundancies, does not require people to go home, cut contractors. And all of those contractors who have been working on the frontlines of the pandemic . . . a Parliamentary Question was tabled by the Opposition today. And the Minister of Health laid out the entirety of so many Bermudians who have helped on this frontline, Mr. Speaker. And we are going to continue to fund their contribution because it is vital to take care of the health of this country, Mr. Speaker.

Also, this budget does not look to extend the 10 per cent public sector pay cut after it expires. And, Mr. Speaker, with that I want to make sure that we give credit to our public sector workers who have done an excellent, excellent job during this very difficult time. And, Mr. Speaker, they get a bad rap often. But we work with incredibly dedicated public officers who go above and beyond, who work nights, who work weekends, who answer their phones, who make sure they respond to emails long after the business day is done to ensure government continues to work and function throughout our weekends. They do all these things, Mr. Speaker.

This Progressive Labour Party Government supports labour, and we support those who labour in service of the Government of Bermuda, Mr. Speaker. And that is the difference between us and others, Mr. Speaker. It is important to recognise them, and I want to thank them for their work, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, this is a recovery budget, Mr. Speaker. And what the Minister of Finance demonstrated last week is the same strong leadership that got us through COVID-19 and is continuing to deliver and continuing to make sure that we have one of the best testing systems in the world and continuing to ensure that we have one of the best vaccine delivery programmes in the world, Mr. Speaker, because that same strong leadership is what will get us through this economic recovery. And that is the strong leadership that this country continues to need and demand, Mr. Speaker.

And I am so proud to lead a team of 30 strong, Mr. Speaker, who continue to work and fill in their part and deliver for this country. We just heard the Minister of Public Works speak about the members of our team who are filling in at all areas at all points in assisting in economic recovery, Mr. Speaker. We all have a part to play, and that is the strong leadership that the country voted for. And we have a plan and a vision for protecting Bermudians. We have demonstrated that. We have a plan to get Bermudians back to work, to transform our economy. And as the Minister of Finance said, not to build it back to where it was before, but to use this opportunity to make sure we transform this economy, to deliver on the promises of making a nation of owners while also ensuring that people can afford to live in this country, Mr. Speaker.

We cannot rebuild the economy of the past, and we will not rebuild the economy of the past, Mr. Speaker. But if you listen to the subtext of the Opposition's Reply, it would make it seem as though they want to get back to business as usual, Mr. Speaker. This country does not want business as usual. And those persons who benefited from business as usual and were upset at the new way that business is being done may not like it. And so that is why you hear the subtext inside of their Reply, Mr. Speaker. But I am going to get to that in a little bit. Because when we see the One Bermuda Alliance's approach, some of it tries and pretends to be constructive. But as we heard from the Honourable Member for constituency 11, MP Christopher Famous, Mr. Speaker, they are masters of deception. They throw things around and fudge numbers and go with different facts which are not based in reality.

And those approaches are not helpful for the governance of this country, and they are not helpful for the debates and the needs of what the public desire, Mr. Speaker. And so this is the general economic debate, a time where once every year we can talk about all things related to the economy, Mr. Speaker. And so I will speak a little bit about economics. But

what I cannot allow, Mr. Speaker, is the revisionist history of the One Bermuda Alliance and some of the things which were laid out in this Budget Reply today. Because I heard the Honourable Member from constituency 22 say that the Opposition is not going to take cheap shots. Did he read his own party's Budget Reply? How can you say that you are not going to take cheap shots when you just start making things up? If you listen to the Opposition's Reply, *We are going to add another million dollars to the debt this year*. No way is that possible! If you listen to the Opposition Reply, *We are on the blacklist!* That is complete and absolute nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

So let us be real. Let us actually deal with the facts as they are on the ground, Mr. Speaker. And let us not look to the past, as the Honourable Member who spoke right before me heard about the *bold visions* and then say we can go back to what was tried and tested before. That is not what the people of this country voted for, Mr. Speaker, and that is not what we will deliver!

I want to take some time to talk on a few issues, Mr. Speaker, because the Honourable Member who is in the Cabinet Chamber with me, the Honourable Member for constituency 31, MP Crystal Caesar, is the Chair of the Bipartisan Immigration Committee. And I say that, Mr. Speaker, because it was so rich to hear some Members of the Opposition talk about working together in support and how we are going to do things. And then we find out—members of the public may not know—that they withdrew participation from the Bipartisan Immigration Committee! We even let them have two seats that they had before, Mr. Speaker, even though we have a 30-to-6 majority. And they said, *No, no, no. We don't want to participate*.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we hear in this Budget Reply nonsense! Civil unrest? That is what the Opposition Leader is putting out to the country? Look at what civil unrest is, Mr. Speaker, political violence! Those types of things. That did not happen in Bermuda. So to throw around terms like *political unrest*, which is when we have companies in Bermuda that actually insure against political unrest, is complete nonsense, Mr. Speaker. What it was was peaceful protest. And we cannot allow persons to rewrite history, Mr. Speaker.

And now I just want to go back to history, Mr. Speaker, and I am going to go back to the Hansard of this Honourable Chamber from 2015. This was a year before Pathways to Status was introduced. I am going to take you back, Mr. Speaker, to the Progressive Labour Party's Budget Reply in 2015. And I am going to quote from that Reply, Mr. Speaker. And it goes like this:

"²Yes, Mr. Speaker, immigration policy is a central component of economic policy. And in order to grow our economy and get Bermudians back to work, we have to get immigration right." (It goes on to say,) "Previously, the Minister of Finance said (and I quote), 'Population growth is an important component of economic growth. The simple truth is, to grow the Bermuda economy we have to increase the resident population.' (End quote.) Mr. Speaker, the Minister is correct, but the issue is not if we need to increase the residential population; the real issue at hand is how and with whom we increase the residential population."

The Budget Reply went on to say, Mr. Speaker, and I quote: "Mr. Speaker, if the Government is really serious about addressing this issue, we again call on the One Bermuda Alliance to support the motion to be tabled on Monday that Parliament establish a Joint Select Committee on Immigration Reform . . .

"This is an issue where both parties can work together to build something that works [better] for our citizens. Let this be an issue on which we work together to show Bermudians that we can come together for the national good and permanently fix a broken system." End quote, Mr. Speaker, 2015. Before Pathways to Status, before any of that stuff, an olive branch laid out, Mr. Speaker, in a 19-to-17 House of Assembly to say, *Let's work together on this issue*.

Did the One Bermuda Alliance try to do that, Mr. Speaker? Absolutely not! They voted down the motion, unsurprisingly. They tried to go it alone. And they ended up going back on the promises of which they made before the election to the electorate. So should the electorate just say, *You have carte blanche to do what you want to do?* No, Mr. Speaker, that is not the way it works.

And that is the difference, Mr. Speaker, between the One Bermuda Alliance and the Progressive Labour Party. We lay out our plans, Mr. Speaker. We tell the electorate what we are going to do. And we follow through with those plans, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes it does not work out the way that we want it to work out, too. There are many who say bipartisan commissions hold things up. And we saw that on mixed status families. But we still pushed through because we are following through with our promises, Mr. Speaker. And so the fact is that to actually hear what the Opposition Leader said in his Statement today, where he said (and I quote, Mr. Speaker), that it is good that "the PLP government is finally accepting the fact that a good Immigration policy is a good economic policy"—a falsehood, Mr. Speaker, because the Hansard from this House shows that this party made that declaration six years ago.

It is not about the premise of immigration reform; it is about how to fix the issue that works for the country, Mr. Speaker. And we have always been on

² [Official Hansard Report](#) 27 February 2015, page 828

record saying that we should do it on a bipartisan basis. And I would invite the Honourable Opposition Leader, if he is really serious about this, to rescind his view and [decide] that we are going to have a bipartisan committee. But rest assured, Mr. Speaker, if he does not, we will press on, because we understand the task at hand. We get it. We will consult, and that is the reason why the international business community, Mr. Speaker, has confidence. That is the reason why they invest, because they know what they will get from this Government. We lay it out in our election manifestos, and we deliver it in this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

I am not going to touch on the issue of international relations. I am going to leave that up to the Minister of Finance, who is going to speak after me. And I think it was adequately covered by the Honourable Member from constituency 9. But it was quite shocking and surprising, Mr. Speaker, to listen to the commentary about how we should handle dealing with the European Union and going together with other countries that are not as highly ranked as we are, Mr. Speaker. That is not what we will follow, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Member touched on Morgan's Point. And I will resist the temptation to tell the Honourable Member that is not *Carolina Bay*; it is *Caroline Bay*. But if we would have looked through this speech, I would have said, Mr. Speaker, it would have been better if they would have said nothing at all on Morgan's Point, because the revisionist history that was presented, Mr. Speaker, is offensive to the people of Bermuda. And what was actually required was an apology for backing the wrong horse, despite all of the shortcomings of the proposed budget, Mr. Speaker. We spoke about it in this very House when the Minister of Finance put it forward at the time. And we said, *This is not the way to go*. So said, so done.

And all of the falsehoods that were inside of this Statement and all of the different innuendoes, all of the talk about how we can do this and what about this and what was on offer and how all the rest—the Minister of Finance will clear this up, because here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. I will take this Minister of Finance to any One Bermuda Alliance Minister of Finance on any day of the week, Mr. Speaker. He gets it right, and he understands what it is that he is doing.

We heard from the Honourable Member about banking, Mr. Speaker. And it almost seemed like a threat, talking about, *Oh, be careful what you do! The banks may invest their money somewhere else*, Mr. Speaker. This is the problem when you defend the status quo. You end up operating from a position of being scared rather than a position of the bold action that may be necessary. So when we have a Minister of Finance, who has a very distinguished career in banking, Mr. Speaker, when we get to hear that the Opposition Leader, who also understands what is in banking, does not think that the Minister of Finance

understands how to deal with this issue and has not studied this issue, it is nonsense.

And the same arguments of which we are hearing, which I think the Honourable Member from constituency 11 may have alluded to, is the same argument that we were getting and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, who spoke earlier, who laid out brilliantly the falsehoods that were contained inside the statistics, Mr. Speaker, where we were dealing with law firms. They said, *No, can't allow international law firms to Bermuda*. The Conyers Dills and Pearmans, and the Appleby's and all those things, even though they have companies all over the world. They were like, *No, no, no. Cannot allow them here in Bermuda*. This protectionism needs to go, Mr. Speaker! And what have we seen? Law firms in, and guess what, Mr. Speaker? Economic growth. Jobs created. Multiple Bermudians advancing and getting opportunity. That is what we have done.

And, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to banking, we will regulate banking conduct in this country because it must be regulated. The Minister of Finance will regulate the base rate in this country. We will diversify the banking sector and introduce new banks into this country, Mr. Speaker, because it is vital. It is spelled out in our Economic Recovery Plan, and it is understood to be a hamper on growth, Mr. Speaker. And we will make no apology for delivering what the people of this country voted on for us, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to just move on to one more issue inside of the Reply. And it is an important issue, Mr. Speaker. It is an issue dealing with gaming. Mr. Speaker, I wish for Bermuda to take very careful notice of the Opposition's formulation of gaming inside of this Reply. Because apparently, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has been advised that the issue of banking can be resolved if I, the Premier of Bermuda, do what is, and I quote, "required." Mr. Speaker, I have a series of questions for the Leader of the Opposition, none of which are rhetorical. And I will happily yield for him to offer a point of clarification, Mr. Speaker.

What exactly is *required*, Mr. Opposition Leader?

Who exactly said that it was *required*, Mr. Opposition Leader?

Do they have the authority under this Constitution or any law in this country to deem this a *requirement*, Mr. Speaker?

In what form was this understanding received? And will the Honourable Leader of the Opposition table it for the information of this House, Mr. Speaker?

Because to make accusations like that, you must have evidence. I will yield, Mr. Speaker, for a point of clarification if the Honourable Opposition Leader wishes to elucidate for the listening public. Okay, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Premier, continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: I will continue, Mr. Speaker, because he has not taken the opportunity to [provide] a point of clarification.

Here is what I will say, Mr. Speaker. Having posed those questions, offered a point of clarification and not having any response, I am compelled, Mr. Speaker, to make a further observation. My political life does not extend back to a time when the CEO of a bank in this country could direct the Premier, a Minister or a Government of what appointments to make or policies to pursue. But I have heard about it, Mr. Speaker. I know the stories about the corner offices from which this country was actually run and the exclusive bars and clubs where actual government policy was made.

But let me make something perfectly clear, Mr. Speaker. Whilst I am prepared to work with anyone from the C-Suite to the mailroom, from uptown to downtown, from Church Street all the way back to North Street, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I will not be managed, ordered or directed in the discharge of constitutional duties and functions to serve private interests, Mr. Speaker. That is not what this Government does.

To do so would be to betray the oath I took upon pursuing this office, Mr. Speaker. It would be to betray the legacy of the party that I represent in this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker. And to do so would make a mockery of the transformational change that the people in this country voted for in record proportions, Mr. Speaker. And to do so, Mr. Speaker, would mean that my son has been born into a country where even his Black Premier father can be brought to heel by an attitude from the dark days of centuries and decades that should be confined to history, Mr. Speaker.

The answer is we will stand up, Mr. Speaker, and that era is past. And if the Honourable Opposition Leader wants to table that in this Honourable House, I ask him to go ahead and do so, Mr. Speaker. Because we are proud of our economic record, Mr. Speaker. We are proud of the economic record of the stewardship of which we have had in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Think of what we have done. We have lived within our means. In our first budget, there were persons who said, *Oh, the PLP is going to have to raise the debt ceiling. Oh, the PLP is going to do this. Oh, the PLP is going to do that.* What happened, Mr. Speaker? We cut the \$100 million deficit that the One Bermuda Alliance left us, Mr. Speaker. We did not increase the debt ceiling until Morgan's Point came due and we had to raise money to pay of their debts, Mr. Speaker! The next time we raised the debt ceiling was when we had a pandemic, Mr. Speaker. If there were no Morgan's Point and no pandemic, the debt ceiling would not have been raised, Mr. Speaker.

Those are the facts, Mr. Speaker. And no matter what the One Bermuda Alliance wishes to say, they cannot run away from the fact that they doubled the debt in their four years in office, entered at \$1.2 billion, left at \$2.4 billion.

This Government maintained it until we had to pay for their Morgan's Point and had to deal with a pandemic, Mr. Speaker. And our economic record is one that made this country fairer. In 2017 a Bermudian earning \$48,000 a year, Mr. Speaker, paid \$2,280 a year in payroll tax. This year, Mr. Speaker, that same Bermudian will pay \$960 in payroll tax, a \$1,320 reduction, or a 58 per cent reduction, Mr. Speaker. That is the record of this Government delivering on its promise to make the country fairer.

We introduced taxes for the first time on dividends, which ensures that people who are taking home millions of dollars a year while their employees pay taxes, and they got off tax free, contributed to this economy, Mr. Speaker, and continue to fund the actions that we took in health care, the investments in health care, education, training and retraining, and social support, Mr. Speaker.

We are proud of our economic record. We are proud of the investments we have made. We have actually done work to diversify this economy, Mr. Speaker. They gave diversification lip service, Mr. Speaker. We have actually delivered on economic diversification, and we are pressing ahead and moving forward on matters of economic diversification, Mr. Speaker. People in this country are responding to our economic stewardship.

And when we hear the question about pessimism about the future, Mr. Speaker, I am not, and neither is the business community, and neither are international investors because they are investing in Bermuda. They are starting companies in Bermuda. They are buying homes in Bermuda. We talk to realtors who have not been this busy in 10 years, Mr. Speaker. Jobs are being created by companies that are moving to Bermuda and providing the opportunities for the people who vote for us. And construction is continuing, and we will continue to stimulate that investment, Mr. Speaker.

It is increasing so much that we are getting letters from members of . . . even through all of the streamlining which the Honourable Deputy Premier, who led off this debate, spoke about, the things of which we have done, is getting calls to increase the resources of the Department of Planning, Mr. Speaker, because they want to make sure that they can get through the work, and the projects which are on tap, Mr. Speaker.

So I am confident of the future. And here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. I will close by saying this: As I say in presentations often, Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance represents the past. And the Progressive Labour Party Government represents the future. The future that was laid out from an economic

perspective last year by our Honourable Minister of Finance is one that will have this recovery budget, will help this country navigate this pandemic, will power our growth for the future, will restore public finances from a very, very difficult period with discipline. In short, Mr. Speaker, that he can deliver on the promises that we made to the electorate in 2020, Mr. Speaker.

Congratulations Minister of Finance and thank you for your service!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier. You were just short of your one-minute time remaining.

I am assuming the Minister of Finance would like to close us out.

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: I sure will, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour this evening of being joined by my oldest son, Samuel, who is here to keep his dad company. I am all by myself, so—

The Speaker: That means you will be shorter rather than longer.

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: It is going to be just enough time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Let me begin by thanking my honourable colleagues for their contributions to the debate today.

Mr. Speaker, let me say that last week Friday in delivering my third Budget Statement, I started off by making reference to 2020 being a year like no other. And the economic and humanitarian impacts of the global pandemic have been life-altering, very significant for all of us. Bermuda has certainly not been spared. But comparatively, though, we fared very well due to a number of factors—our aggressive testing, our excellent compliance with public health rules, a resilience in the international business sector and unemployment benefits to provide for those who had lost work or [suffered] a reduction in hours. But altogether we worked as a community to push through the effects of this pandemic.

The economic impacts have been significant. And this Government spent \$127 million in unbudgeted expenditure in support of our people and our economy. We had tremendous loss of revenue as a result of the contraction in our economy. And our deficit last

year swelled considerably. That debt as a result also grew. And I think we took the necessary steps that I think my colleagues on the other side would have taken as well. So I find it somewhat surprising, some of the tone and some of the commentary coming from the Opposition Leader's response to the Budget Statement.

Clearly, we have a number of challenges. And we will work hard to solve them because it is our responsibility as leaders to be in front and to show the way. This budget is not about getting back to Bermuda's pre-pandemic state. It is not about austerity when the country needs stimulus. It is not about excessive stimulus spending and relying on overly optimistic recovery and growth assumptions. Mr. Speaker, I heard comments over the course of this debate referring to the budget as *aspirational*. What is it supposed to be? We are aspiring to move this country forward. I thought that was part of my job. And to present a budget that did not have an aspiration, I would surely be criticised for doing such.

This budget is about collaborating. This budget is about being pragmatic. It is also about being transparent. And it is partly about ensuring that we have a common set of facts. I would tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have been somewhat disappointed with some of the commentary contained in the Opposition Leader's Reply to the Budget [Statement]. I would have expected, this being my third time doing this, a constructive critique of the content of my own Budget Statement. I was expecting [the Opposition] to offer up suggestions and potential challenges to what was contained in my Statement. What I did get, Mr. Speaker, and was somewhat dismayed, is a compilation of what I would call alternative facts. And I will take the opportunity tonight to refute some of them. I think that my colleagues have done their bit and covered a lot of territory. But I think it is really important and part of my job to make sure that Bermuda knows for real what the facts are.

Let me start with our relationship with the UK and Europe and the concept on the topic of Brexit. Mr. Speaker, the UK made the decision to leave the European Union. Their population decided in an election several years ago that they wanted out of the EU. The decision certainly has been disruptive—disruptive for the people of the United Kingdom, disruptive for the people of Europe, disruptive for us. I know I am not shedding any new light here, Mr. Speaker, but the UK does what the UK wants in the UK's own interests, as they should. Does their leaving the EU have an impact on us? Absolutely.

However—and here is where the facts come in—prior to Brexit, Bermuda had started to establish its own bilateral relationships with member States of the European Union. Those relationships have fostered and continue to be maintained. Today political dialogue continues to go on, and technical dialogue continues to go on among technical officers. I had,

when I was able to travel, the opportunity to meet with political leadership in both the tax offices of France and Germany. I had the opportunity to interact with the Finance Minister of Luxembourg. I have had interactions with the Finance Ministers of Malta and Estonia. Bermuda is working to do what Bermuda needs to do in Bermuda's best interest with respect to the EU.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I was surprised to hear that we should be aligning ourselves with countries who rank below us with respect to blacklisting. And I thought it was a very clever play on words. And clever plays on words can sometimes be very dangerous. A politician in a European Parliament taking a view on what we are and what we are not is not the measure that I am seeking to live up to.

The European Union's Code of Conduct Group has deemed Bermuda largely compliant from a transparency perspective with respect to tax compliance. That is where we are. We are not on anyone's blacklist. And similarly, with the OECD and CFATF we have been found to be largely compliant and have met the standards for those international organisations. And so it is important that the people of Bermuda know that we are not deemed blacklisted.

I would like to now talk, Mr. Speaker, about the national debt. I know it is a subject that is near and dear to many people, and I certainly can appreciate the concern that is being expressed by all folks about our debt. Again, let us talk about the facts. I have been probably (some would say) overly transparent on the matter of the country's debt. I have discussed it publicly. I have also discussed the debt situation in the House Chamber. And my view is that persistent deficits and growing national debt are unsustainable and that decisive actions are required.

But, Mr. Speaker, I cannot afford to lock myself in when the country is on the precipice of a crisis. I can recall when I increased the debt ceiling in order to accommodate the fulfilment of the Government's obligation with respect to Morgan's Point guarantees. The Government of the day entered into an arrangement with bond holders to guarantee their debt. But Government changed, and a new administration came in, and the bond holders presented their bonds for payment. What was I supposed to do? Not pay, and put at risk the country's credit rating for not being prepared to honour its obligations? We met our obligations, and we did it the way we were supposed to do it.

It is somewhat interesting to note that there was discussion in the Opposition Leader's Reply that the developers threatened to sue the then-Government for \$100 million if they did not comply with the development agreement. So, Mr. Speaker, with the benefit of hindsight one could argue that the Government of the day should have probably taken that deal. It would have been a better one than the one we have today.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the debt ceiling, I would like to kind of provide some perspective. I know the Premier covered a lot on this in his remarks. But in July of 2017 the debt ceiling was at \$2.5 billion. It was increased further in September of 2019 in order to accommodate the payment of the monies due to the Morgan's Point Limited bond investors. It was increased to \$2.9 billion in April or March of 2020 in order to accommodate the Government having sufficient liquidity to meet potential funding needs associated with the pandemic.

This debt increased again in July of 2020 to \$3.5 billion because we were in the midst of the first quarter of the pandemic and had no idea how long it would last and what its economic impact would be on our Island. So we borrowed the money. We took that money, and we put it aside in the Sinking Fund as a way of ensuring that we had money to fund the operation of the government in the out-years when deficits would still be pervasive.

Mr. Speaker, I indicated that I was planning to access the capital markets, in my Budget Statement last February. And the strategy that I laid out was that we were going to go to the markets to refinance higher-priced debt and to refinance the credit facility that we undertook in support of the Morgan's Point guarantees. Mr. Speaker, because of the pandemic, one would have thought that the markets would not have been receptive to us. Fortunately, they were. And we managed to achieve the best financing in this country's history. And I say that not to crow about how good a job we did; but I say it because when we went to the markets and we expressed what needed to be done, how we were planning on doing it, investors rallied around the transaction and gave us the best pricing that we have ever had in history.

Mr. Speaker, discussions on the more recent increases in debt ceiling and debt balances need to be had in context around why such actions have taken place. And I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that the decision to raise the debt ceiling and to borrow more over the course of the last three years have been rooted in our honouring our commitments and ensuring that our Government has the necessary money to meet the needs of our people.

I will now turn to the Sinking Fund. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my reaction to the remarks was, I guess I would say suspended disbelief. I think it is important to understand, and there has been a lot of energy around the Sinking Fund as of late, to explain what a sinking fund is. And just by way of reference, Mr. Speaker, before I moved back to Bermuda about 16 years ago, I spent 11 years working on Wall Street as a financier. And my specialty was raising capital for companies that were emerging companies in the telecommunications space. And I had raised before coming back here over \$40 billion of debt in aggregate. So I know how the markets respond to issuers, and I

know my way around debt offerings. And I have some expertise in dealing with sinking funds.

Honourable Members will recall that in my first budget I took the decision to suspend making contributions to the Sinking Fund. And I thought I had clearly set out the rationale and that when I talked with Members, they understood what we were trying to do. So, notwithstanding those explanations, I think it might make some sense for me to repeat them.

The purpose of the Sinking Fund was to create a pool of money that would be available to the government to repay debt when it matures. Legislation required Government to set aside 2.5 per cent annually of the debt balance into the Sinking Fund. When governments generate surpluses, that is actually a good thing to do. When governments generate deficits, especially in environments of raising interest rates, savings that way can actually be viewed as a good thing. Now, in 2018 I delivered the first budget with my first Budget Statement. We were at a point where the country was moving closer towards a balanced budget and interest rates were at all-time lows. And so we decided to stop borrowing to save, because we were probably spending more money on interest expense than we needed to.

I also indicated that when we crossed over from deficits to surpluses, we would allocate a portion of the surpluses to the Sinking Fund. I did not commit to a dollar amount; I said we would see what it looks like when it happens. I was actually working against a concept called *negative carry*, when we spend more interest expense than we earn on the money that we save. The decision that we made at that point was rooted in sound financial principles.

So, along the way to today, we ran into something called a pandemic. And we decided that we would suspend our thinking with respect to the Sinking Fund contributions, and we would go and borrow money and have that money sit inside the Sinking Fund until such time as we needed it. Rates were at all-time lows. And while I was opposed to the concept of negative carry, I was more committed to the idea of the Island's having liquidity. I was astounded earlier today to learn of the criticism when all I did was what Minister Richards did when he raised a substantial amount of money several years ago and put the excess money inside the Sinking Fund for future use.

Now, I had taken the view when I took this job, my first day sitting in the seat of the Finance Minister's office and feeling the awesome nature of responsibility. But you never know what it is like until you sit in the seat. And it is often very easy to criticise someone until you have an opportunity to walk in those shoes. And so I have been very careful in my commentary about being critical of my predecessors, because I also accept because I know that sometimes you make decisions based on imperfect information. You make the best call that you can given the infor-

mation that you have, and sometimes those decisions have to be made very quickly.

So it is surprising to me that I have gone out to ensure that the solvency of this country is preserved and the liquidity of this country is preserved, and to be criticised for doing that. I am also reminded, Mr. Speaker, that every time that we raise the debt ceiling and I set out the rationale for it, I enjoy the support of all of the Members of the House of Assembly irrespective of what party they represent. So, it is somewhat convenient (or inconvenient) for folks to remember their support for these things in light of the obligations of the country ahead before it.

Now, there has been some talk about Caroline Bay, and I will say this. Last year in March we petitioned the courts to appoint joint provisional liquidators [JPL's] to deal with the Morgan's Point matter. The matter is still with JPL's. And so my planning for and disclosing my plan for Morgan's Point at this point would be completely inappropriate. We do not know the answer. We have a claim. And we are giving some thought to how we deal with that claim. But we are going to let the process run its course. And when it is time and it is appropriate for me to disclose more on what is going on at Morgan's Point as far as our strategy is concerned, I will disclose that. But until then, I would suggest that Members be a little bit more patient and allow the process to run its course.

Mr. Speaker, the next point that I would address is the matter of the Government's pension plans, and in particular is the Public Service Superannuation Fund [PSSF] and the Contributory Pension Fund [CPF], which is commonly known as the social insurance fund. Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the government pension funds are underfunded. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they have been underfunded for decades. Successive Ministers of Finance, irrespective of political party, present annually in this House of Assembly an update on the status of those funds. This exercise, I believe, is an effort to inform the Legislature and the general public of the funding status of these funds. I am not completely sure what is giving rise to the sudden interest. It is something we have been talking about, albeit quietly, for a long time. And I did mention in my Statement (which I was lauded for, for the transparency) that we did have a challenge here.

But, Mr. Speaker, talking about it annually in my view is not enough. And so, in August of last year I authorised the engagement of McKinsey & Company to come in and do a comprehensive review of our PSSF and our CPF. And the reason why I hired McKinsey was because they have a wealth of experience advising governments, plan sponsors, companies with pension funds that are underfunded on how to improve the funding status of those funds. Their work, which has been ongoing for the last six months, is in three distinct phases. First phase, which has

been completed, is an assessment of the plan and an assessment of the performance.

The second phase, which is currently ongoing quietly around Bermuda—a series of virtual meetings [that] have been held over the course of the last several weeks—is engagement with stakeholders to share with them the findings of the assessment with a view towards working together collaboratively to find or agree to a solution on the way forward. Mr. Speaker, I am advised by my advisors that this problem is solvable. Now, it took us a long time to get here. And it is not going to take us overnight to get out of it. But I believe I am the first Minister of Finance to take this issue by the horns and try to deal with it. And so I am very concerned when people start raising the alarm without putting into context the work that is actually being done to solve the problem.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there has been some talk about guarantees. And I think it is important that I kind of set out for everyone what my position on guarantees is. I have said publicly that I am not opposed to governments issuing guarantees. What I am opposed to is governments giving guarantees badly. And there have been some comments around the Bermudiana Beach Resort project and my recent statement that I had decided to support the \$10 million guarantee for that project. And there have been references made to my Morgan's Point comments and trying to compare those comments to the position that I have taken on Bermudiana Beach.

I would also interject that the former Government signed a guarantee agreement or negotiated the guarantee for the St. Regis Hotel. And I actually upon ascending to office signed that document (1) because it was a commitment, but (2) because I supported the nature of the guarantee. The difference between the St. Regis guarantee and the Bermudiana Beach guarantee and Morgan's Point is very simple. In the St. Regis guarantee, there was plenty of money put in by the sponsors, and so if the guarantees went bad, they lost a whole lot more than I would. That is the first one. The Bermudiana Beach Resort . . . the Bermuda Housing Corporation owns that facility. And guess who owns the Bermuda Housing Corporation? The Government. So I am basically guaranteeing debt on an entity which I own.

Now, let us compare that to Morgan's Point. The developers did not really capitalise that project. And its success was based on our providing the guarantee. And the risk to the Government was that if the developers failed, we would lose. And that is where we are. So the notion that all guarantees are the same is not true. Guarantees need to be evaluated for their risk, and governments need to be supportive of projects, but prudent and not take on all of the downside risk for themselves and leaving all of the upside to the equity-holders or the sponsors. And that was the fatal flaw in the Morgan's Point project.

Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to cast blame or wag a finger. But what I would not like to have happen here is that . . . people make mistakes. You own up to them. You acknowledge them. You learn from them. You move on. And this notion of trying to rewrite history about the brownfield sites—and this and that, who did what does not really matter. Because when I assumed this office, all of the problems that existed became my problems. Because my responsibility as the Minister of Finance is to deal with the issues that come across my desk related to the fiscal matters of this country. And so for me, it does not matter who created the problem. It is my job to work to fix it.

So I would appreciate a little bit more candour around what really happened and acknowledgement of where things really are so that we can move forward and work together to find ways of making the country better.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that I have a strong track record of being a collaborator. And I am finding it hard not to be insulted that I would not work with people whom I spent the better part of 13 years working with and finding solutions to challenges. I do not need to be lectured on how I need to engage banks. I have had very cordial, professional, friendly relationships with the leaders of all three or four banks, and we maintain a very positive relationship. And my expectation is that I will continue to do so.

Mr. Speaker, the last issue that I wanted to talk about is the issue of accounts receivable. And I think, you know, in this case I welcome the attention that is being focused on this issue, again another matter that has not been created overnight. It is unfortunate that in highlighting this issue the Honourable Opposition Leader has misstated the numbers. His numbers are actually incorrect. The problem is larger than what he is presenting here. And we are focused on addressing it. But part of the challenge, Mr. Speaker, quite candidly, is if you do not invest in technology, in systems and in people, when you get problems like this, you have got to figure out how you are going to go about fixing it quickly. So, we are focused on it.

I would say that the last year has been particularly challenging with respect to accounts receivable and tax collections. I think it is somewhat difficult. We have hired people to work through this issue in the Office of the Tax Commissioner. We have even gone so far as to hire two outside vendors who get paid on a success basis. If they collect the money, they get paid a percentage of the money they collect.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know, we do have to be mindful of the times in which we are living. And I would expect that when people are being put out of work, the last thing that they want is the Government knocking on their door saying, *Where's my money?* Because they do not have it. And so I would expect that the collections for this year have not been as robust as I would have liked them to have been. But I do accept that this year for many people from govern-

ment has been a difficult one. And so we have to try to find ways of ensuring that we are supportive and growing this economy so people can get back to work.

Mr. Speaker, I have talked briefly about the capital markets transaction, and just to get into a little bit more details that I shared with the Members earlier this year. For the first time this last year we issued a 30-year note. And the reason why that is an important statement is because it speaks to the maturity of Bermuda as an issuer of debt. I am a believer, as a former capital markets professional, that some degree of debt is a good thing. Where we are today, not so much, but some degree of debt is a good thing. And we were able to, for the first time in our history, issue a 30-year note. On our balance sheet today there is a piece of debt that has been around for probably 10–15 years, maturing next year as a coupon at 5.73 per cent with a private placement that was done by a government many, many years ago. And that pricing is reflective of our immaturity as an issuer back when that was done. So we move on.

Our 30-year bond was priced at 3^{3/8} per cent. And our spread to treasuries, which is the benchmark for how successful the deal was, was the best ever achieved in this country's history. So while there are some who would be preaching doom and gloom, all is not bad. We are not where we want to be; we are on the path to get where we need to be.

And I would say that, as I sat around thinking about framing the speech for the Budget Statement, I wanted to be mindful of what we have experienced over the course of the last year, but also to recognise that we have made substantial progress in beating COVID-19 as a jurisdiction. And then to look to the other side around the, *Now what?* The *now what?* is a phrase that I often use with my children when they come and tell me that they have got a problem. I used to say, *Now what? What are you going to do about it? Go in the corner and cry? Or are you going to move on?* And for us, and in my doing this job, and even welcoming some of the stress that comes along with it—

[The bell rang time.]

The Speaker: Minister, you hear that alarm in the background? That is reminding me that your 30 minutes is about to run out.

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Okay.

Or I can ask myself, you know, I use the *Now what?* to require me to do this job better.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That concludes my response to the Reply.

And, Mr. Speaker, I now move that the House do now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2021/22.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister, for closing us out. And there is no other business this evening on the Order Paper
So, Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I thought that we would actually go into committee and then rise to report progress.

The Speaker: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. We will rise to report progress, yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Are you chairing, Mr. Speaker, or is the Deputy [Speaker] chairing?

The Speaker: I am chairing. You can rise—

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman—

The Speaker: No, no, no, no. You are right. We will move into Committee.

So, Deputy, you will take us into Committee, then rise and report progress. And we will come back to the House and take us through the close of the night.

House in Committee at 10:53 pm

[Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, Sr., Deputy Speaker, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2021/22

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Mr. Chairman. I cannot see you.

The Speaker: The Deputy is there.

The Chairman: I am here.

YOUTH, CULTURE & SPORT

Hon. Curtis L. Dickinson: Mr. Chairman, I now move Heads 71, which would be Youth, Culture and Sport Headquarters; Head 20, Youth, Sport and Recreation; Head 52, Department of Culture, Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again on Monday, the 8th of March 2021.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Are there any objections to this motion?
There appear to be none.

Agreed to.

Mr. Speaker. I have a bell, but I call you.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 10:55 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2021/22

The Speaker: Thank you for that.

Members, we are back in the House with all business having been concluded for today.

Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Monday, March 8. And I am uncertain if one of my Members wishes to speak on motion to adjourn, although someone has indicated that they may.

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, I understand that Members have decided it has been a long day and we will see them all on Monday.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Members, with that thought, that means you all have a nice, pleasant weekend.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: I look forward to seeing you nice and bright and early on Monday morning at ten o'clock.

Thank you, Members. Enjoy your weekend.

An Hon. Member: Good night!

The Speaker: Good night.

Some Hon. Members: Good night.

[At 10:56 pm the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, 8 March 2021]